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Organization Studies 2013 34: 1099 originally published online 10 July 2013
DOI: 10.1177/0170840613492073

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What is This?
From Novel Practice to Consecrated Exemplar: Unity Temple as a Case of Institutional Evangelizing

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Abstract
Institutional theorists focus on practices that spread because they conform with and build on established cultural assumptions and resources. Novel practices, however, not only fail to conform to, but also challenge the dominant institutional order. We seek to understand the process by which novel practices move from entrepreneurial anomaly to consecrated exemplar within a field. We contrast Unity Temple by Frank Lloyd Wright—a building that challenged the accepted practices of ecclesiastical design in the architectural profession—with the most prominent churches during the same period. We find two distinct legitimation processes—institutional evangelism where creators express their identity and generate novel practices versus adaptive emulation where adopters focus on prestigious others and emulate their established practices. We reveal that actors engaged in institutional evangelism and adaptive emulation, employing institutional work and leveraging ideas, materials and identities to effect, transform, and maintain institutions. Our comparative cases show the key role of materiality, particularly collective identity markers, in institutional work and institutional processes.

Keywords
institutional work, institutional evangelism, adaptive emulation, materiality, architecture, collective entrepreneurship, collective identity marker, profession

Introduction
Exemplars are concrete models, practices or achievements that highlight not only a field’s puzzles, but also successful solutions to these puzzles (Kuhn, 1970/1996). Established exemplars help reinforce and reproduce an existing institutional order. In contrast, novel practices—i.e., those that “fail to reproduce previously legitimated or taken-for-granted actions” (Lawrence &
Suddaby, 2006, p. 217) —can destabilize an institution by providing actors with a viable alternative model that fundamentally undermines the existing institutional order. When novel practices challenge an institutional order, they are ignored and wither, or are actively suppressed (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). Most institutional studies, however, focus on diffusion, where social actors imitate prestigious others and conform to prevalent practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; see Mizruchi & Fein, 1999; Heugens & Lander, 2009 for reviews), and tend to assume homogenous rather than pluralistic environments that offer multiple models (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). Therefore, a fundamental puzzle that has received inadequate attention is how a novel practice that challenges cultural assumptions becomes a consecrated exemplar—one validated as critical to the profession and appropriate for emulation—and thus, an agent of institutional change.

One reason this puzzle remains largely unsolved may be that many institutional scholars define innovation as new to the adopter regardless of how much time has elapsed since creation, rather than tracing the innovation from its inception (Rogers, 2003, p. 12; Still & Strang, 2009; Strang & Soule, 1998). The focus on the experience of adopters has led to significant gaps in empirical accounts of how novel practices first gain recognition and legitimacy. For instance, academic entrepreneurship connected with patenting knowledge started in the 1950s (e.g., Indiana University licensed “Crest” to Proctor and Gamble in 1957) and was still relatively rare by 1968, but was only studied at Stanford from 1970 onwards (Colyvas & Powell, 2007). The cochlear implant was developed in the late 1950s, “almost two decades before the ideas were fully commercialized” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 660). Modern Indian art, which blends modern art and traditional Indian art, was started in the 1940s by painters blending these categories; yet only the dynamics of market emergence from 1990 to 2007 are examined (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010). Similarly, California thrifts are analyzed 25 years after the first thrifts were founded (Haveman & Rao, 1997). Some novel practices become accepted and diffuse, as shown in film (Jones, 2001), the web (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), science (Kuhn, 1970/1996), literary genres (Martindale, 1990), haute cuisine (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003, 2005; Svejenova, Mazza, & Planellas, 2007), and architecture (Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejenova, 2012). Yet, the process by which entrepreneurs’ first forays into novel practices persevere, gain recognition and then consecration as exemplars remains opaque.

To discern the institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) that underpins the legitimation process by which a novel practice becomes a consecrated exemplar, we started with a success story—Frank Lloyd Wright’s Unity Temple built between 1906 and 1908—and moved to comparative cases. Unity Temple was an innovative building that offered new practices—symbolic, esthetic, and material—for church architecture. It was the first modern church in the world that used reinforced concrete, a building material associated with bridges and piers, for its interior and exterior surface. It was also erected using site (in situ) concrete pouring, in which concrete was placed in one continuous pouring rather than in blocks. By using reinforced concrete in a church, Wright intentionally transgressed boundaries, moving a profane material into the sacred realm (Douglas, 1966; Durkheim, 1915/1965), thus mixing old and new in an illegitimate way (Rao et al., 2003). To assess whether Wright’s status as a cultural producer was a decisive factor in Unity Temple’s consecration, we compare Unity Temple to Wright’s Larkin Building, which was built around the same time but which met a different fate. To pinpoint key forms of institutional work crucial to the legitimation process, we contrast Unity Temple with the two most prominent new churches of the period—Madison Square Presbyterian Church and St. Thomas Church—where actors adopted the dominant symbolic systems and materials of their time. In contrast to these prominent churches, which then faded from attention and collective memory, Unity Temple, when
first built, garnered a few mentions, being one of hundreds of examples of church architecture included within professional journals. It then entered a period of no attention in professional journals, only to re-emerge five decades later consecrated as an exemplar: one of the four most important churches in America as determined by a panel of eminent architects for the American Institute of Architects 100th anniversary in 1956. Its status as an exemplar expanded from the profession to the public when granted National Historic Landmark status in 1970 and when nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008.

Our study makes three contributions to the institutional work and institutional theory literatures. First, through our comparative cases, we elaborate two distinct legitimation processes: institutional evangelizing (Stinchcombe, 2002; Suchman, 1995) based on translation processes (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996) versus adaptive emulation (Still & Strang, 2009; Strang & Soule, 1998) based on imitation processes. Institutional evangelizing takes place when actors, focusing on a logic of appropriateness, co-create, spread, and support novel practices through a desire to express their unique identities, whereas adaptive emulation emphasizes adopters who focus on a logic of consequence, seeking to enhance their perceived efficiency and effectiveness by conforming to established practices of prestigious others. Second, we demonstrate that institutional evangelism is a process that entails not only collective entrepreneurship of multiple actors who co-create and support novel practices, but also cross-generational institutional maintenance that protects the novel practice. Thus, for a novel practice to become a consecrated exemplar, social actors must engage in institutional work of both creation and maintenance. Third, we identify the interplay of three key dimensions of institutional work—ideas, materials, and identities—when moving entrepreneurial anomalies to consecrated exemplars. We demonstrate the central role of materiality in instantiating, diffusing, and institutionalizing novel ideas. We show that to gain consecration as an exemplar, a building must become a boundary object, both its physical form and representations of its physical form (i.e., sketches, plans, photos), that engages multiple audiences and diffuses novel practices across social and geographic boundaries. Further, we demonstrate that when buildings engender identification, they become collective identity markers, spurring social actors to engage in institutional maintenance work to protect novel ideas and support the community instantiated by those novel ideas.

Institutional Work: The Interplay of Ideas, Materials, and Identities

To introduce and legitimate novel practices that challenge institutionalized assumptions and generate new categories, actors cross social and symbolic boundaries (Jones et al., 2012; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), engage in agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) that ranges from future, past to present oriented (see Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009 for a review) and perform work that cuts across ideas, materials, and identities.

Ideas expressed through symbols

Work is guided by some set of ideas—mental activity such as beliefs, concepts, categories, constructs, thoughts, knowledge, plans, schemes or mental images (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)—about what to do and how to do it, which are expressed through symbols, and correspond to the cognitive dimension of institutional theory (Scott & Davis, 2006). Ideational elements of cultural expectations, shared cognition and beliefs underpin isomorphic forces (Zilber, 2008), as well as institutional logics, providing frameworks for action (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Rao et al.,
In Weber’s words: “… ‘world images’ that have been created by ‘ideas’ have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest” (Weber, 1958, p. 280). Weber’s seminal ideas of social action, specifically “value rational” directed toward ultimate values and “end rational” which is instrumental were developed into logics of appropriateness and consequence by March (1994). A logic of appropriateness answers “what kind of person am I and what is the appropriate response to this situation” (March, 1994, p. 61) whereas a logic of consequence relies on “intendedly rational decisions based on a comparison and evaluation of alternatives in terms of consequences” (March, 1994, p. 57).

Further, similarity among ideas is the basis for categorizing practices and products, a process labeled as lumping and splitting (Zerubavel, 1996). Practices or products that are lumped together share many features whereas those split apart represent distinct features. Distinct and aspirational arrangements of features underpin professional exemplars, which are used to socialize members and articulate professional standards (Larson, 1993).

Institutional theory emphasizes social construction through cognition and symbols based on Berger & Luckmann (1967), including theorization (Strang & Meyer, 1993), vocabularies (Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012) and narratives or stories (Czarniawska, 2004; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). For instance, theorization—“simplifying and abstracting which properties produce what outcomes” (Strang & Meyer, 1993, p. 497)—is central to processes of institutional change in accounting (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), healthcare (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010), and architecture (Jones et al., 2012). Indeed, Strang and Soule (1998, p. 276) claim that “practices do not flow: theorized models and careful framings do.” An emphasis on ideas as primarily linguistic has led institutional scholars to over-emphasize the cognitive (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) and neglect the material aspects of institutions, even though institutional change involves transformations in both symbols and materials (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Notably, institutional scholarship that primarily focuses on language often overlooks the fact that symbols must be material in order to signify (Friedland, 2001).

Materials in artifacts

Work is coordinated and accomplished through artifacts: products made by humans, such as schematics, computers or surgical knives that provide the tools by which humans shape and are shaped by their environments. Materials are the specific ingredients that compose an artifact such as steel or aluminum for knives, brick or concrete for buildings. Organizational scholars, by and large, have focused on symbolic associations of artifacts and material practices that reveal actors’ meanings (Zilber 2002, 2006), express domination (Rosen, Orlikowski, & Schmahmann, 1990), evoke emotions (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004), facilitate sensemaking (Stiglani & Ravasi, 2012) or trigger deinstitutionalization of traditions (Dacin & Dacin, 2008) (see Gagliardi, 1990 and Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006 for edited volumes on artifacts). Material elements of artifacts are kept constant (i.e., the same green for all buses in Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004) or are treated generically (e.g., no distinction among paper, computer image or built model in Stiglani & Ravasi, 2012). Yet, the decay of the original materials and changes in material composition alter associations and meanings of an artifact (McDonnell, 2010). The contestation and transformation of architecture’s professional logic was enacted through different materials of brick versus concrete (Jones et al., 2012). Institutional logics are not simply beliefs, norms, and abstract practice, but rather material practices: the objects by which practices are anchored and oriented (Friedland, 2013). Yet, few studies examine variation in the materials of artifacts, such as distinct textures and properties inherent in materials (e.g., plastic instead of metal for knives), and how these influence institutional processes.
Scholars have tended to give greater weight to “cultural, economic and human” aspects of institutions, ignoring the material (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008, p. 436). Artifacts, however, embody cultural ideas, such as how flag designs reveal national beliefs (Cerulo, 1993) and carry tacit knowledge, experience, and collective memory (Gagliardi, 1990; Preda, 1999; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991). For example, Christian beliefs of sin, redemption, and purity, which were enacted through land reform and gardening, became the foundation for landscape architecture (Mukerji, 2002). Thus, materials and artifacts contain “political purposes” that produce consequences (Winner, 1980). Artifacts not only embody cultural ideas, but also enable agency by how they channel experience and knowledge and by how they act as boundary objects crossing different social worlds. As such, they enable actors to impede institutional change through segregation or spark institutional change through synthesis (Gieryn, 1983; Pinch, 2008; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Therefore, “physical symbols, objects and artifacts form an important but relatively unexplored element in the chains of activities that constitute institutional work” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, pp. 215, 245).

**Identities and identification**

Work enacts identities and engenders identification by how “collectives create distinctions, establish hierarchies and negotiate rules of inclusion” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 395). Identities and identification processes can be individual, interpersonal or collective, defining an entity through answering “who are we” or “who am I” and through social categories and social comparison (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2005). “Identity and identification are terms that travel easily across levels of analysis” (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 13) because they are multi-level constructs (i.e., the same relations generalize across two or more levels; Rousseau, 1985). Actors construct identities through distinctiveness and statuses, enabling others to recognize dissimilarities, judge worth, and confer status (Elsbach, 2006). Distinctiveness answers “who are we” (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000), differentiating actors from others, whereas forms of status such as prestige answer “how we compare with relevant others”, enacting hierarchies and symbolic boundaries (Cerulo, 1997; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Distinctiveness and prestige also engender individuals’ positive identification with the collectives to which they belong, prompting members to exert effort and donate resources (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). For instance, when members positively identified with the Amway organization, they voluntarily worked to evangelize and justify company values and practices; when members dis-identified with Amway, they exited the organization (Pratt, 2000). The purposeful construction of identities is a form of institutional work and an important area of study (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Scholars highlight the ideational or symbolic aspects of institutions such as beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that provide cultural resources for identity claims (i.e., Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Rao et al., 2003). For example, gay and lesbian ministers used cultural resources to manage contradictions between professional roles and marginalized social identities (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010) and institutional shareholders and managers used the existing managerial and the new shareholder logic to construct and maintain identity by accommodating and resisting the new shareholder value logics (Lok, 2010). Yet, logics require emotional attachment, or love, that drives identification (Friedland, 2013). Research shows that when identities are inscribed into material form, they trigger emotional attachment, called identification, that shapes individuals’ efforts and practices (Elsbach, 2004; Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006). For example, office workers who personalize their workspaces in ways that signal their distinctiveness feel more connected to their organizations and are willing to forgo privacy features such as lockable doors (Biner, Butler, Lovegrove, & Burns, 1993). Through artifacts such as logos (Baruch, 2006) and built spaces (Berg & Kreiner,
1990; Yanow, 2006), we “communicate collective values, beliefs and feelings” (Yanow 2006, p. 42) and “people understand themselves, their organizations and their institutions” (Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006, p. 279). Scholars, however, are less clear about how artifacts become collective rather than individual identity markers or about the role of and variance among materials in expressing identities and triggering identification so that actors advocate and support them as worthy exemplars that shape fields and professions. Thus, an important avenue for institutional work is how identities are embodied in and identification triggered through specific materials contained in artifacts.

In this study, we examine the interplay of ideas, materials, and identities in the institutional work involved in the recognition and consecration of novel practices. Through institutional work, novel practices are consecrated and change the institutional order.

Methods

Critical realism guides our methods. It is an ontology that sees structures and the mechanisms through which they are generated as being fundamental to the constitution of our natural and social reality (Fairclough, 2005). Critical realists strive to identify generative mechanisms—principles that cross levels of analysis and connect events in time and space to explain and govern patterns (Stinchcombe, 1991; Tsoukas, 1989). This approach is central to historical sociology (Sewell, 1996; Tilly, 2001), providing a view of reality as socially situated, not socially determined, and allowing for the possibility that critical actions can motivate social change (Bhaskar, 1975/2008). Historical studies and methodologies employ primary and secondary data as well as qualitative and quantitative methods to identify and interpret events, actors, and accounts, generating a narrative and focusing on meaning (Tuchman, 1994). We use our data to illuminate processes and generative mechanisms of how and why change occurs by examining sequences of events to reveal linkages among context and action (Langley, 1999; Pentland, 1999; Zilber, 2002). By integrating our empirical findings and theoretical insights into a comprehensive narrative, we shed light on institutional work.

Research context: Novel practices and institutional work in the architectural profession

The architectural profession is an appropriate context to trace the interplay among ideas, materials, and identities that reveals how novel practices become consecrated exemplars because buildings embody the symbolic systems and material practices of their time and culture (Brand, 1995; Mumford, 1952/2000). First, architects and architectural historians explicitly focus on expressing ideas visually and materially in styles, and linguistically by theorization (Jones et al., 2012). Second, composition and use of materials is a central focus of architects. Frank Lloyd Wright penned eight articles on different types of materials and their use in 1927 and 1928 alone. Third, buildings are instrumental cultural products valued for their practical function as well as for their expressive meaning (Berg & Kreiner, 1990; Lawrence & Phillips, 2002; Yanow, 2006). Fourth, professional peers and architectural historians categorize architects into schools and movements based on similarity of the ideas, visual elements, and material structures (Jones, 2010).

Sample selection

We capture the ideational and material dynamics at play in the “success story” (Strang & Macy, 2001) of a built exemplar (Larson, 1993). We purposefully selected Unity Temple based on four criteria:
it is the first church constructed with exposed, site-poured reinforced concrete, involving decisions to use novel material and create new practices; (2) it is consecrated as an exemplar for the profession in 1956 (Architectural Record, 1956) and lay public in 1970 with Landmark Status by the National Park Service; (3) the building is theorized extensively by Wright, the client, professional peers and historians; and (4) Unity Temple presents an “extreme case” (Eisenhardt, 1989) that allows us to conduct a fine-grained exploration of how a novel practice becomes recognized as exemplary.

To identify key aspects of institutional work and assess the influence of Wright, we compare Unity Temple, which became an exemplar, to Wright’s Larkin Building, which was demolished. We also compare Unity Temple to two prominent churches, using the three most important architectural journals of the time: Inland Architect and Building News, Architectural Record, and Brickbuilder, which became Architectural Forum. This search yielded 565 religious buildings and the cities in which they were located as examples worthy of attention between 1890 and 1919. The two most prominent churches were built by high-status architects of this period: Madison Square Church (9 mentions) by McKim, Mead, and White (17 mentions for church buildings), and St. Thomas Church (4 mentions) by Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson (44 mentions for church buildings), both located in New York City. Madison Square Presbyterian was demolished whereas St. Thomas still functions and was consecrated for the public as a National Historic Landmark in 1966. By contrast, Unity Temple, which is located outside Chicago, and Frank Lloyd Wright garnered two mentions in these professional journals for churches.

Data collection

We employed archival research methods (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002), triangulating multiple sources of data (Denzin, 2006) to obtain a richer picture of institutional processes and work that transpired along the life of the buildings. The archival data sources for each of the buildings are identified in Table 1.

Context. To discern contextual dynamics, we used the United States Census special reports on religious bodies for the years 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936. We gathered information on three specific denominations—Unitarian, Presbyterian, and Protestant Episcopal—that match the denominations of our comparative churches: Unity Temple, Madison Square Presbyterian, and St. Thomas, respectively. From the census data, we assessed whether these denominations were growing, shrinking or changing theologically that may have influenced their respective fates in the cities where the buildings resided: Buffalo, Chicago, and New York City. In 1936, the data format shifted from a denomination’s population by city to denominational organization (i.e., by Diocese for the Catholic and Episcopal churches which could be a city or spread across states). The 1936 data are not comparable with the 1906, 1916, and 1926 reports. Religious questions were not included in the census before 1906 or after 1936.

Ideas expressed through symbols. To apprehend the ideas that guided construction of the building, we searched for and examined documents that preceded construction and explained the purpose of the new buildings. These included letters between the architect and clients, interviews in newspapers, pamphlets published to explain the building, and dedication ceremonies. We focused on data that helped us answer: For what goals and aims was the building commissioned, designed, and built?

Materials in artifacts. We used professional journals and church histories that allowed us to identify and compare the materials used in each building, and how these materials influenced symbolic
Table 1. Data Sources for Comparative Cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type(s)</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
<th>Unity Temple</th>
<th>Larkin Building</th>
<th>Madison Square Presbyterian</th>
<th>St. Thomas Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consecration/Building Registry Application and supporting documents</td>
<td>National Park Service’s Historic &amp; Historic Landmarks Register, UNESCO listing</td>
<td>• 1967 Historic Bldg survey</td>
<td>Not consecrated</td>
<td>Not Consecrated</td>
<td>1966 NHL application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
associations as well as practical consequences, such as the amount of money and time to construct the building. The church and building histories also provided costs for Unity Temple, Madison Square, and St. Thomas. For the Larkin Administration Building costs, we used online sources such as the Buffalo History Gazette (2011).

To recognize the novelty of the building practices for Unity Temple, we examined which materials (e.g., stone, wood, concrete, etc.) were prevalent when Unity Temple was built. We used two distinct data sources: (1) exemplary church buildings; and (2) prototypical Unitarian church buildings. Similar to Jones et al. (2012), we obtained data on exemplary church buildings and material usage in these buildings from www.greatbuildings.com (Matthews, 2004). Notably, we also used these data to examine the material composition and architectural style of exemplary churches that were built following Unity Temple.

To assess whether Unity Temple influenced the use of concrete in churches, we conducted a search of Google’s Ngram corpus between 1880 and 1979. With over 5.2 million digitized books spanning centuries of English publications, Ngram provides researchers with a means to track mentions of single terms or phrases in published books with unprecedented accuracy and comprehensiveness and to investigate cultural discourse and trends quantitatively (Michel et al., 2011). Our search revealed 4,040 books mentioning Unity Temple and 1,140 mentioning reinforced concrete churches.

For prototypical Unitarian buildings, we collected data from the Andover-Harvard Theological Library’s database of postcards of Unitarian and Universalist Churches. The collection consists of postcards depicting church building that were printed from 1890 to 1930 (n = 425). Because many of these postcards did not include a church’s erection or dedication date, we identified dates using several sources: (1) Google searches for the church by name; (2) the “find a congregation” feature of UUA.org to find contact information for the congregations and calling the congregations; (3) the assistance of Cristina Prochilo, Associate Archivist at the Congregational Library; (4) the Massachusetts historical archives (a substantial number of Unitarian churches reside in the state of Massachusetts); and (5) the archives at the Unitarian Universalist Association headquarters in Boston, MA, which holds records for Unitarian churches across the US and where we were assisted by Mike McGlone, archivist. Since Unity Temple was announced with photographs and plans to the profession in Architectural Record, and to the public in Chicago Tribune during 1908, we divided our analysis of postcards into those churches erected before and after Unity Temple (n = 367). We located founding and construction dates for 367 of the 425 postcards (86.4%) whereas 58 buildings (13.6%) had missing data. These data allowed us to assess the typical building materials for churches, compare them to exemplars in the profession, and reveal the novelty of concrete as a primary building material.

**Identities and identification.** To capture identities and identification, we drew upon statements by clients and users of buildings, which indicated their self-image as members of claimed category, paying particular attention to statements that defined “who we are” and how we compare to others. We also ascertained whether this identity was personal or collective by examining how actors referred to the building. We examined the church bulletins, organizational newsletters, and other artifacts for indications of identification with a new building such as use and placement of photos or sketches of the building or its key elements to adorn these communication vehicles and signify a personal or collective identity.

**Outcomes: consecration and demolition.** We focused on two primary outcomes: consecration and demolition. Consecration indicates exemplar status in a culture (Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984).
For consecration as an exemplar in the profession, we relied on recognition from the architectural profession. For consecration for the lay public, we used the National Park Service, which oversees historical preservation status at the national level. For demolition, we examined Avery Architectural Index and used two national newspapers: *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times*.

**Data analysis and interpretation**

To create the historical narrative in which we present our findings, we identified “common social accounts” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 147) that described key events, practices, and the work of actors. We wrote these social accounts into historical narratives for each case. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we identified recurring categories and themes by cycling between sources and organizing findings into tables that allowed for cross-comparisons of events and interpretations. These comparisons generated theoretical insights on distinct processes of institutional evangelism and adaptive emulation across ideas, materials, and identities. In addition, we focused our efforts by consistently referring back to a guiding research concern: how a novel practice becomes a consecrated exemplar.

**Findings**

Our findings are organized into two sections. In the first section, we compare the four buildings across context and by the institutional work of ideas, materials, and identities that are associated with outcomes of consecration or demolition. Through this comparison, we reveal two distinct legitimation processes: institutional evangelism and adaptive emulation. In our second section, we focus on Unity Temple: the only one of the four cases in which a novel practice became a consecrated exemplar that served as a model for the profession.

**Institutional work of ideas, materials, and identities in context: A comparison of four buildings**

To discern the institutional work in the life of buildings and why some but not others become exemplars, we compare four buildings—Unity Temple, Larkin Building, Madison Square Presbyterian, and St. Thomas church—across ideas, materials, identities, and outcomes while taking into account the context in which institutional work took place. Table 2 summarizes our data analysis and interpretations.

**Context: Built Environment and Religious Expression in Buffalo, Chicago, and New York.** The built environment played an important role in shaping the institutional work of these buildings in two ways: by showcasing exemplars that signaled the expectations and opportunities for architects to innovate; and by providing opportunities and resources to support a building. From 1890 to 1919, Chicago and New York were hotbeds of both commercial (41% and 25%, respectively) and religious (9% and 14%, respectively) new building construction highlighted in professional journals. No other cities had more than 5% of new commercial or religious buildings cited as examples. Geographic proximity enhances interaction and mutual awareness of innovations, increasing the likelihood of both innovation and emulation of exemplars (Strang & Soule, 1998). Further, our buildings resided in or near three of the largest cities with sizable populations that engaged in religious worship: Chicago, Buffalo, and New York City (see Table 2).

Chicago provided the frame of reference and resources for Unity Temple’s and the Larkin Administration Building’s clients and architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Unity Temple is proximate to
Table 2. Institutional Work of Institutional Evangelism versus Adaptive Emulation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Institutional evangelism</th>
<th>Adaptive emulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unity Temple (1906–1908); Unitarian church</td>
<td>Madison Sq. Presbyterian (1900–1906); church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larkin Building (1906); commercial bldg.</td>
<td>New York City with 41% religious participation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>• Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>• % Presbyterian decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 44% relig. participation</td>
<td>• New York City with 41% religious participation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• % Unitarians varied</td>
<td>• % Episcopal steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas in symbols:</td>
<td>• God is present</td>
<td>God is present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>key theme, logic</td>
<td>• Church is community</td>
<td>Dignity &amp; industriousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; medium</td>
<td>• No spire</td>
<td>Spire not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Logic of appropriateness</td>
<td>Logic of appropriateness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verbal and written sermons</td>
<td>Company newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and artifacts</td>
<td>• Innovate site-cast reinforced concrete; new bldg functions</td>
<td>Innovate: combine concrete &amp; brick; new bldg. functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• H not cruciform plan</td>
<td>Open floor plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cost $68,000.</td>
<td>Cost $4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities and identification</td>
<td>• Express distinctive Unitarian identity; Collective identity marker</td>
<td>Express distinctive family business; Collective identity marker, then altered &amp; contested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collective identity marker</td>
<td>Express prestige; “conspicuous bldg”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal identity marker: “Rev. Parkhurst church”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demolished (1919) to become insurance building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consecrated for US public (1966)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chicago proper and the Larkin Administration Building’s owner, John Larkin Sr., began his career in Chicago before moving to Buffalo, New York. D. D. Martin, Larkin’s senior executive, also traveled frequently to Chicago and hired Wright to build his home in Buffalo (Quinan, 1987). Frank Lloyd Wright trained with and became a key employee of Adler and Sullivan, leading commercial architects in Chicago. When the fire of 1871 destroyed most of Chicago’s building stock, new clients, primarily businessmen enriched by industrialization, demanded new kinds of buildings (Jones et al., 2012). Chicago architects played with new materials, methods, and technologies, heralding building innovations that earned the label “the Chicago Commercial School of Architecture.” At that time 41% of Chicago’s population was engaged in religious worship through a denomination, increasing to 53% in 1926. Unitarian membership fluctuated from 0.04% in 1906, to 0.02% in 1916, to 0.06% in 1926. Chicago Unitarians were embedded in a dynamic and innovative building environment, but had a smaller and less stable population of adherents to support funding for new church buildings. Thus, it is surprising that Unity Temple, from a resource and ecological perspective, survived to become an exemplar.

Although the owner and Wright were oriented toward Chicago, the Larkin Administration Building was located in Buffalo, which grew rapidly from the 1890s through 1906 to become the eighth most populous city in the United States. Thus, Buffalo provided the initial resources for buildings: money and an expanding population. Its growth, however, slowed dramatically between 1906 and 1936, and it lost population size from 1950 onwards. The Larkin Building’s demise parallels Buffalo’s slowed growth and economic decline. Notably, church involvement was particularly high in Buffalo (51% in 1906 versus 41% for Chicago and 44% for New York), increasing to 65% in 1926. Thus, religious ideas permeated the context of the Larkin Building and the lives of the workers and executives who occupied it.

Madison Square Presbyterian and St. Thomas churches were erected in New York City, which was more conservative architecturally than Chicago. New York was oriented to Europe and engaged in adaptive emulation by conforming to and adapting historical architectural styles to contemporary buildings. Further, Stanford White, the architect of Madison Square Presbyterian, was educated at the École des Beaux Arts in France, similar to H. H. Richardson with whom he apprenticed. The architects of St. Thomas, Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue, belonged to the Arts and Crafts Society in Boston, a historically oriented guild, and apprenticed with neo-Gothic architects of the day. With regard to religious participation, 44% of New York City’s population in 1906 was composed of church members, dropping to 40% in 1916, and then increasing to a high of 65% in 1926. In terms of growth or decline in relevant church denominations: Protestant Episcopal held steady at 2.25% of the population whereas Presbyterian slightly decreased from 1.25% to 1.09%, providing stable environments for Madison Square and St. Thomas. Thus, the changes in the number of adherents of a particular denomination do not readily account for the different fates of these two buildings.

The context played a role in the fate of these buildings. Chicago offered an innovative built environment but less stable resource environment to Unity Temple. Buffalo was initially a thriving city oriented toward Chicago, but experienced decline in its resource environment over time. New York City provided both Madison Square and St. Thomas a conservative built environment and, despite a relatively stable resource environment, the buildings met different fates, as noted in Table 2.

Ideas: God as eminent over versus present in human community. Since three of the buildings are churches, it is not surprising that religious ideas are central to them. However, we also found religious ideas key to the Larkin Building, a commercial enterprise. In the three churches, an exterior spire (or its absence) symbolized the congregation’s beliefs about God’s relationship to humans. In contrast, religious beliefs were encoded into the interior of the Larkin Building.
Jones and Massa

For Unity Temple, the absence of a spire marked the belief that God is present, residing in human community rather than eminent and pointing away from humanity. Unity Temple’s Reverend Johonnot and architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1906) explained to church members that the spire was excluded because “God should not be sought in the sky, but on earth among the children of men.” The belief of God in humanity was a central idea guiding the design of Unity Temple. Thus, Rev. Johonnot voiced a logic of appropriateness in eliminating a spire and dismissing Gothic architecture, which extensively used a spire, as inappropriate for Unitarians’ beliefs.

A spire was not relevant for the Larkin Building, as a warehouse and manufacturer. However, the interior of the building emphasized the Protestant religious idea of salvation through hard work and the Larkin Company as a “Christian family”, a church metaphor. Religious ideas were inscribed in the interior of the building. For example, the walls of the light court contained inscriptions from the Bible and words such as “dignity” and “integrity,” extolling the company’s Protestant ideas and expectations for its workers. Larkin reinforced a logic of appropriateness—striving for self-improvement—by including a branch of the Buffalo Public Library, classroom space for grammar and writing classes, and an office of the YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association) (Quinan, 1987).

For Madison Square Presbyterian, Rev. Parkhurst was conflicted over whether or not to have a spire. Conformity to tradition appealed to Rev. Parkhurst: “There is nothing like the Gothic for church architecture; it is the accepted style…. ” He focused on the church’s prestige in the neighborhood, articulating a logic of consequence for not having a spire: “ a steeple could not be built high enough to overtop the roofs of buildings all around it, and the result would be a dwarfing of the structure” (New York Times, March 4, 1904, p. 16). In contrast, Stanford White, Madison Square’s architect, expressed a logic of appropriateness: the absence of a spire signaled a “protest against the dominance of Gothic architecture” and the spire “belongs absolutely to the Roman Catholic church” (Carrere & White, 1906, p. 29); thus, it was inappropriate for a Protestant church.

The choice of a dome instead of a spire generated “howls of protest … indicating how firmly the Gothic has been adopted into our ideal of Ecclesiastical architecture” (Inland Architecture and Building News, 1904, p. 24). In his dedication sermon, Rev. Parkhurst (1906a, pp. 18, 28) acknowledged that the church’s architecture “has gained a good deal of attention.” The design of and materials signified God’s eminence and created a magnificent pulpit from which to preach the word, the central focus of Protestant denominations (Kieckhefer, 2004).

St. Thomas’s Rector and building committee insisted on a spire. Burke, a member of the building committee, articulated a logic of consequence—what a spire did: “the spires of our churches pierce the skies, as so many conductors to avert the wrath of the Heaven, and to point a whole population to the City of God.” Rector Stires expressed his desire that St. Thomas Church provide God with a “worthy dwelling place” and compared the church’s status to secular buildings: “fairly challenge the costly secular structures in which our city abounds” (Year Book, 1905, pp. 10–12). Gothic architecture sought to induce awe through the material scale: exceptional height directs attention toward heaven and length directs movement toward the altar, symbolizing the transition from worldly at the entrance to the spiritual at the altar (Kieckhefer, 2004). The New York Times clearly stated the aspirations of the church: “a strong suggestion of Westminster Abbey in the general treatment” (Feb 27, 1910, p. SM3). Thus, the church’s prestige signaled God’s eminence over humanity and the church’s status in the world.

The material features in buildings, such as spire or not, signified distinct ideas about God: Unity Temple and Larkin enacted a belief of God as present on earth and with humanity, whereas Madison Square and St. Thomas emphasized God’s eminence, represented by the church’s prestige, and the church’s role as a conductor between man on earth and God in heaven.
**Materials: Innovation and tradition.** The materials of these buildings not only embodied and signified specific Christian ideas, but also varied in type and composition, demanding knowledge and construction techniques that ranged from new to centuries old, with associated time and cost investments.

Wright’s Unity Temple deployed a novel but mundane building material, reinforced concrete, for the most sacred of building types: the church. Reinforced concrete was relatively new as a building material and used for infrastructure such as bridges, ports or building foundations. Thus, the use of reinforced concrete as the exposed material for a church transgressed boundaries, combining the mundane with the sacred. Wright not only used reinforced concrete, but also devised a new method called on-site pouring, that demanded reusable plywood forms to create a uniform surface. Wright’s innovations included new methods to deliver traditional functions: radiant heating embedded into the concrete floor, solid walls that cut off noise and induced tranquility, as well as natural lighting through a glass ceiling rather than stained glass windows. These innovations drove the costs over budget by 30% and required three rather than two years to build. Even so, Unity Temple at $68,000 cost substantially less than the other buildings mentioned (see Table 2).

With the Larkin Administration Building, Wright used brick, which was typical for commercial buildings and relatively economical and durable. He departed from traditional designs, however, by having a plain exterior that lacked ornamentation, instead using the exterior materials as ornamentation: a cornerstone belief of modern architecture (Jones et al., 2012). Russell Sturgis, an architectural peer and critic, criticized the building as “a monster of awkwardness” (Sturgis, 1908, *Architectural Record*). The belief in dignity for the worker resulted in building innovations: (1) air circulation and conditioning that enhanced working conditions, a first in a commercial workplace in America; (2) a wall facade that protected the interior from the noise of truck and rail activity and facilitated the tranquility necessary for dignified work; and (3) an open floor plan that allowed for increased sociability and monitoring by supervisors and peers. Larkin cost $4 million dollars, a very expensive building for 1906. The Larkin Building still garners significant attention from the profession today, as shown in Table 1, albeit far more from architectural historians who explain its importance to modern architecture than from practicing architects who use it as an exemplar. When the American Architectural Association celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1956, the Larkin Building, demolished in 1950, was not included as an exemplar; only buildings that survived in material form were included in the list. When the building was demolished so was knowledge of the building’s innovations. “In the absence of the building itself, [the incorporation of services] has been little more than gossip” (Banham, 1979, p. 195).

Madison Square Presbyterian transposed into church architecture the materials and Beaux Arts style that dominated public buildings such as libraries, concert halls, hotels, and State houses. The church’s exterior materials were unusual: brick, terracotta, and columns of light green marble and granite. These materials were uncommon in ecclesiastical architecture, ostentatious enough to attract attention of the passerby and incited strong reactions and controversies, as noted above. The *Inland Architect and Building News* (1904, p. 24) called the design and proposed materials: “one more conspicuous church.” In 1918, Metropolitan Life Insurance offered to purchase Madison Square church to extend its office space. Rev. Parkhurst, who was set to retire, and the elders of the church, accepted. The architect for the Metropolitan Life Insurance building “regretted the necessity of destroying a beautiful church” and reused the terracotta tiles and green columns for a newspaper building, the *Hartford Times*, that he was constructing (*New York Times*, 1919, Sept 28, p. RE1). Other parts of the building’s exterior were donated to the Columbia School of Architecture and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ironically, the building that protested the dominant Gothic ecclesiastical style and materials for churches became elements of commercial and secular public
buildings. Madison Square initially merited significant attention from the profession. It was built by the most prominent architectural firm of the 20th century, recalled classical Christian church architectural traditions, and transposed the secular Beaux Arts materials to the sacred. Yet, it survived a mere 10 years. It was razed in 1919, fading from the profession’s collective memory. As Table 1 shows, no architectural books or articles were written specifically on it after 1907.

St. Thomas was built in the traditional Gothic style: completely of stone (limestone and sandstone), according to medieval construction principles, using load-bearing rib vaulting arches. Although the architects, Cram and Goodhue, adapted Gothic architecture to modern needs, at St. Thomas they rejected the modern convenience and space-spanning benefits of steel. The building’s interior, appointed by Goodhue, translated medieval artistic and spiritual forms into contemporary expression. For example, traditional stained-glass windows in the clerestory suffused the church in color and the altar, which was featured prominently at the head of the nave with a flat wall behind it, characteristic of English cathedrals, added to the majesty of sermons and choir. St. Thomas required nine years and $1.5 million for its construction, making it the most expensive church per square foot constructed in America. St. Thomas still stands and functions as a church today near Fifth Avenue; yet it has merited little professional attention (see Table 1).

In sum, materials signify ideas, and demand knowledge of construction processes and methods. Architects ranged in their materials usage and agency from retrospective to prospective. McKim, Mead, and White transposed classical Christian and secular building style into the contemporary church; Cram and Goodhue adapted and translated medieval Gothic church to modern congregation. Wright, while inspired by Gothic architecture, focused on the modern, innovating and reinventing church architecture. Architects and clients chose their materials thoughtfully. Innovation in materials, including plans, functions, and composition, spurred recognition, both positive and negative, from the profession, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition to become an exemplar. To become an exemplar a building must survive; when a building’s material form is eviscerated, it is eliminated from consideration as a potential exemplar by professional peers.

**Identities and identification: Buildings as personal or collective identity marker.** When the ideas and materials of a building express a distinctive collective identity resonant with the architect, owners, and users, it generates identification seen in commitment of resources—time, energy, and money—over generations. However, the institutional work of transforming buildings from personal identity marker of minister and architect to collective identity marker of the congregation did not always happen. In Table 1, the media’s focus and labeling—whether congregants, preacher, building or events—indicates whether a building was a personal or collective identity marker.

For Unity Temple, the media highlight the collectivity of the church. Table 1 reveals a balance among the minister ($n = 31$), church events ($n = 41$), its congregants ($n = 29$) and a relatively little about the new building ($n = 5$). In the next section, we explore the Unity Temple case in depth. Here we note that even through the trials and tribulations of an over-budget and long-delayed building process, the congregation expressed gratitude to Wright for “the new building is a noble, dignified, beautiful and inspiring example of architecture and most admirably adapted to the various needs and activities of the church. Because of its uniqueness in style and construction, it is set apart as a thing by itself, at once honoring and distinguishing its designer and its possessors” (quoted in Siry, 1998, p. 193). The building created and reflected a distinctive collective identity that engendered identification by its congregants.

The Larkin Building, created through the collaboration of Wright and executives Martin and Larkin, Sr., captured and evoked a sense of distinctiveness of the Larkin enterprise that heralded improvements to working conditions. However, it did not take into account the possibility that future owners might not identify with the ideas emblazoned on the walls and purpose-built work...
areas. While D. D. Martin, the primary contact with Wright, remained in power, he protected the Larkin Building’s material integrity. After the death of John Sr., John D. Larkin Jr. pushed D. D. Martin out of the company and altered the building. In 1926, he punched windows into the fifth floor, despite protests from Wright at the site (Quinan, 1987). Wright dis-identified: “They [the Larkins] never realized the place their building took in the thought of the world—for they never hesitated to make senseless changes in it after years” (quoted in Quinan, 1987, p. 128). Both the company’s profits and the vitality of Buffalo waned. Larkin Jr. sold the building to a contractor, who abandoned the building in 1943; it was vandalized until 1950 when the city of Buffalo demolished it and replaced it with a parking garage for city trucks. Larkin’s demolition occurred not only after Wright’s recognition worldwide as an architectural genius, but also the Larkin Building’s recognition as an exemplar of modern architecture. The architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable (1957, p. 142) captured the dynamics of Larkin’s fate: “So absolute was its departure from tradition, so radical were its innovations, so startling its appearance, that it shocked more than pleased … it became an undisputed turning point in commercial architecture … In less than fifty years, initial antagonism turned to acceptance, and then to apathy. Such is the irony of architectural progress in America—its most important monuments forgotten and destroyed.”

Madison Square Presbyterian’s identity, as expressed through the building, was not distinctiveness, but prestige of Reverend Parkhurst. The New York Times routinely summarized Rev. Parkhurst’s sermons and, from the 1880s onward, referred to Madison Square Presbyterian as “Parkhurst’s church.” Thus, the church functioned as personal, not collective, identity marker. Madison Square was co-located near and associated with the influential Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. In 1903, Rev. Parkhurst sought a new church to replace the current building, which had been erected only two years earlier in 1901 and for $100,000. He sought to replace the new 1901 building because commercial buildings obstructed the church’s “fair share of light” and lessened the dignity of their current building (Parkhurst, 1906b). In 1903, the congregation sold Madison Square and moved to a new location across the street, comprised a building committee of artistic luminaries such as Louis C. Tiffany and spent $350,000 on Stanford White’s neoclassical design and building (Parkhurst, 1906b). Upon his retirement in 1919, Rev. Parkhurst and the church elders opted, once again, to sell the church building to Metropolitan Insurance. Madison Square merged with two other Presbyterian churches and relocated to the First Church Presbyterian: both the building and its community ceased to exist with Rev. Parkhurst’s retirement.

St. Thomas church is located near Fifth Avenue and included as parishioners America’s business elite such as J. P. Morgan, the Vanderbilt family, and Joseph Pulitzer. Given the church’s expense and long construction time, the media focused on the building (n = 19), rector (n = 12), and then congregants (n = 11) (See Table 1). In St. Thomas the distinctive social status and identities of key parishioners were emblazoned satirically into the stone by associate architects such as dollar signs over the bride’s doorway and money bags in the church under the initials JPM (for J. P. Morgan). These satires made headlines in the New York Times, generated apologies from the architect Goodhue and a retort from Rector Stires, who averred, “it is much ado about nothing.” It humanized the church, making its eminence more approachable (Lippman, 1923). St. Thomas church became a collective identity marker with the distinctive and unique history of its parishioners inscribed into the material building. Generations of parishioners continued to support the church that bore their distinctive history upon its walls. Within the profession, however, it is little noted.

The cases of Larkin and Madison Square Presbyterian illuminate that an inability to move from personal or remain as a collective identity marker impinges on the resources of time, energy, and
money that ensure a building’s survival. In contrast, both Unity Temple and St. Thomas became collective identity markers. Unity Temple fostered commitment by reflecting its distinctive community and religious ideas, whereas St. Thomas enhanced and reflected its parishioners’ distinctive history and prestige. To survive, a building must engender identification with its owners and users who devote time, talent, and money to support and maintain the material building.

Our comparative cases also reveal two distinct legitimation processes—institutional evangelizing and adaptive emulation—across the four buildings. Institutional evangelizing created and protected new forms and practices that altered architecture, whereas adaptive emulation translated traditional practice to contemporary form or transposed historical practices to a new arena such as from secular to sacred buildings. The failure cases within each, Larkin and Madison Square, highlight the critical necessity that, if buildings are to survive, they must become a collective identity marker. However, as the St. Thomas case demonstrates, a collective identity marker does not ensure consecration as an exemplar for the profession. To apprehend the process by which a novel practice that challenges a profession’s institutional order became an exemplar, we engaged in an in-depth analysis of Unity Temple.

**Institutional work of Unity Temple: Moving from novel practice to consecrated exemplar**

The institutional work of many actors was vital to transitioning Unity Temple from a novel practice to a consecrated exemplar. Prophets engage in collective entrepreneurship and offer an alternative future; evangelists tout and spread the novel practice; truth tellers consecrate the novel practice as an exemplar; and shepherds protect the novel practice so it survives materially through the vulnerable early periods to become an exemplar. These activities are associated with phases, some sequential: a novel practice has to be created before it is evangelized, and it needs to be evangelized so truth tellers know about and can consecrate it. Others do not take place in sequence: shepherds protect the novel practice throughout the entire process.

**Prophets of innovation: Johonnot and Wright.** The story of Unity Temple began before Frank Lloyd Wright was ever commissioned for the project, with the minister and congregation that later funded this innovative building. The first photo in Figure 1 is of a traditional Gothic revival church building erected in 1872 just over a year after the Unity Church organization was founded (1871). An imitation of the Universalist church of St. Paul in Chicago, the building housed a liberal-minded congregation set on advancing Unitarian ideas through progressive religious practices, including hiring a woman pastor, Augusta Chapin, who served from 1886 to 1891. She left to attend Harvard Divinity School, became the first woman in the United States to receive a doctorate in divinity, and was replaced by Dr. Rodney Johonnot, a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School.

In 1901, Minister Johonnot articulated a logic of appropriateness for Unity Church, starting a new building fund and expressing how discordant a building anchored in the ideas and materials of the past was to house a congregation moving toward the future. In short, incongruities between ideas and material abounded: Unity Temple as a Gothic-style building emulated the Catholic denomination, which adheres to the Nicene creed, celebrates the Trinity (God, Son and Spirit), believes in confession, and is organized hierarchically under a Pope with bishops and then priests. Unitarians, however, reject any creed and the Trinity, believe in individual freedom of thought that is reflected in character, and are organized by covenant and congregationally rather than hierarchically (US Census of Religious Bodies, 1906, 1936). In a sermon in May 1904, Johonnot made his case to the congregation for a new structure, engaging in projective agency: the institutional work of using a social situation, in this case a new fund and his sermons, to move the congregation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building photograph</th>
<th>Floor plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unity Church (1872)</strong></td>
<td>1872, congregation builds traditional Gothic Revival building which uses a traditional cruciform plan pictured above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Unity Church (1872)" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Floor plan" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unity Temple (1905–1908)</strong></td>
<td>1905, Frank Lloyd Wright is commissioned to design a building that fits the secular and religious needs of the congregation and that reflects the ideals of Unitarianism. H plan was a stark departure from traditional cruciform designs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Unity Temple (1905–1908)" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Floor plan" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Illustrations of Unity Church (1872) and Unity Temple (1905–1908).

Source: Building photos from Unity Temple Restoration Foundation and building plans from www.greatbuildings.com
toward a new future. Citing “great developments in church construction and new conceptions of art and architecture which could not be ignored” (Annual Sermon, Oak Leaves, 13 May 1904), he argued for a new church construction that incorporated new conceptions of architecture, facilitated both religious and civic engagement, and was durable and beautiful. He appealed to the congregation’s taste for being at the forefront of progressive religious thought and practice, enhancing acceptance of the innovations to come.

On June 4, 1905, as if Johonnot’s calls to raise funds had been prescient, a lightning storm hit three church steeples in Oak Park. It damaged two churches and burnt to the ground the entire edifice of Unity Church, creating the opportunity for the construction of a new building (Chicago Tribune, June 5, 1905, p. 5). The parish leadership secured funding pledges for a new building in a long but narrow lot alongside a busy street. A committee of church members, chiefly businessmen and lawyers for large corporations, who were the primary clients for modern architecture at the time, interviewed several architects, choosing from among them Frank Lloyd Wright. Even though Wright had little experience when it came to church design, his selection was not arbitrary. Wright came from a long line of progressive Unitarian thinkers. His great-great-grandfather, Jenkins Jones, had in 1726 founded the Unitarian sect in Wales (McCarter, 1997, p. 9). Moreover, Wright’s uncle, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, was a progressive and influential Unitarian minister at nearby All Souls Church, and Wright’s mother was good friends with the former minister, Augusta Chapin. Johonnot knew Jenkin Lloyd Jones and was familiar with Wright’s work. Wright had built houses for several parishioners at Unity Church, including Charles Roberts, head of the selection committee. Roberts, an engineer and inventor of industrial machinery, like Johonnot, was not only receptive to but encouraged Wright’s innovative spirit (Siry, 1991, 1998). Johonnot, Roberts, and Wright engaged in collective entrepreneurship to co-create a novel practice. Johonnot, Roberts, and Wright aligned in their agency: a desire to move Unity toward a new future by housing it in a novel material form that was consonant with Unitarian ideals.

Johonnot and Wright’s work of prophecy included theorizing a new ecclesiastical aesthetic by marrying Unitarian and modern rational, scientific ideas into symbolic and material form, while also making it understandable to the congregation. A pamphlet, written by Johonnot and Wright (1906) to the congregants, explained their conception of a new church that overcame the discordance between ideational and material that had beset the progressive congregation when it occupied a Gothic church. Johonnot and Wright drew upon four key ideas of the Unitarian faith—love, reason, community, and free expression (first column of Table 3)—which were clearly expressed in the Unity Church Manual (1902–1903). They explained how these symbolic elements translated into the material, enacting a novel practice that fulfilled specific client needs and embodied a collective identity.

Unity Temple reflected Wright’s innovations in materials and stylistic features of ecclesiastical architecture—a subfield that had been free from major changes in materials or styles for centuries. Stone was the dominant material used in 82% of exemplary churches and 26% of Unitarian churches before 1908 (see Figure 2). Stone has “Biblical symbolism”: living stone refers to a church’s members and a church constructed from many stones allegorically represents the spiritual union of members (McNamara, 2011). The foundation of the Christian church is St. Peter, whose name comes from the Latin petra, meaning “stone” or “rock.” Although Unitarian churches before 1908 used a wider variety of traditional materials, including wood and brick, as shown in Figure 2, no church before 1908, either exemplary (i.e., consecrated by the profession) or prototypical Unitarian (i.e., populating the landscape) used reinforced concrete as its primary building material. Thus, the use of reinforced concrete was innovative, not only transposing the secular material used in ports and piers to the sacred church, but also inventing a new method of site pouring to create a uniform surface for concrete instead of stone-like blocks.
Wright involved the client and congregation, especially the building committee, in his creative process, educating them about design and building possibilities. Wright (1910/1975) described the architect–client relationship as “it is to a certain extent the duty of an architect to give his client something dated ahead while the architect is educating the client, the client is educating him … style is this matter growing out of this relation of architect and client to the work at hand…,” Charles White, Jr., Wright’s employee, in a March 1906 letter wrote: “for a liberal church, we at last have a design that is beautiful and consistent … This building, I prophesy, will be admired for generations to come, as a beautiful and fitting memorial to the service of God, and the betterment of mankind. It will probably be adversely criticized … but … it has a virile quality that cannot die” (reprinted in Brooks, 1983, p. 91). The building was so radical a departure from traditional church architecture and had such significant cost and time overruns that Johonnot and the building

Table 3. Translation from Ideals to Material Form in Designing and Constructing Unity Temple.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideals of Unity Temple</th>
<th>Enacted in symbols</th>
<th>Realized in material form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity Church Manual (1902–1903)</td>
<td>Johonnot &amp; Wright booklet (1906)</td>
<td>Building completed and dedicated (1908–1909)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Religion is…love to God and love to man”</td>
<td>• Church needs to perform both sacred and social functions “... God should not be sought in the sky, but on earth among the children of men”</td>
<td>• H-plan design connected social and sacred space by central archway and gave them equal value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reason is respected as the ultimate authority in religion”</td>
<td>• The plan and style of a church should provide rational solutions to problems in a cost-effective manner “Every radical departure from the customary must make its appeal to reason to determine its truth and worth … Especially is this true with regard to things sacred”</td>
<td>• Lack of tower or spire emphasizes idea that God is sought on earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We do hereby unite and associate ourselves together”</td>
<td>• The design of the church should facilitate congregation and community “the interior arrangement … mak[es] it easy for the pastor and officers to meet all members and strangers without effort”</td>
<td>• Use of site-cast concrete, a cheaper and more flexible means of construction than traditional stone masonry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One article of faith “each member shall be allowed every liberty of thought and opinion”</td>
<td>• Rejected trinity and church hierarchy where clergy mediate between God and people “by its departure from traditional lines, the simplicity and freedom of the faith held by members … is outwardly expressed”</td>
<td>• Exclusion of traditional church features such as a spire, tower, and pitch roof save costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of natural lighting and thick concrete walls meant lowered utility costs and noise reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Solid wall sealed off street sound and focused congregation inward</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Exits placed by sides of altar rather than rear of church to move parishioners toward minister</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Open floor plan unimpeded by beams or columns enhanced views of clergy and fellow congregants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seating on three sides focuses congregation on one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• No traditional stained-glass windows which tells Christian history for the uneducated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Additional exists allow congregants to depart freely without disturbing services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Material Usage Before and After Unity Temple Completion.

Sources: www.greatbuildings.com for exemplar data, and Postcards of Unitarian and Universalist Church buildings (Harvard Cooperative Digital Resources Initiative) for data on prototypical churches.
committee had the congregation vote multiple times to approve the designs and funding (Sokol, 2008). The reaction of the Unity Temple congregation was positive, despite its escalated costs (30% over estimate) and two-year construction delay. As noted earlier, at the annual meeting on March 9, 1909, the congregation expressed thanks to Wright, acknowledging the building as a collective identity marker and a logic of appropriateness. Not only was Unity Temple embraced by its congregants, but also by Unitarians, who held their annual national conference in 1909 in Chicago. “Unitarians praised Unity Temple as ‘the most strikingly original of any church in America’” and Lloyd Jenkins Jones called it a “study in architecture as well as church history, probably the most deliberate, elaborate and successful attempt yet to apply the new construction to church architecture” (quoted in Siry, 1998, p. 199). Wright customized Unity Temple to meet the congregation’s needs, marrying Unitarian ideas with novel materials to express a coherent identity of a progressive Unitarian church, which triggered identification by Unitarians with the church building.

Unity Temple generated different reactions from the Oak Park and Chicago community. Only three articles even mention Unity Temple. The front page of the Chicago Tribune (1908, p. 1) noted the opening of Unity Temple: a “structure like no other in the world … the only temple in the world whose walls, floor and ceiling are of one single piece … built of reinforced concrete….” In 1909, Winthrop Kendell expressed vitriolic critique of Unity Temple in the local paper: “unique and ugly … it is so severely plain and so plainly severe that it makes one shiver and shrink away from it.” Charles White, President of the Fine Arts Society of Oak Park, publicly defended Unity Temple, “as a great achievement and quotes Henry Wilcox, a European expert who recently visited the temple, as saying that the proportions of Unity Temple are sublime” (Chicago Tribune, Nov 20, 1909, p. 6). After this initial controversy, the Chicago Tribune becomes silent on Unity Temple until after 1956 when Architectural Record and its panel of architects consecrates Unity Temple as one of the four most important church buildings in America for the American institute of Architects’ 100th birthday.

Despite the local community’s negative, if limited, reaction, the congregation identified with and remained committed to their distinctive building. In 1910, during the height of a domestic scandal that tarnished Wright’s reputation and was published widely in the local Oak Leaves and the Chicago Tribune, congregants placed a placard on Unity Temple and proclaimed it a “Frank Lloyd Wright building.” Wright asked the congregation to remove the placard because he objected to his name being attached to any building (Chicago Tribune, Oct 25, 1910). A search through Unity Temple archives revealed the congregation’s commitment to Unity Temple: the church emblazoned Frank Lloyd Wright’s sketch of the building on its church bulletins, which are used for Sunday service, from its dedication on October 25, 1908 through the present. When the church started a newsletter in 1916, it prominently placed the Wright sketch on its letterhead. Photos and sketches are still prominent on Unity Temple’s communications.

Evangelizing the novel practice. A building has two lives and two audiences: how it functions for its inhabitants and how professional peers and historians judge it (Blake, 1996). As shown above, congregants embraced Unity Temple, not only as a functional building but also as a material embodiment of their distinctive identity and beliefs. Its second life required that the building, as a collective identity marker, expand beyond its first audience—its congregants—and engage a different audience of professional peers if it is to play a role as an exemplar to the profession. Unity Temple expanded its identity to include multiple groups: a process of evangelizing.

After the prophets—Wright, Johonnot, and the building committee—co-created Unity Temple, Wright and early European architects and a few architectural historians proselytized Unity Temple as a solution to problems facing the profession and contemporary society. Wright published two monographs: Ausgeführte Bauten of 1910 and Ausgeführte Bauten of 1911 (translated as The Early
Work of Frank Lloyd Wright). Wright placed Unity Temple in prominent positions—either first or last in the portfolio. Architects in both Germany and Holland attended to these books (Brooks, 1983). Retrospectively in 1946, Mies van der Rohe recalled how: “This comprehensive display and the extensive publication of his works … prove[d] of great significance to the development of architecture in Europe” (p. 41). The monographs contain limited text, the introductions in 1910 by Wright and 1911 by C. R. Ashbee, and many photos, renderings, and plans. Theorizing was primarily visual, seen in plans, sketches, and photos, reinforcing the importance of visual persuasion and materiality in the diffusion process rather than primarily linguistic transmission through abstract ideas and cultural frameworks.

We identified and read all the early reviews, positive and negative, of Unity Temple by ten prominent architectural peers and historians. Architects, particularly Europeans central to the modernist movement, including Henrik Berlage, J. J. P. Oud and Erich Mendelsohn, highlighted how Unity Temple initiated a “new tradition” or “new architecture” (70%) and used reinforced concrete as its building material (50%). Reviewers who responded negatively were located primarily in the United States, such as Montgomery Schuyler (1912) who described Unity as “rude, incomplete, unfinished.” In 1918, the Americans, Kimball and Edgell, noted that Unity and Wright “has received more appreciation abroad than at home.” The dramatic difference in American and European responses may be due to Wright’s personal scandals during 1909–1914. Unity Temple was dedicated on October 25, 1909 and by December 1909 Wright had abandoned his wife and six children and fled to Europe with a client’s wife to work on his monographs, described above, returning in 1911 to live in Wisconsin with his lover who, along with her children and Wright’s employees, were murdered in 1914 by a deranged employee. The initial reviews by Americans of Wright’s Unity Temple were negative and occurred during the time of the scandals.

Figure 3 reveals the diffusion of Unity Temple relative to reinforced concrete churches by tracing the number of mentions of the terms Unity Temple and reinforced concrete church in a corpus of books digitized by Google. Mentions of Unity Temple in books spike in the decade following the building’s construction, but the number of mentions soon dissipates. It is only with the publication of the “Wendingen” series, a compilation of writings by European and American architects about Frank Lloyd Wright’s work, in 1925 that the building garners attention again, which remains strong until 1940. By 1950, the novel practice of building churches out of concrete had become accepted, as indicated by an article which focused on concrete churches, entitled “Old wine in new bottle: a new conception of an old idea” (Liturgical Arts, 1950, Aug., pp. 100–101). Although the idea of reinforced concrete as a material for churches was accepted, it was not typical practice for new church buildings. Instead, reinforced concrete became the dominant material for church exemplars in the profession. As shown in Figure 2, reinforced concrete dominates the material of exemplar churches. In fact, 77% of exemplary church buildings listed in www.greatbuildings.com from 1950 to 1969 used only reinforced concrete as their material. Although reinforced concrete is increasingly used as a composite material (i.e., material combinations are used; 15% for prototypical buildings and 25% for exemplars in Figure 2), it never became a prototypical or popular building material for churches, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Thus, Wright’s reinforced concrete in Unity Temple transformed architectural exemplars, but not typical church buildings.

Lewis Mumford, starting with the 1925 “Wendingen” book, became one of Wright’s evangelists. Mumford recognized Wright’s intentions and contributions; he noted that Wright operated out of distinctly different ideas that rejected a logic of consequence. Mumford (1925, p. 71) wrote that “the center of American architecture has been occupied by the able technicians: the periphery has been divided between the cultivated stylist and the outcast … Mr. Wright is our most distinguished outcast … His architectural conceptions are far removed from the conservative architects
Figure 3. Attention to Building (Unity Temple) and Category (Reinforced Concrete Churches) in Published Books.
Source: Google Ngram corpus (2012).
who will not carry modern processes to the inevitable conclusions ….” In his 1929 review of Hitchcock’s 1928 monograph on Wright, Mumford made clear that Hitchcock had missed the point and significance of Wright’s architecture:

*Mr. Wright’s art is prophetic: it does not simply conform and adjust itself to existing conditions; it reacts and makes demands* [emphasis added] … Success under present conditions demands unhesitating conformity on the part of engineer to the terms laid down by the banker and investor … Mr. Hitchcock’s principles keep him from grasping Mr. Wright’s significance.”

Retrospectively, Wright’s 1930 letter to Lewis Mumford framed the meaning of Unity Temple in the place of architecture: “the Larkin Building made definitely the negation now engaging Le Corbusier et al. Unity Temple went a step further from that negation to affirmation” (Wojtowicz, Pfeiffer et al., 2001, p. 92). In 1943, Wright revised his 1932 autobiography, devoting seven pages to Unity Temple; “The first idea [for Unity Temple] was to keep a noble room for worship in mind, and let the sense of the great room shape the whole edifice. Let the room inside be the architecture outside” (Wright, 1943, p. 178). Wright claimed: “When I finished Unity Temple, I had it. I knew I had the beginning of a … great truth in architecture … Unity Temple is my contribution to modern architecture” (Wright, 1943, p. 182).

It was not until 1942, after Wright built his two most important masterpieces, Fallingwater and the S. C. Johnson & Son Administration Building, that Hitchcock changed his views. Hitchcock dedicated a book to Wright’s architecture, *In the Nature of Materials* (1942), where he identified Unity Temple as “justly the most famous—more so than the Prairie houses and Larkin Building … [Unity Temple] was the first time he—or for that matter anyone else perhaps—had used [poured concrete] in a monumental public building” (p. 53). Hitchcock’s conversion was critical and reflected a growing trend within the profession.

In 1956, Unity Temple was consecrated: designated by professional peers as an exemplar. When the American Institute of Architects celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1956, *Architectural Record* tasked a panel of architects and architectural historians to nominate the 50 most significant buildings in the last 100 years. Unity Temple was one of only four churches included. Wright’s buildings comprised 16% of the list (eight buildings in total) compared to the next most cited architect, H. H. Richardson, with three buildings. Wright’s Larkin Administration Building is absent. Once demolished, the building can no longer be experienced and architects no longer consider it as a potential exemplar.

Although consecrated by the profession, to secure resources for Unity Temple’s material survival, Unity Temple also needed consecration by the public. By comparison, McKim, Mead, and White’s Pennsylvania Station (1910) also was recognized as one of the 50 most important buildings in the United States; yet, it was demolished in 1964 after recognition of its significance. Architectural historians played a key role in securing public consecration in the form of regulatory action that preserved and safeguarded Unity Temple. In 1960, the architectural historian, Vincent Scully of Yale University, wrote a monograph on Wright and his work. In 1967, the National Park Service undertook a historical survey of Unity Temple, emphasized not only Wright’s contribution to modern architecture, but also Unity Temple’s importance to American culture, and quoted directly from Scully’s (1960) *Frank Lloyd Wright*:

Though uncompromisingly monumental it is scaled to the individual rather than to the office hive. The concrete of the exterior has a pebbled aggregate which makes it sympathetic to the touch. The building thus encloses and invites. Its union of these opposites must have seemed to the free-thinking congregation for which it was built an ideal expression of the character of modern religious experience … In Unity
Temple, Wright was interpreting both his time and its memories, in terms of the history of Protestantism on this continent; it still remains the most modern and the most traditional church built in twentieth century America. (National Park Service, 1967, pp. 7–8, quoting Scully 1960, p. 20)

In 1970, cultural consecration occurred: the National Park Service granted Unity Temple National Historic Landmark status. The reported noted: “Wright created both a notable new architectural form and a strong material statement of the radically new architectural philosophy then emerging—that form must fit the function, that a building must be adapted to the uses to which it is to be put and should express those uses in its form” (p. 3). The 1967 and 1970 National Park Service documents drew upon the prior proselytizing to anchor their case for Unity Temple’s national landmark status: Johonnot and Wright’s (1906) pamphlet, Wright’s 1910 and 1911 monographs released in Germany, Wijdeveld’s 1925 edited book, which included Mumford’s chapter, Wright’s autobiography (1932), Hitchcock’s 1942 conversion, captured in his book, In the Nature of Materials, and Scully’s 1960 book. Consecration of Wright’s Unity Temple has extended beyond the national level to international: in 2008 it was nominated for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list, becoming an exemplar not just to the architectural profession but to culture worldwide. The professional and cultural consecration of Unity Temple was possible because the congregants of Unity Temple protected rather than sold or abandoned their building.

Shepherding Unity Temple’s material form. The congregation shepherded their distinctive building, created by novel practices, and maintained the integrity of Wright’s design and construction over time, despite changing economic situations and shifting congregational members. As Unity Temple’s newsletters and church bulletins showed, the congregation consistently responded to internal appeals for funds to maintain and upkeep the building, honoring its original form with only minor modifications. The identity of Unity Temple became Wright’s church, even though, ironically, in 1910 Wright refused Unity Temple the right to have a sign with his name on it on the church. Between 1956 and 1979, and in contrast with 1905–1919 in Table 1, the Chicago Tribune referred to Unity Temple most often by association with Wright (n = 53), or with the building (n = 27), but there are few mentions of congregants, church events or the minister.

The congregation still sees its calling as one of maintaining its “Wright” heritage, safeguarding and opening the church to the larger community and the world to share Wright’s and their architectural treasure (personal communication, Ron Moline, Unity Temple archivist). In 1988, the congregation of Unity Temple unanimously voted to grant a preservation easement into perpetuity with the State of Illinois, becoming the first church in the United States to do so. Churches have fought preservation easements, claiming that they unfairly burden churches for maintenance and restrict their theological and social missions (Nesmith, 1988). The extent of this commitment to guard and shepherd the church is also seen in the church creating the Unity Temple Restoration Fund in 2005, whose mission is “to continually restore, preserve and present Unity Temple, Frank Lloyd Wright’s masterpiece of modern architecture” (http://www.unitytemple-utrf.org/foundation.html). Between 2000 and 2009, the church raised and spent $700,000 on the building (Roth, 2009). In 2009, Unity Temple Restoration Fund initiated a $12–15 million restoration, the first in the church’s history. It partnered with the National Historic Trust, which placed Unity Temple on its eleven most endangered historic buildings list, generating attention and money for the project. For over half a century, the congregation has engaged in a largely unsung form of institutional work: ensuring the survival of the building in its original form and sharing the cultural treasure with the world. This institutional work of maintaining the building’s material integrity enabled Unity Temple to become an exemplar within the profession: architects, particularly Europeans, experienced, wrote about, and translated Unity Temple’s innovations into the profession.
Discussion

In this paper, we sought to reveal the process by which a novel practice that eschewed an established institutional order became a consecrated exemplar—a physical model deemed critical to a field and suitable for emulation. We compared the success story of Unity Temple, a building that challenged established practices of ecclesiastical design in the architectural profession, with a mix of successful and failed cases that allow us to identify the process and key mechanisms that determine whether a building becomes consecrated as an exemplar, falls into professional obscurity or is demolished. Our findings make three contributions to our understanding of institutional work and institutional processes. First, we reveal two distinct legitimation processes: institutional evangelizing and adaptive emulation. Second, we illustrate that institutional change is a collective process of entrepreneurship and institutional maintenance acting in concert. Third, we highlight the interplay of ideas, materials, and identities in enacting institutional work and processes, where materiality plays a key role in instantiating ideas and enabling the building to become a boundary object that engages distinct audiences and diffuses novel practices.

Legitimation processes: Institutional evangelizing and adaptive emulation

By examining the institutional work of actors, we provide greater insight into how purposive actions generate two distinct legitimation processes: one that challenges an extant institutional order and one that builds upon an institutional order. In institutional evangelizing, actors seek to express their distinctive identity, engaging in a logic of appropriateness and creating novel practices that challenge cultural assumptions to meet their specific needs. The novel practices reconfigure the features of established categories and, because collective actors identify with them, they shepherd and maintain the original form through changing times and constituencies. In contrast, in adaptive emulation, actors engage a logic of consequence and translate established practices of prestigious others (Rogers, 2003; Strang & Still, 2009; Strang & Sine, 2002). Our results challenge adaptive emulation’s assumption of action based primarily on rationality, such as greater efficiency and effectiveness (Rao, Greve, & Davis, 2001; Strang & Soule, 1998). Scholars argue that prestige drives emulation based on perceptions of increased effectiveness and efficiency (i.e., Labianca, Fairbank, Thomas, Gioia, & Umphress, 2001; Strang & Strang, 2009). Contrary to established assumptions, we found that when prestige was the basis for emulation, it led to higher rather than lower costs for well-trodden solutions. Both St. Thomas and Madison Square were built by the most prominent architects, replicated well-known construction methods and materials, and turned out to be the most expensive churches per square foot at the time. Neither Madison Square nor St. Thomas engaged the profession’s attention or collective memory over the long term. In contrast, institutional evangelizing based on identification and driven by emotional attachment, as in the case of Unity Temple, led to lower costs and a greater contribution to the architectural profession and to culture-at-large.

Our cases of institutional evangelizing and adaptive emulation highlight short-term and long-term tradeoffs of the two legitimating processes. Adaptive emulation, which seeks prestige, gains immediate attention and acceptance because it builds on established solutions; yet the lack of originality undermines the profession’s sustained attention and mitigates the adapted solution from gaining exemplary status. Institutional evangelizing, which seeks to express what is distinctive and in the process creates novel practices, provokes criticism and then silence, but its novelty is more likely to trigger re-engagement and then attain lasting prominence.
Institutional evangelism: Collective institutional entrepreneurship and institutional maintenance

Our findings demonstrate that institutional evangelism entails not only collective entrepreneurship where multiple actors co-create new identities and practices (Colyvas & Powell, 2007), but also cross-generational institutional maintenance by members to preserve the novel identities and practices. For instance, Wright and Unity Temple’s leaders engage in prospective agency to create novel practices and the congregation engages in retrospective agency to maintain and preserve the novel practices over five decades through changing times and fortunes. Ironically, the radical progressivism that provided fertile ground for novel practices shifts over time to conservation and preservation. Recently scholars have called for eschewing institutional entrepreneurship because it appears to be tightly coupled with a focus on isolated individuals rather than collective processes (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Some scholars focus on Wright as the lone creative genius, who acts as an institutional entrepreneur. For instance, Sigfried Giedion (1940/1956, pp. 394–395) describes Wright as “isolated and singlehanded, without aid from his contemporaries among painters and sculptors, he has introduced the beginnings of a new conception.” We elaborate institutional evangelism to reveal a process of multiple actors with interdependent agency rather than a heroic individual who alters institutions. Thus, we re-engage rather than abandon institutional entrepreneurship and describe it as a form of collective, rather than individual, action. By doing so, we retain its relevance in institutional work because of its focus on interest and agency (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, pp. 216–217; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009, p. 8).

Institutional evangelism answers a fundamental question in institutional work: the efforts by which actors make novel practices and identities cohere and endure (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). We demonstrate that coherence came from prospective agency where multiple actors co-create a novel practice to create a holistic approach based on and that captures a distinctive identity. Endurance came from identification with the building by actors who proselytized the novel practices and by those who engaged in cross-generational institutional maintenance, which includes the unsung work of shepherding that protects the novel practice in its original form. Our findings also reveal that cross-generational maintenance demanded institutional creation and pursuing novel paths. For instance, to preserve Unity Temple, the congregation formed a new organization, the Unity Temple Restoration Fund, created a new partnership with the National Historic Trust to raise money, and ceded their easement rights to the State of Illinois, the first ever by a church. Thus, institutional maintenance involved creation, literally entrepreneurship of new practices and identities. In essence, the congregation enacted new practices that aimed toward the future in order to protect and preserve the past.

Interplay of ideas, materials, and identities in institutional work and processes

Our study provides institutionalists with a framework for “bridging the current division of labor between studies of material and ideational aspects of institutionalization” (Zilber, 2008, p. 164). Institutional theory has, by and large, privileged ideational aspects of institutions such as representation (e.g., Nigam & Ocasio, 2010), abstract models, and linguistic vocabularies (Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; Strang & Meyer, 1993; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Although institutional scholars have called for studies that tackle the role of materiality and its relationship with agency (Wijen & Ansari, 2007) or highlighted the consequences of materiality (Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2013), scholars rarely examine how the type and quality of materials influence institutional processes or work. More often, material is treated abstractly
(i.e., Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012) or held constant (i.e., Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Few studies examine variation in materials of artifacts, such as distinct textures and properties inherent in materials (for exceptions see Jones et al., 2012 and McDonnell, 2010). Our cases reveal that materials instantiated new ideas of what “church” means and translated established ideas inherent in the “church” concept into new contexts. We show that a reinforced concrete church not only represented distinctly different ideas and symbolic meanings than did a stone church, but also demanded radically different construction practices that had differential outcomes in terms of costs and construction time. Materials made religious ideas concrete and relevant for social actors, triggering identification and enabling novel practices and identities to cohere and endure. Our cases demonstrate that Christian ideas expressed through material form such as spire (or its absence), plan (cruciform versus H versus square), and stone or concrete, and that their material form was pivotal to their enduring and becoming institutionalized. The evisceration of a building’s materiality removed it from consideration as an exemplar and rendered it mute as an agent of change. Jacques Herzog (2001), in his Pritzker Prize acceptance speech, captured the importance of materiality: “architecture can only survive as architecture in its physical … It is the materiality of architecture that paradoxically conveys thoughts and ideas. In other words, its immateriality.” The cognitive bias in institutional theory casts institutions as malleable, prone to episodic fads and fashions. In contrast, materiality illuminates why some ideas persist in the face of competition and environmental shifts. Thus, the material instantiation of ideas is central not only to the durability of ideas but also to the social relations that form a community and underpin institutions. Materiality unites ideas and social actors through identification, enabling institutions to cohere and endure over time.

Our study also demonstrates that artifacts built for collectives, such as work organizations, do not automatically take on the mantle of a collective identity marker (e.g., Berg & Kreiner, 1990; Gieryn, 2002; Yanow, 2006). Buildings, although housing and serving collectives, may or may not trigger inhabitants’ identification that support and sustain the building. When buildings do not trigger identification, they do not inspire institutional maintenance work and support. Collective identity markers, similar to personal identity markers (Elsbach, 2004), depend on customizing and embedding what is distinctive about a collective’s history into the material artifact. Our findings suggest that distinctiveness rather than prestige, as shown in emulation studies (i.e., Labianca et al., 2001; Still & Strang, 2009), serves as the basis for collective identity. By constructing identities and engendering identification, our study begins to tackle a central mystery in institutional work: “how social structures can be made to be self-replicating and persist beyond the life-span of their creators (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 234). We show that when a collective’s distinctive identity and history was encoded into a building, it became a collective identity marker that engendered identification, eliciting institutional maintenance by members. These findings reinforce prior studies that show that prestige does not engender identification as strongly as does distinctiveness, even in contexts where prestige is highlighted in the media (Jones & Volpe, 2011). Thus, our findings suggest that institutional scholars should re-engage Selznick’s (1957) focus on institutionalization as a process of making distinctive organizations. Institutional entrepreneurship and maintenance were more likely when organizations sought distinctiveness and offered membership in an organization with a unique history and identity.

We extend prior research by showing that consecration of a novel practice involves not only contestation among the same groups (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), but continual boundary crossing of novel practices and boundary expansion to new audiences and across multiple levels of analysis. We show that Unity Temple involved “transgressive” boundary crossings: combining new and old in illegitimate ways. Specifically, concrete, the most humble material, became the
dominant material for exemplars in constructing the most sacred of buildings, a house of God. The move from novel practice to consecrated exemplar demanded boundary expansion, engaging new audiences through boundary objects. The case of Unity Temple also demonstrates that materiality, in the form of boundary objects such as plans, sketches, photos, and the building itself, were essential to the diffusion and consecration of an exemplar. The first audience is the prophets who envision and co-create an alternative future. The second audience is the collective or community in which prophets reside and speak to, expanding their ideas to include and enlist the support of their community. The third audience is progressive professionals, who are often peripheral players, for whom the novel practice offers new solutions to pressing problems; they proselytize the new solutions within the profession by publishing articles and using photos, sketches, and plans. They also enact variants of the solution with their own clients. The fourth audience is the “truth tellers” such as critics and historians, who evaluate and place into history the work and contributions of the novel practice; they consecrate cultural innovations (Allen & Lincoln, 2004). The fifth audience is the state, which inventories the material forms, and catalogs the various boundary objects (articles, photos, studies, etc.) to demonstrate its cultural significance. This process generates resources—both legal and financial—that preserve and support the novel practice on the public’s behalf as contribution to the wider culture. A sixth audience is the public who visit and make pilgrimages to the building. Our findings of Larkin Building and Madison Square suggest that, when a novel practice does not become a boundary object, it hinders its ability to engage distinct audiences and increases its likelihood of being abandoned and demolished rather than consecrated. Our study reinforces recent findings that when actors seek institutional change, their institutional work crosses boundaries and entails boundary objects (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and crosses multiple levels (Strang & Sine, 2002, e.g. organizations, professions, communities, nations). Since buildings serve collective purposes, future research on material exemplars needs to verify whether these processes generalize across artifacts.

Limitations

Our study, like most studies, has limitations. Although our study is an in-depth comparative case study, we had no data that captured conversations and sensemaking by a key audience—congregational members—who performed the unsung institutional work of maintenance and protection in these buildings. Thus, we have limited insight into what sustained their institutional work and engendered their identification with the buildings as collective identity markers. Whereas our retrospective approach allowed us to follow institutional work over a long period of time, future studies that follow in vivo and in situ institutional work over a shorter period may complement our findings. A second limitation is that our in-depth, comparative cases did not allow us to capture the interaction of denominational and regional dynamics. For example, Unitarians were relatively few in number in Chicago where Lutherans dominated. Did the relative isolation from other Unitarian churches and proximity to Chicago embolden congregants at Unity Temple to pursue more novel practices than their peers in New England? Only comparison with other Unitarian churches in Chicago and Boston will reveal the answer. A third limitation is that we focused primarily on ecclesiastical buildings. Further research needs to explore whether adaptive emulation and institutional evangelizing occur across commercial and corporate headquarters that are instrumental buildings, and thus may not generate identification and institutional work to protect and maintain the building, similar to Larkin Building. A fourth limitation is that we examined a single artifact type: the building. Buildings are relatively similar in their decay, lasting longer than most artifacts in our daily life. They are also more highly valued and enduring than many artifacts. An important avenue
for future research on institutional work of ideas, identity, and materials is comparing artifacts that vary in their decay rates and cultural value.

Conclusion

If scholars are intent on taking materiality seriously in institutional theory, an examination of how artifacts reinforce existing institutions or act as beacons for new institutional arrangements, and the institutional work involved in these processes, is essential. The material world can reflect, enhance, and sustain unique visions that seed social change; yet institutional scholarship continues to divorce the material from the ideational. This study examines one form of the material—buildings—as carriers of institutions (Scott, 1995). As Winston Churchill said, “we shape our buildings and afterwards, our buildings shape us” (Gieryn, 2002). Buildings embody the cultural meanings, material and technological practices, and identities of their time and place. Insurgents who wish to strike at the heart of a culture often target its most meaningful buildings: they plot against monuments, disrupt transportation systems that bind a nation together, or incinerate iconic financial centers and seats of power. Likewise, leaders commemorate the past, celebrate the present, and envision the future through buildings (e.g., Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991). Buildings symbolize not only our collective identity, but shelter us, order our social interactions, inspire creative impulses, and indicate our economic health. They affect social life in profound ways and can be a means to reinforce or alter the institutional order. Institutional scholars, then, need to attend more seriously to the institutional work accomplished through buildings and by buildings.

Acknowledgements

We thank Tammar Zilber, our editor, and three anonymous reviewers for their help on improving our manuscript. We presented the paper at the following and thank participants for their comments: International Conference on Institutions and Work at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, June 2010; EGOS sub-theme “Micro-foundations of Institutions,” July 2010, Lisbon, Portugal; and the Boston University Research Seminar 2011. We thank our colleagues who provided constructive feedback on prior drafts of the paper: Royston Greenwood, Stine Grodal, Kate Kellogg, Mukti Khaire, Siobhan O’Mahony, Woody Powell, who suggested we focus on Stinchcombe’s institutional evangelism, Laurel Smith-Doerr, Mary Still, and Mary Tripsas. We also thank the following people for their research assistance: Massimo Maoret for data-scraping Unitarian postcards; Anne Kenney and the library staff at Boston College; Ron Moline, archivist for Unity Temple; Mike McGlone of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) headquarters; and Cristina Prochilo, Associate Archivist at the Congregational Library. All remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre in Paris, France, erected by architect A. Baudot in 1902, was the first church to use reinforced concrete in stone-like blocks. The French state demanded that the architect cover the exterior with brick.

2. In 1938 Wright graced the cover of Time magazine as Man of the Year, in 1941 he received the Gold Medal award from RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), and in 1948 the Gold Medal from the AIA (American Institute of Architects) for contributions to the profession and built environment.
3. The content of these conversations are lost to history since the board and building meeting minutes only capture the resolutions and votes on whether to go forward with construction and continue with fundraising.

4. Wright’s buildings included Ward Willett House (1901), Avery Coonley House (1907), Robie House (1908), Unity Temple (1906–1908), Kaufmann House (Fallingwater; 1936–1939), Taliesin West (1937), S. C. Johnson & Sons Administrative Building (1936–1939), and S. C. Johnson & Sons Laboratory (1944–1951).

References


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