Recovering Materiality in Institutional Work: Prizes as an Assemblage of Human and Material Entities

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Abstract

In this article we utilize a (posthumanist) practice theory orientation to foreground the neglected role of material elements (e.g., objects and spaces) in institutional work. The paper builds on the results of an empirical study of two prizes in the Italian public sector for best practices in public administration and healthcare respectively. Our discussion centres on the critical role played by materiality in the legitimizing work performed by the two prizes. More specifically, we show that humans and material elements share the institutional work of mimicry, theorizing, educating, and reconfiguring normative networks. The article expands and enriches the notion of institutional work by foregrounding its inherent heterogeneous nature. It also shows the capacity of post-humanist and practice oriented approaches to shed new light on fundamental questions regarding the nature of situated action and distributed effort in institutional analysis.

Keywords

field-configuring events, institutional work, institutionalism, materiality, objects, practice theory, prizes, spaces

In their foundational text, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) explain that the notion of institutional work stems from two traditions: one that acknowledges the role of actors in changing/maintaining institutions—relating to discussions of agency—and another that sees social action as a situated affair, in line with practice theory (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2000). While the former stresses "the impact of individual and collective actors on . . . institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 218), the latter highlights the "embodied [and] materially mediated" nature of human activities (Schatzki in Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 218).

Inquiries into how actors are involved in institutional dynamics is a prolific field, as evidenced by the number of researches on institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007). However, the practice-based dimension of the notion has been largely overlooked. This is unfortunate as the tradition "has the potential to provide a robust theoretical foundation for the concept of institutional work" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 216).

At the core of practice theory we find an insistence on "the critical role of the body and material things in all social affairs" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 4). However, institutional scholarship in general, and empirical studies on institutional work in particular (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008; Rojas, 2010; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) have mainly highlighted the constitutive influence of historical and cognitive structures

on actions, leaving their material dimension in the background (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011).

In this article, we address this neglected aspect of institutional work (and institutionalism more generally) and show that there is much to be gained if this line of inquiry were expanded to accommodate an awareness of the role played by materiality. We combine the idea that materials (e.g., objects and spaces) are part of the way in which social processes and organizations are enacted and stabilized (Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2013; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) with the widely held position that institutional agency is better conceived as both emergent and distributed (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011, p. 55; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). This raises the following questions: As institutions are built through effort (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 56), do institutional processes depend solely on humans? If not, how do material entities take part in institutional work?

Our argument is mainly grounded on practice theory, especially its posthumanist versions in line with science and technology studies (Pickering, 2001; Roosth & Silbe, 2009; Woolgar, Coopmans, & Neyland, 2009) and in particular

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Actor–Network Theory (Latour, 2005). Scholars associated with these perspectives argue that social phenomena are brought to bear and sustained in space and time through the joint effort of humans and nonhumans (Latour, 1992, 1996). In institutional terms, this means that the preservation and change of social arrangements can only be explained when one recognizes the active involvement of material entities in the process. As Pinch (2008) puts it,

> Institutions have an inescapable material dimension . . . part of the agency that materiality brings to institutions is the work of producing and reproducing (and sometimes changing) the social dimensions of institutions. Indeed, we neglect the material aspect of institutions at our peril, especially if we want to understand institutional change. (p. 466)

We build on the results of two case studies of prizes for best practices in the Italian public sector to support and illustrate our reflections. The first award addresses innovation in public administration, being linked to the New Public Management movement. The second concentrates on health care and is part of a set of actions to promote a form of patient-centered care. Examining these prizes, we show their efforts aimed at institutionalizing these models and highlight how the process depends on the "collaboration" of a number of materials entities.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. We first explore the literature on prizes and institutionalism and introduce a framework for understanding materiality. Next, we present the methods of our research and short descriptions of the two cases. We then examine the types of institutional work carried out through prizes and the various material elements involved in these strategies. The article concludes with a brief discussion and a call for studies sensitive to the participation of material elements in institutional dynamics.

Understanding Prizes From an Institutionalist Perspective

Scholars have pointed out the relevance of events as occasions of institutional change, claiming that these are opportunities when legitimacy is assigned to practices, ideas are stimulated and promoted, networks are strengthened, and new markets are created (Anand & Jones, 2008; Delacour & Leca, 2011; Garud, 2008; Glynn, 2008; Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Lampel & Meyer, 2008; McInerney, 2008; Moeran & Pedersen, 2011; Oliver & Montgomery, 2008; Zilber, 2011). The basic intuition is that conferences, conventions, congresses, and awards are moments in which multiple actors interact, reconfiguring social rules, standards, and positions. Thus, such occasions are rife with struggles to establish and institutionalize what dominant values and models count as appropriate or not (Lampel & Meyer, 2008).

Institutionalist studies on prizes follow this movement, focusing on their relevance as field-configuring events (Anand & Jones, 2008; Anand & Watson, 2004; Lampel & Meyer, 2008; Watson & Anand, 2006). For example, Anand and Jones (2008) explain that the Booker Prize is structured as a ritual tournament organized around a set of categories in the literary field. The authors demonstrate that the prize strategically links various actors and is thus a crossroads of contemporary English literature. As a result, it influences the works produced by writers, introducing new genres such as postcolonial fiction.

Taking a similar perspective, Anand and Watson (2004) and Watson and Anand (2006) describe how the Grammy Awards mesh a variety of actors and configure the artistic musical canon by articulating value distinctions in the music field. The prize is a site where "the ideal of 'artistic merit' embodies the value of the 'rightness' of musical taste" (Watson & Anand, 2006, p. 43). The classification has a big impact as the prize is a valuable promotional vehicle, boosting the sales of award winners. Thus, it effects the creation and circulation of cultural products by conferring prestige (Anand & Watson, 2004).

Although praiseworthy, these studies appear primarily concerned with the outcomes produced by prizes, leaving the detailed mechanisms mainly unexplored. Causality (and merit) is attributed either to "heroic" entrepreneurs or faceless grand institutional forces, while the "work" involved—and its material dimension—are overlooked (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009).

Bringing Institutional Work Back In

An institutional work perspective enables researchers to avoid earlier shortcomings. Such an approach refers to the individual and collective efforts to create, sustain, and disrupt institutions, whether or not they achieve their intended ends, with a focus on concrete activities (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). This reverses the trend toward taking institutions as the central concern and limiting action to merely an explanatory factor (Lawrence et al., 2009). From an institutional work perspective, the key question is not whether prizes are successful in reconfiguring institutional arrangements but rather through what kind of institutional work activities the (distributed) effort is organized.

Although the notion of institutional work restores an appreciation of what is usually missing from grand accounts (Lawrence et al., 2011), it is traditionally linked and attributed only to human actors. According to Suddaby (2010), for example, "institutional work, *of course*, is conducted by individuals" (Suddaby, 2010, p. 17, emphasis added). Hence, though the discussion continues on whether individual or collective actors are the appropriate unit of analysis (e.g., see the debate in this journal between Clegg, 2010; Hwang &

Colyvas, 2011; Kaghan & Lounsbury, 2011; Kraatz, 2011; Suddaby, 2010), there is little doubt that when most scholars talk about actors in this context, they only mean humans.

This contrasts with growing calls to address "the ways in which organizing is bound up with the material forms and spaces" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1435; see also Czarniawska, 2008). By including materiality in our studies, richer explanations can be achieved that are closer to the reality of social processes. For example, considering the Booker Prize and Grammy case mentioned above, it is quite clear that it is because ideas and examples about a certain literature format (Anand & Jones, 2008) or music style (Anand & Watson, 2004; Watson & Anand, 2006) are selected and inscribed into artifacts that the canons of the field might change (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Artifacts are highly relevant at all stages, from the events themselves to the work of materials in broadcasting, yet they receive little or no attention.

By understanding prizes as complex assemblages of humans, language, and material elements, it becomes possible to fully appreciate how awards and (field-configuring) events in general aim to influence institutional configurations. Accordingly, in this study we proceed to unpack the prize "black-box" and examine how concrete efforts involved in legitimating models in the public sector are distributed among ecologies of humans and material entities. Prizes are to be understood thus as emergent entities that perform institutional work when certain alignments are put in place.

The Active Participation of Materiality in Social Phenomena

In recent years, a number of authors have embraced the idea that objects and (more broadly) material arrangements should be included in research on social and organizational phenomena (Carlile et al., 2013; Latour, 2005; Leonardi, Nardi, & Kallinikos, 2012; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Pickering, 2001). These authors highlight the consequential role of materials in social phenomena and generally share a discomfort with the idea that physical and nonhumans elements merely act as social symbols. Rather than reducing them to mere "envelopes of meanings" (Pels, Hetherington, & Vandenberghe, 2002), they suggest that materials play an active role in constituting and perpetuating the very fabric of the social. This entails moving beyond a view of the "world of things as passive objects that gain meaning only in symbolic terms" (Pinch & Swedberg, 2008, p. 2) and attending to the capacity of objects, spaces, technological equipment, and other material elements to literally, not metaphorically, construct social life (Latour, 2000). For example, X-ray machines or modern magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans used by radiologists are not merely "symbols" of an occupational community: They are the very elements that make the activity possible and around which interaction and sociality emerge (Knorr Cetina, 1997). Take the materials away and

you are left with no work, no worker, and no way to account for the social relationships among them (no "community" of radiologists). Thus, if you were to study the sociality among radiologists or the institutionalization of radiology as a profession, you would ignore the role of materiality at your peril.

Scholars offer different accounts on how to make sense of the role of artifacts and materials in social affairs (see Nicolini, 2012, for a review). Simplifying what is a very complex (and sometimes confusing) debate, we can summarize the different positions regarding the role of materials in social matters in terms of a division between humanist and posthumanist approaches (Pickering, 2001; Roosth & Silbe, 2009; Schatzki, 2001).

Occupying a residual humanist position, scholars such as Schatzki claim that materials fully participate in human action playing mainly a mediating role. They enable and structure intentional human actions, much like "props" or a physical scaffolding (Orlikowski, 2006). Thus, materiality configures practices but does not propagate them (Schatzki, 2001, 2002). Translated in our context, this highlights that human work always takes place through and amid a material infrastructure and an array of instruments that orient interactions and make them possible. As Bechky (2008) puts it, "When a doctor dons a white coat and stethoscope, she not only represents her identity to others, but her identity as a doctor is formed in relation to those objects" (p. 101). Continuing with our example above, the work of radiologists is formed in direct relationship with the technologies that make it possible.

Embracing a fully fledged posthumanist stance, other scholars take a further step and argue that objects, software, artifacts, spaces, and so forth, actively participate in social processes—For a debate on the equal status of humans and nonhumans, see Latour (2005). In fact, material artifacts not only facilitate and constrain human activity but also extend it in space and time. Latour, one of the proponents of this view, suggests in fact that "By dislocating interaction so as to associate ourselves with non-humans, we can endure beyond the present, in a matter other than our body, and we can interact at a distance" (Latour, 1996, p. 239). This is of great importance in the study of institutional work. As the project is to ground institutional dynamics in day-to-day actions, it is fundamental to account for how humans manage to produce impacts beyond copresent interactions and make their social "constructions" last.

Regarding the former, Scandinavian institutionalist authors highlight the active role of materials as carriers of ideas in institutional change (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), for example, argue that influential ideas on work and management are carried by combinations of texts (e.g., books) and material artifacts (e.g., tools and equipment). In our example above, radiologists often influence clinical decisions from a distance by sending

X-ray films and a short letter with their interpretation of the image; these material artifacts "represent" them and extend their influence even though they are not there in person.

As for the latter, posthumanist scholars posit that social phenomena such as institutions acquire an enduring character thanks to both intersubjective relationships among humans and of heterogeneous interactions between humans and nonhumans (e.g., objects). To make clear what this means, we might compare the sociality among humans with that of other primates. As Latour (1996) notes, the fundamental difference is that for baboons, "The social is always woven with the social: hence it lacks durability" (p. 234). By contrast, the stability of human social orders beyond particular contexts of action can only be explained when one allows for the active participation of objects—symbols alone do not resolve this puzzle. Once more, if the goal of institutional work is to understand maintenance, in addition to change and disruption, it is essential to pay attention to the role of materials in perpetuating social configurations.

For example, in an institutional study of the history of the London School of Economics (LSE), Czarniawska (2009) narrates how the renting and then construction of the complex of edifices of the school represented a central moment in its establishment: "With the exception of clandestine schools, a school is not a school without a building" (p. 430). One can contrast this account with situations in which the absence of a material dimension negatively affects the durability of institutional arrangements. Delacour and Leca (2011), for example, studied the deinstitutionalization of "Paris Salon," a selective annual show that constituted a notable field-configuring event in the art scene of the time. The Salon, an event that unlike others was not associated with a particular gallery or building, succumbed to the buildup of internal and external pressures partly because—unlike LSE—it lacked a strong material anchor.

To sum up, much is to be gained if we pay greater attention to the role that materials play in social and institutional phenomena. Although the general principle has been established and some general affordances of materials identified, the empirical details of how they specifically contribute to institution maintenance, change, and disruption remains largely unexplored. In this article, we take prizes as our research setting to address this gap by focusing on whether and how materiality enters the "chains of activities that constitute institutional work" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 225).

Method

Following a purposeful and theoretically driven strategy, we selected as case studies two prizes for best practices in the Italian public sector—here renamed *Strategy* and *Humane* for reasons of anonymity (Flick, 2008). This is for four reasons. First, the Italian public sector is marked by successive reforms (Gherardi & Jacobsson, 2000). Such a turbulent context

makes them a propitious setting for exploring how actors try to impose certain models to suit their interests and how they try to enroll others in this. Second, the prizes were selected for their opposing characteristics, recognizing that contrasting cases provide opportunities for enriching the analysis (Bryman, 2012). Here, one prize has a contest format, while the other is of a "threshold" nature. Hartley and Downe (2007) define threshold award schemes as those where a standard or criterion is defined and any organization or service unit deemed by a panel as meeting the standard receives the award. Third, the prizes not only have different structures but are also organized by actors with different power positions. This allows us to account for possible variations in institutional work strategies—it having been proposed that actors with different status positions deploy tactics in specific ways (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Finally, it is worth noting that the geographical location of the study constitutes a point of interest in itself. Given the propensity of most works to focus on internationally recognized prizes in the English-speaking world (Anand & Jones, 2008; Anand & Watson, 2004; Watson & Anand, 2006), our study constitutes a limited correction to what Scott (2005) labeled the "embarrassing" (Anglo-American) bias in much neo-institutional research (p. 478). Table 1 provides the main features of each prize as per their last edition (2009 and 2012, respectively), sometimes abridged for reasons of space.

Data Collection

Data were collected in two stages between 2011 and 2012 using a combination of interviews and documentary analysis. In the first stage, we conducted 46 semistructured interviews in total with the organizers of the awards, participants, winners, and runners-up of the most recent editions (2009 and 2010, respectively). All individuals were initially contacted and interviewed by phone. This was because respondents were spread throughout the country. Phone interviews lasted between 20 and 35 min, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Twelve of the initial respondents, considered particularly valuable given their direct involvement with the awards, were subsequently interviewed in person. These interviews lasted between 45 and 90 min; they were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the authors. The website of each prize, publications, and other documents provided by the respondents (such as posters featuring the call for nominations) were also included in the analysis.

We returned to the field in 2012, about a year after the initial data collection. The aim was to corroborate our emergent findings (see "Data Analysis" below) by observing in situ the unfolding of one of the prizes. The first author attended the awards ceremony of the Humane Prize (the only one still in course), wrote field notes, and recorded the acceptance speeches. During the event, he also conducted seven

Table 1. Prize Characteristics.

	Strategy Prize	Humane Prize
Prize format	Threshold	Contest
Prize content	Best practices in public administration	Best practices in health care
Organizers	ReformCo (private company)	CareCoop (nonprofit association)
Sponsors	Ministry for Public Administration and Innovation	Association of the Italian Pharmaceutical Industry
Prize editions	2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009	1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2012
Model supported	Strategic governance (strategic planning)	Humane Care (patient-centered care)
Application procedure	Online application form (free of cost)	Online application form (free of cost)
Participation norms I	Participation is open to central and peripheral administrations; public health units; municipalities and their associations; local administrative organizations; provinces, regional administrations, and cities; educational institutes; universities and other institutions that provide higher education; nonprofit statutory corporations; chambers of commerce and industry.	Participation is open to the following health units: Public and private health units, hospitals, local and social health organizations and civic associations that provide care for citizens.
Participation norms II	Projects at different stages of implementation (either at a planning stage or fully developed initiatives) and of any dimension (including micro projects) are accepted	Projects currently in progress or already completed are accepted
Evaluation criteria	• Innovativeness • The ability to produce measurable results through clear indicators • The presence of a complete analysis during the initial phase of economic and structural characteristics of the area that the project addresses and its strong and weak points • The introduction of new management models • The creation of a strategic coalition with private and public actors and a value chain in the region	The project must be characterized by a constant attention to human dignity and a commitment to fight against social exclusion. In addition, the project will be judged on the basis of the following criteria: • Innovativeness • Measurability • Level of impact • Reproducibility • Economic sustainability.
Evaluation procedure	Jury composed of field experts	Jury composed of professionals from the health field (one representative of the Ministry of Health, a general manager from a health organization), representatives from civic and patient organizations, and a family member of the doctor to whom the prize pays homage
Award	Celebratory award and access to Winners Club	Celebratory award and money (First place €3,000; Second place €2,000; Third place €1,000)
Location of the award ceremony	Public Administration Fair (Rome)	Ministry of Health (Rome)

further short interviews lasting around 7 to 15 min before and after the ceremony (recorded and transcribed verbatim) and collected further materials on the new edition of the prize, including the documents and publications made available to ceremony participants.

Data Analysis

In analyzing our data, we employed methods and techniques from the interpretive tradition and used grounded theory coherently with the basic tenets of this tradition (Locke, 2001; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). According to Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) and Mantere and Ketokivi (2013), interpretative methods of analysis rely on a "continuous dialogue" between data and theory in an abductive circle. Such ampliative form of reasoning takes theoretical credibility and reflexivity as its central reliability criteria. This is in stark contrast to approaches that assume researcher invariance and an eliminative form of reasoning, assessing reliability through intercoder agreement

(Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Accordingly, we used a robust and coherent grounded theory approach although we refrained from the application of formulaic techniques to data (Suddaby, 2006). We did not focus on procedural reliability (we did not measure such things as an intercoders reliability index that are alien to the interpretive tradition), and we did not use specialized software that we felt would have not added value to the process on our case (Charmaz, 2006). In so doing, we followed the steps of Birks, Fernandez, Levina, and Nasirin (2013) who demonstrated that it is possible to remain true to the general spirit of grounded theory without using the entire "toolkit" and its "modern" instruments (e.g., qualitative analysis software). Our analysis proceeded as follows.

As our original interest lay in the work carried out through prizes to shape the legitimacy of models in the Italian public sector, we started our analysis reconstructing the story of the two cases by combining data from interviews, documentary sources, and general literature on the public sector. We wanted to plot the two prizes within the broader institutional context surrounding their establishment and evolution. The next step involved scanning all our data by recursively moving between the various data sets to identify recurrent themes, following the inductive approach by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Locke (2001). At this stage, we worked independently, carefully reading the transcripts and documents line by line several times and annotating them. We met regularly to compare notes and categories and to discuss possible meanings emerging from the data following the methods suggested by Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006). The differences in coding, which only emerged in small minority of cases, turned out to be quite important in the process of theory building. For example, by comparing notes we realized that we had different views on what work was performed by a single object, such as the call for nominations. This prompted us to go back to our data and discuss our interpretations. The joint analysis suggested that some of the materials were in fact involved in different forms of institutional work. This prompted us to go back to our data (and later, to the literature) and our further analysis confirmed this intuition, which is now part of our findings.

Relatively early in the analysis, we were both struck by the central role played by material elements in the accounts gathered in the field. For example, we noted that the codes referring to efforts related to prizes (e.g., "promoting interest," "connecting people") very often depended on both human action and material performativity and that the prize organizers were highly concerned with the artifacts linked with them. As this chimed with our theoretical sensitivity, after careful consideration, we agreed to actively embrace this abductive inference (Reichertz, 2003).

To this end, we made the working hypothesis that materiality played a central (and active) role in the phenomena under investigation as a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer, 1954) and employed it as a guide for our axial coding. During this phase, our analysis became more abductive (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) and we also started to consult the literature to sharpen our interpretation—See Kelle (2007) and Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006) for a discussion on the benefits of moving between data, interpretation, and literature in the analysis process.

In fact, at this point we decided that some aspects remained unclear and that more evidence was needed to corroborate our emerging findings. We therefore embarked in a second and more focused round of empirical inquiry. To this end, the first author attended the ceremony of one of the prizes to collect further data. These were processed in the same form as the original set: We produced a detailed observation analytical report, transcribed the interviews, coded the data, and checked for ways in which the results of our new round of investigation might corroborate, disprove, or refine our emerging explanatory framework, adjusting our analysis accordingly.

The last analytical step took place during the writing up of our findings (Richardson, 1994). When preparing the manuscript for the original submission, we reflected once more on the connection between our data and the institutional work literature. The data not only suggested that critical aspects of such institutional work were performed by the prizes but also that the performance of such work depended in turn on a complex material infrastructure. Although we were aware that our emergent codes were close to four original categories defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), as we familiarized ourselves with other empirical studies in the area, we agreed that our theoretical contribution could be clarified by employing the "classic" categories (see the appendix for the relation of codes and data excerpts to the "classic" institutional work categories). Therefore, we decided to construct our argument on the lines taken by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and to reorganize our findings using their categories. Although our data could have been written in a different and more "inductive" way (e.g., reproducing our own journey of discovery), we deliberately decided to adopt this rhetorical device to clarify the novelty of our findings and to highlight our contribution to institutional theory (following the advice given by Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007).

Prizes and the Aim to Legitimize Models in the Public Sector

The Strategy Prize

The awarder of the first prize is ReformCo, a private organization located in Rome that sells its services mainly to the government sector. Its most profitable and important venture is the holding of the biggest fair for public administration in Italy, sponsored by the Ministry for Public Administration and Innovation, which in its 2011 edition attracted around 37,000 visitors.

The first prize to acknowledge excellence cases in public sector management in the country was established directly by the Ministry in 1999. A year later, ReformCo took up the creation of best practice awards. The organization works closely with the Minister's staff and decides on prize themes that reflect their interests. In most cases, they carry messages molded by the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money—the main buzzwords associated with the reforms, which have been promoted since new legislation (e.g., Act 142/1990) imported them from the private sector (Capano, 2003).

The Strategy Prize is of a threshold nature and was created in 2002, having its first edition in 2003. Its purpose was to document and reward best practices covering the adoption of a strategic governance framework—reflecting what is known in the private sector as "strategic planning." That is, the construction of medium and long-term strategies involving various actors (Bryson, 1988). Throughout its editions, the prize explored different areas (e.g., energy policies in 2009), but always kept the focus on the strategic method.

The Strategy Prize was open to projects from all kinds of public organizations and at every stage. The assessment was based on how successful the initiative was in adopting the strategic framework. After receiving and reviewing the applications, the organizers checked how the initiative was developing and the involvement of the various actors (e.g., partners, stakeholders)—a decisive factor in the creation of a strategic plan.

The criteria adopted in the last edition (2009) included some bearing on energy policies and others common to most editions, such as

- The ability to produce results measurable through clear indicators; and
- Creating a strategic coalition with private and public actors and a value chain in the region.

Based on the results achieved and methods used, some projects were given a symbolic award (no money was at stake) and granted access to a "Winners Club": a virtual community pooling information and ideas. The prize ran for seven annual editions until 2009.

Newsletters, spaces, and other materials. "Apply, apply, apply . . . submissions are now open to the [Strategy] Prize . . . its success depends on applications, which can be made using the online form." This is how one of the electronic newsletters presents the prize. Together with the call for nominations and publicity documents, these materials are the first contact contenders have with the prize, followed by the application form.

In the awards ceremony, which takes place during the aforementioned fair, winners and invited individuals have the opportunity to forge and strengthen links. For example,

one of the 2011 winners, a national body responsible for technology issues in public administration, said that through the prize they meet representatives of a governmental energy agency, whose resources might prove crucial for putting their ideas on energy efficiency into work. The media, always present at the event, reports it widely.

The prize website, an online database and a contacts list complement the set of materials. The central details of all prize entries were included in the latter two, while the website features general information on the prize, pictures of the awards ceremony, and links to its sponsors and partners. All contenders are included in these materials as this is both a way to give them recognition and foster greater awareness in the public to the strategic method.

The Humane Prize

The second prize promotes a "humane approach" to the provision of health care services. It was established by CareCoop, a nonprofit association set up in the late 1970s with headquarters in Rome and branches throughout the country. As part of its mission, it advocates the protection of patients' rights and wellness. Its character as a critical voice has often put it at loggerheads with the central government, which has reacted angrily to its scathing reports on the state of health services, alleging that they are unscientific and biased. The establishment of the Humane Prize honoring achievements in this field was thus a much-needed opportunity to show that the association also focused on identifying and supporting positive initiatives.

The prize had its first edition in 1997. The contest is open to all kinds of health organizations: The winners receive a modest sum and are handed a celebratory plate during the awards ceremony. On top of meeting the standards of humane health care promoted by CareCoop, the main evaluation criteria include innovativeness; measurability; level of impact; reproducibility; and economic sustainability. Not all criteria are given equal weight. Although innovativeness is highly rated, it is always considered in the light of the costs involved. The preference is thus for creative, low-cost initiatives that are close to the "humane care" principles.

The prize was awarded on an annual basis with some interruptions between 2002 and 2010. When reestablished in 2010, it was renamed as a prize for the "humanization of care," thus establishing clearer links between the award and the association's mission. Also for the first time in 2010, it was awarded on the same day as the release of the annual health report—timing that was intended to maximize the media impact. This was the result of CareCoop's success (after several attempts) to host the event in an auditorium in the Ministry of Health.

Table 2. Overview of Materials Elements.

	Strategy Prize	Humane Prize
Call for nominations	♦	♦
Application form	♦	♦
Awards ceremony	♦	♦
Celebratory award	♦	♦
Winners Club	♦	♦
Media reports	♦	♦
Booklets		♦
Pocketbooks		♦
CDs		♦
Database	♦	♦
Newsletters	♦	♦
Publicity documents	♦	♦
Contacts list	♦	♦
Prize website	♦	♦

Booklets, databases, and other materials. Since its second edition, CareCoop has sought ways to amplify the effects of the prize and to make them more lasting and pervasive. From 1998 on, it started handing out a small booklet during the awards ceremony, featuring information and contact details of all winners and contestants deemed particularly significant. In the most recent editions, this information was provided in the prize website—which can rightly be considered as the online version of the same artifact.

CareCoop also began a printed bimonthly newsletter in 1998, which was distributed to all those interested in the humanization topic (including award participants), and a database of best practices for the humanization of care in the following year. The database was used by CareCoop for the publication of two pocket books and the creation of CDs in collaboration with various actors and is now available online on the portal of the association. All participants were eligible (not only winners), which means that it also functioned as a sign of approval. A clear concern, as the calls for nominations states that all participants would receive a certificate and be included in publicity.

The definition of "best practice" used to guide the collection of projects is particularly interesting:

> Any successful initiative regarding the contextual improvement of the efficiency (value for money) and efficacy (properly satisfying citizens' needs and expectations) of healthcare structures. (CareCoop documents, booklet 1999)

It appropriates the main ideas behind the reform of Italy's public administration (i.e., efficiency, efficacy, and value for money) in ways that meet CareCoop's own objectives. Overall, almost all contestants were deemed to fulfill the criteria. So, although the selection and creation of a database was a separate step to the prize, it has strong links with it.

Table 2 shows the material elements that populate both prizes.

Why Are Prizes Emergent Actors?

Both prizes are geared toward institutionalizing specific models for public administration and health care, respectively. In a top-down effort with official actors, the first one promotes a managerial method in the Italian public administration, which is loathe to change its hidebound, bureaucratic ways (Lippi, 2000). The second represents a bottom-up struggle to mainstream a form of patient-centered care in the health services, an area that is also increasingly subject to public scrutiny, increasing accountability, and performance priorities (Mattei, 2006).

However, the actors of ReformCo or CareCoop alone could not accomplish this. The prizes with their ecology of humans, language, and materials are vital for aligning the interests of creators and supporters. First, the award ceremonies are a great opportunity to invite key public sector actors as judges and to host an event on themes that interest ReformCo and CareCoop in official settings—a move that is highly legitimizing especially for CareCoop and would not be possible without the Humane Prize.

Second, the guests, picture sessions, and all forms of media reports create a spectacle that gives visibility to the prize organizers and the models they support. This enhances the credibility of contestants, which in some cases was essential to the continuation of a project. For example, in the 2010 edition of the Humane Prize, a runner-up project on mental health represented a volunteer scheme for family members and patients with mental disorder to provide comfort to newly arrived psychiatric patients. Many local psychiatrists contested its value. After winning the prize, CareCoop provided the hospital direction with an official communication attesting that it had classified among the best three from a pool of initiatives, allowing thus the project to continue.

Third, prizes function as an intersection. By bringing together people at different positions in the public sector (and levels of awareness of the different models), they make it possible for people to interact and connect in unforeseen ways. CareCoop workers reported indeed that the winner project Humane Prize 2010 "was not even known by those working at our nearest local chapter."

Finally, prizes are not only a catalyst for the creation of "strategic" or "humanization" initiatives but also a way to flesh out these models. As more and more contenders win the awards and/or are included in databases and publications, the clearer these models become. As a member of the Strategy Prize organization committee explains,

> We include all contestants because it is a way of recognizing they took part even if they were not among the winners. Furthermore, they can serve as an example and reveal that there is a much broader movement. (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)
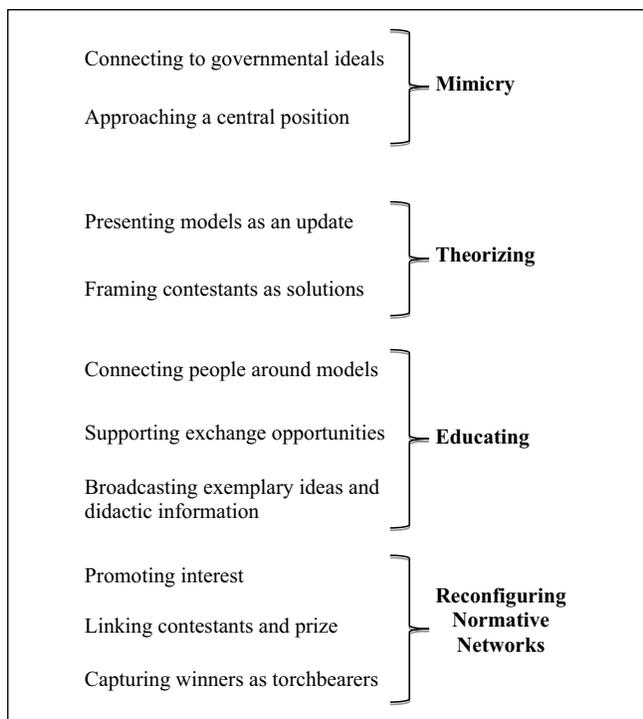
Figure 1. Institutional work in the Italian public sector.

Prizes are necessary in this context because participants might not be willing to associate themselves with organizations like CareCoop, which has a mixed image in the field. By the same token, the various materials (e.g., newsletters, pocket books, media reports) when connected to a legitimate prize (at arm's length from CareCoop and ReformCo) appear partially independent from their specific agendas, appealing to a wider audience. Indeed, both organizations present them as *best practices* awards—using a label from the private sector that connotes technicality and competence. Thus, the prize works as a double of the organizations (and in CareCoop's case, a less controversial one). As a matter of fact, the Humane Prize with its focus on valuing innovations in health care is an important condition for the association to get closer to central positions of the public field (e.g., Ministry of Health).[1]

Prizes, Materiality, and Institutional Work

The previous section showed that both prizes strive to foster the legitimacy of new approaches to public administration and health care and their distributed and emergent character. By presenting the models they support as both desirable and "do-able" (Fujimura, 1988, 1995), they struggle to alter the cognitive dimension of the field—"the beliefs, assumptions and frames that inform action" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006,

p. 228). This is achieved through four specific types of institutional work: mimicry, theorizing, educating, and reconfiguring normative networks. Figure 1 presents the different strategies involved in each one of these (see the appendix for a finer grained list of codes of concrete activities comprising the different institutional work strategies together with illustrative data).

In turn, these activities depend on a number of material elements in place. Although the awards ceremony, media reports, and related materials do not and cannot operate alone (they do not have autonomous humanlike "agency"), prizes are also not (entirely) human and their effects cannot be attributed to the agency of humans alone. They are heterogeneous assemblages of people and things. Accordingly, in this section, we demonstrate how the institutional work performed by prizes depends on the joint work of humans and material entities. Different forms of institutional work as identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) are discussed in turn.

Mimicry and Theorizing

Mimicry covers attempts by interested actors to associate the practices they propose as a continuation of current and taken-for-granted ones to make them appear accessible. Theorizing suggests that the success of a new practice depends on creating a causal link between it and particular outcomes. In our cases, the aim is to create chains of cause and effect in which the practice appears as a solution to (current) problems (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Prizes carry out these forms of institutional work, often in an intertwined fashion. In the Strategy case, its very existence results from a connection with the governmental ideals. As a ReformCo worker puts it, "We launched the prize aiming at amplifying what was a new buzzword in the political agenda, the direction of the government." Thus, its close link with the Ministry (which as sponsor of the prize has its name/logo featured in most prize documents) helps the strategic model appear as an appropriate response to reform pressures.

The link is concretized through (a) the adoption of evaluation criteria present in the call for nominations that reflects the general reform message; (b) the location of the awards ceremony in the public administration fair, which puts itself over as a major forum for discussing changes and innovations in the public sector; (c) the invitation of central actors in the public sector as judges.

The link between the approach supported by the Strategy Prize and (common) problems is also forged by governmental associations; at a broad level, ReformCo and the Ministry present Italy as Europe's Cinderella and theorize on New Public Management practices as a way to bring the country up to scratch (see, for example, Brunetta, 2009). More specifically, the organization also insists in its communications

that the method is an appropriate tool for improving public administration: The prize website announces that its launch is "based on awareness that new ideas on strategic governance are vital for transforming public administration in times of crisis." (ReformCo documents, prize website).

Mimicry and theorizing are also recognizable in the Humane Prize. Efforts are made to place the humanization approach in the context of general debate on health services and as an opportunity to advance in this field. Mimicry is particularly relevant because unlike ReformCo, CareCoop lacks official support—for many years, its actions in the health area were seen with suspicion. To counter that, first CareCoop mirrors Central Government's concerns regarding cost-saving among the evaluation criteria present in the call for nominations and related documents. Thus, winners must show they have been able to develop an inexpensive patient-centered approach. As one of the organizers puts it, "given that the Italian health care system faces a number of challenges . . . due to the lack of resources, having economic sustainability as an evaluation criteria is particularly relevant nowadays." This makes a nod to the financial restraints on the Italian health care system and heads off potential arguments on the submitted scheme's (economic) viability.

Second, the three key words in public sector reform (efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money) are adopted in the selection criteria for the best practices database but are reinterpreted in local terms (that is to say, local meanings are placed in the context of wider ones). Efficacy, for example, is understood as "properly satisfying citizens' needs and expectations," not merely as achieving a general, anticipated result. Therefore, partially using the vocabulary present in discourses and guidelines of governmental actors makes the approach appear compatible with the official agendas.

Third, like the Strategy Prize, CareCoop invites central actors in the field (such as representatives from national health institutes) as jury members. In the words of a CareCoop worker, an important move "because it creates a good image of us . . . having jury members drawn from important institutions might prove useful one day, because someone in that institution will be involved in our work and be aware of our approach." Finally, starting from the 2010 edition, CareCoop managed to host the awards ceremony in an auditorium in the Ministry of Health after the presentation of its annual report on the state of the Italian health care, which helps portray the humane approach as closer to the (official) actions of the Ministry.

The temporal and spatial context of the prize ceremony also helps to frame the winning projects as "solutions" supporting theorizing. The annual report is the result of CareCoop's effort to identify accidents and blunders and the lack of a humane perspective—a position that is reiterated in the call for submissions, the prize website, and other materials—which feature CareCoop's slogans such as "(Because) not all the news in healthcare is bad." Holding the ceremony after

the presentation of the report therefore makes the selected projects appear as part of a raft of measures for improving the health system through a pseudostandard that has become known as the humanization of care.

Materiality in mimicry and theorizing. The evaluation criteria of both prizes (and the slogans of the Humane Prize) are printed in their calls, which are circulated widely. By the same token, the best practice criteria of the Humane Prize database are enshrined in booklets published by the promoters and later incorporated in the prize website. As intermediaries of the prize, the call and booklets travel easily. Communicating with possible contestants through other medium, such as personal interactions (e.g., door-to-door), would require more resources and be less far-reaching. Similarly, the website operates like an avatar, helping to stabilize and extend the life of the prize (which otherwise could be quickly forgotten after the ceremony); it also allows to arrive at a wider audience over and beyond the existing reach of human contacts. Mimicry and theorizing are heavily dependent on all these artifacts, as this is the only way the prizes can demonstrate the continuity between their proposed practices and show how they can solve some of the current problems in the field.

Spaces are also essential for achieving mimicry and theorizing effects as they enable ReformCo and CareCoop to speak about their models in highly significant settings—in which CareCoop would be hardly accepted without the prize. The spaces in which the Strategy and Humane prizes are awarded are carefully selected and choreographed to show that the settings are appropriate, authoritative forums for discussing innovations in public administration and health care. Slogans, banners, and even the city and building in which they are awarded (Rome, close to the Parliament and the heart of the Italian public administration), all help to physically demonstrate and create continuity between the awards and the institutions they strive to shape. In this context, spaces should not be understood as neutral containers (Law, 2002; van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010). Table 3 summarizes the work performed by materials in accomplishing mimicry and theorizing.

Educating

Educating refers to efforts to provide the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in new practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In the case of the Strategy Prize, the awards ceremony creates a forum for debating the method and for participants to forge links. In the words of a winner of the 2009 edition, it is an "occasion to make your project known, to find collaboration partners and even to network with other public administrations." This community-building effort around the strategic governance model continues via the "Winners Club" and events organized by ReformCo, which create spaces of mutual support and exchange of ideas As an interviewee from ReformCo points out,

Table 3. Materiality in Mimicry and Theorizing.

Institutional work of mimicry and theorizing	Materials	How materials are part of the institutional work?
Connecting to governmental ideals Presenting models as an update	Call for nominations Booklets Prize website	Materials enshrine the evaluation criteria of both prizes (and database criteria of the Humane Prize) making them known in the field.
Approaching a central position Framing contestants as solutions	Awards ceremony	The space in which the prizes take place shape its identity, and the meanings its proposed practices assume.

There is always an interest for creating a community of practice . . . in our meetings and working groups it is clear that we invite projects that are particularly representative . . . awarded administrations. This way . . . it all does not end with the ceremony, with the symbolic award . . . we organize large events and working groups during the year. (Interview, Strategy Prize)

Moreover, ReformCo also provided directed assistance when the model was least known (i.e., first three editions of the prize). In line with the threshold nature of the competition, ReformCo surveyed closely the contestants on the development of their project. A respondent explained, "We ask participants to tell us how their project is evolving; who are their partners, how they work together . . . At times we also went in the locality, gathering feedback from those involved to understand the project performance."

Similar educating work is also evident in the Humane Prize, although weaker. The awards ceremony also provides opportunities for encounters and pooling ideas on specific areas bearing on care humanization. Reflecting on this, a member of CareCoop reported,

What I saw was that many, then, kept in touch after the prize, exchanging experiences, helping each other in trying to solve shared problems because those who had faced and solved them in the past became a point of reference for others who found themselves in the same situation. (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)

Both prizes also stimulated peer-to-peer exchange opportunities. Winners and valuable contenders are reachable through a contacts list while newsletters nurture the communication and interest on the models. Commenting on the existence of channels to ask about the strategic model, a winner from the Strategy Prize 2009 said, "other public administrators have contacted us after the prize, asking how are we developing the project using the strategic model.

There is of great interest in understanding this approach in concrete terms."

Finally, Strategy and Humane prizes use databases and publications to showcase selected best practices in strategic planning or the provision of humane health care and encourage their imitation, though to different degrees. The Humane Prize paid greater attention to broadcasting exemplary projects—as evidenced by its greater number of didactic publications such as pocket books (see below) and CDs.

This is why we decided to start the series Almanac of Best Practices in Healthcare last year. The aim was to provide a toolbox for ensure professionals either already involved or willing to take part in initiatives for more humane healthcare. (CareCoop documents, pocket book, 2000)

Materiality in educating. The role of materiality in the accomplishment of institutional work is perhaps even clearer in the case of educating. The awards ceremony of both prizes is of great importance here as it represents the locus at which learning exchanges are triggered. In most cases, it is very common during the event for winners to be approached by other actors who are interested in learning from and/or collaborating with them. The prizes thus trigger and support the establishment of a knowledge-sharing community around the sponsored model.

In this context, the initiative of ReformCo to promote a "Winners Club" is particularly relevant: Without an arranged setting, winners would have fewer chances to interact after the ceremony. Coordinating agendas and deciding place and time is essential because otherwise people would only meet occasionally and then by sheer chance.

Ties are further sustained and facilitated by the contacts lists and the newsletters both prizes circulate among participants and others. As reported in a booklet from the Humane Prize, "CareCoop has created a quarterly newsletter . . . as an information device and as a way to keep professionals updated" (CareCoop documents, booklet 1998). Contacting all members individually to update them on the latest developments would be practically impossible. Besides, a newsletter, when compared with a spoken statement can be read several times and passed among individuals to be read whenever it best suits them.

In addition, without something as simple as a contact list, the opportunity for triggering encounters independently of the organizations would not exist. Without such a directory, interested parties would need to contact ReformCo or CareCoop first, which would demand more time and resources, reducing the chances of exchanges.

Educating is also accomplished by and through the host of documents and messages disseminated before, during, and after the ceremony. As clearly stated in a booklet from CareCoop, the organization "aims to facilitate the dissemination of the body of initiatives through printed materials and

the media" (CareCoop documents, booklet 1998). In fact, artifacts are essential for new ideas to travel in space and time: Accounts about the projects cannot circulate without being incarnated somewhere.

As studies on the circulation of knowledge have stressed, an idea must be materialized in an object or a quasiobject to be broadcast, as new ideas cannot travel without a material carrier (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005). Prizes use a variety of carriers to this end, which include media reports, pocket books, CDs, and online databases with general information on the selected projects. In this context, media reports stand out among other carriers given the visibility they provide: News conveyed by third parties (i.e., the official media) has a stronger impact, as they are not directly associated with ReformCo or CareCoop. The contribution of materials in accomplishing educating work is summarized in Table 4.

Reconfiguring Normative Networks

A further type of work apparent in both case studies is the capacity to recruit enough participants (who later become the movement's "evangelists"). This way, the practices—and their cognitive and cultural foundations—can become mainstream. Most works on innovation (institutional or otherwise), agree that enrolling support is critical for any innovative model or idea to become successful. Once enough people have been enrolled, the roles are reversed and the onus is on nonadopters to justify why they are not taking up the new measures. In other words, a bandwagon is set in motion, upholding compliance (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Granovetter, 1978; Rogers, 1983).

To create such normative networks, the prizes aim to spark interest, shape registered projects as tangible examples of the models they support, and turn participants into "evangelists." First, they attract contestants through persuasion. The carrot is prestige and favorable publicity. As a complement, the participation norms are as inclusive as possible. Both prizes accepted submissions from all kinds of organizations, and in the case of the Strategy Prize, the contest was open to ventures at any stage and to micro projects. Thus, the net is cast extensively.

Once the participants are lured into the net, their support is enlisted through clever "translation" (Latour, 1994, 2005). Applicants are in fact asked to present their innovations in terms that are ostensibly aligned with the models supported by the prizes (in much the same way that scholars reframe their manuscripts in the light of the prevailing theoretical approaches to get published). This is because the evaluation criteria of the prizes are in line with their proposed approaches. Then, winning projects are displayed in the various printed and online publications with rationales that stress how they embody the models proposed by each prize—Most

other contestants' initiatives are also featured in databases, where they also become concrete examples of strategic governance or humanization of care.

For example, the winner of the Humane Prize in 2010 was an organization that had excelled in cutting red tape and achieving outstanding efficiencies without any additional costs. Although the new practice did not necessarily make the organization a representative case of a patient-centered care, it became so thanks to the translation made in applying for the Humane Prize. The award was granted, "in view of the careful attention to citizens' real needs, the simplicity of the solution, efficiency and ability to make things happen" (CareCoop documents, prize website). By applying, winning, and accepting the award, the organization was "captured" by the humanization label that came with the prize. A runner-up from the same edition sums the process by commenting that

> We serve each other, because we serve as examples of what [CareCoop] believes in and, in turn, we receive visibility given that [CareCoop] is fairly well-known in Italy and that boosts our activities. (Interview, runner-up Humane Prize 2010)

Finally, the prizes rely on the active involvement of participants as torchbearers of the movement. A winner from the Strategy Prize reported that although "The prize is known among those involved in this field at a national level . . . locally, we also tried to advertise our achievements to the general public" (Winner Strategy Prize, 2009). Moreover, in the case of the Humane Prize, two subgroups of prize participants continued to meet and collaborate in the area of pediatrics and hospital well-being, contributing to reinforce the normative value of the proposed approach. According to an informant from the Humane Prize, this is because after participating in the award they "became part of the movement . . . we have pulled them inside . . . so basically they even felt authorized to proceed and present the model."

Materiality in reconfiguring normative networks. Materials are critical in expanding and reformulating normative networks. The call and other publicity documents are indispensable for creating interest among participants. For example, they do so by articulating the benefits of participation:

> The winners of the prize and all the others deemed appropriate will be part of the following initiatives: they will be included in a database of [ReformCo]; they will be disseminated through specific publications; they will participate in exchange opportunities. (ReformCo documents, call for nominations 2009)

> [CareCoop] shall disseminate news through the media on the outcome of the project. In addition, it will use its database to

Table 4. Materiality in Educating.

Institutional work of educating	Materials	How materials are part of the institutional work?
Connecting people around models	Awards ceremony	The ceremony is where interactions happen and collaborations and further associations are triggered.
	Winners Club	In the Strategy Prize, the Winners Club works as a quasi-community of practice around strategic governance.
Supporting exchange opportunities	Contacts list	The contacts list hosted in the prize website makes available contact information/details and descriptions of projects.
	Newsletter	The newsletter helps to create/strengthen a sense of community among those related to ReformCo and CareCoop.
Broadcasting exemplary ideas and didactic information	Media reports Pocketbooks CDs Databases	Materials incarnate accounts about the winners, which are presented as "recipes for success" (exemplary adopters of the practices in question) to be imitated by others. Furthermore, CareCoop creates didactic materials to help the adoption of such method.

Table 5. Materiality in Reconfiguring Normative Networks.

Institutional work of reconfiguring normative networks	Materials	How materials are part of the institutional work?
Promoting interest	Call for nominations Publicity documents	The call and publicity documents advertise the benefits of enrolling in the prize and the (open) participation norms.
Linking contestants and prize	Application form	The application makes it possible for contenders to enter for the prize.
Capturing winners as torchbearers	Celebratory award	The artifact cements the bond, being constitutive of the association between winners and the Strategic or Humane model.

publish information on all submitted projects. This database (which will be given appropriate visibility and promotion) will be available on [CareCoop's portal]. (CareCoop documents, publicity document 2012)

Artifacts are also actively involved in capturing new proselytes. For one thing, to register, the contestants must fill in and send an application form. That is, enrollment is made possible by an artifact that mediates the relation between contestants and organizers. The form seals a contract between prize and contestants who accept to be judged accordingly. Contestants could never apply without it, such as only based on their word.

While this passage supports the translation work that we suggested above, the process is completed during the awards ceremony and the handing of the celebratory plate, in the case of the Humane Prize. The plate, together with discourses and humans' actions, create a bond between the winners and the models they came to exemplify. Given in

the context of the ceremony, it has a performative value and transforms the winners' identity. It serves as a tangible display and reminder that the winner is an excellent case of humanization. Thus, it makes an association visible to others that would be less palpable if it were based only on verbal agreement and handshakes. Table 5 summarizes some of the specific contributions of materials in reconfiguring normative networks.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This article highlights the role of materials in institutional work through the analysis of two events. Our argument is that prizes and awards do more than scholars have been traditionally prepared to acknowledge. For example, whereas studies on field-configuring events conceive award ceremonies mainly as ways to confer prestige or status (Anand & Jones, 2008; Watson & Anand, 2006), our cases suggest that they are involved in mimicry, theorizing, and educating efforts.

In general terms, prizes (understood as heterogeneous assemblages of human and material entities) create a strong center of gravity from which to propose public administration/health care models that aim to reorient the field in a more managerial or human-centered direction, respectively. Aligning the interests of a number of actors (contestants, guests, partners, etc.), they work to sustain a network of relations and actions to lower resistance and reduce the strain associated with adopting these models. This in turn supports their take-up and, in time, normative valence.

Our first research questions asked whether institutional work rests solely on the "effort" of humans. The previous

sections showed that in each case, material elements play a "silent" but essential role. Prizes represent complex arrangements of human and material elements that (when well-aligned in given directions) perform some institutional work. Thus, a strategy like mimicry does not rest on the effort of a discrete actor, but is the result of the alignment of the location of the awards ceremony, the presence of official supporters, and the use of language in line with the governmental agenda. This means that the traditional idea that "institutional work, of course, is conducted by individuals" (Suddaby, 2010, p. 17) should be revised and amended. Institutional work, *of course*, is shared between human and materials entities, although how this happens is an issue that needs to be explored empirically on a case-by-case basis.

Meaning and language are part of the picture and objects also work by incarnating such symbols (e.g., consider how artifacts associated to the Humane Prize promoted "local re-signification" of general reform principles). However, material elements enable and propagate human actions as well. Thus, institutional work, similar to any form of work, needs to be understood as the result of a distributed effort of humans and materials, not simply as the product of individual intentional action. The same way a mason cannot construct a wall without cement and bricks, no institutions can be created, maintained, or disrupted without materials.

In view of our second research question, the study contributes to identify in detail how materials contribute to the accomplishment of institutional work—in our case the institutional work of mimicry, theorizing, educating, and reconfiguring normative networks. We found, for example, that materials such as the call for participation and evaluation criteria contribute to mimicry and theorizing by allowing contestants to translate their interests in a form that adheres to existing agendas. The material makeup of the awards ceremony also creates a symbolic link between the awards and the institutions they strive to shape, establishing a de facto relationship without the need for any explicit agreement or negotiation.

Materials also play a central role in the work of educating, namely, through their capacity to extend human reach in space and time. Media reports, pocket books, and CDs, for example, circulate accounts on the winning experiences and present them as exemplary cases from which prospective adopters can learn from or take inspiration to change their own practices. Similarly, the "Winners Club" and contact lists support interactions by connecting people.

Finally, materials actively contribute to the work of reconfiguring normative networks. They do so by sanctioning enrollment in a new movement—an act that remodels participants' identity, as they become representatives of certain approaches. The application form cements the connection between contenders and the prize and in the case of the Humane Prize, the plate bestowed physically testifies the link between (the models supported by) awarders and winners.

One of our claims is that the relationship between materials and institutional work is not necessarily one-to-one. The same artifact may be involved in different types work—just as not all humans perform the same role all the time (Lindberg & Walter, 2013; Nicolini, Mengis, & Swan, 2012). This is because materials perform a variety of roles: They extend human activity in time and space, they scaffold it, and they cement relationships among others. Thus, accepting that materials play a role in institutional work is only a departure point, an entrée to a world where institutions are created, maintained, and disrupted through the combination of humans, language, and material entities. As soon as one crosses the threshold, however, the "entrance ticket" is useless on its own. One has to start working to make sense of this new world—or of the world seen from this new material angle. In this sense, our perspective opens a host of opportunities for future research. More work will be required to examine empirically how materials enter into the accomplishment of different types of institutional work in different conditions and settings and whether different materials are particularly useful in different types of institutional work.

One caveat arising from our study is that it is not enough to claim that materials are important or merely list the material elements associated with the actions of humans. In fact, the analysis needs to foreground and provide evidence on the specific role played by the material dimension in institutional processes. In short, the role of materials needs to be studied analytically rather than descriptively.

Our study suggests number of avenues for future inquiry.[2] For example, further work will be necessary to explore the "negative" role of material elements in institutional dynamics, an aspect that is notably absent from our study where for want of space, scant attention was devoted to tension, (material) resistance, and conflict. Researchers might ask, for example, "Do materials and humans pull in the same direction all the time?" "What happens when this is not the case?" "Do materials only propagate or do they also hamper the extension in time and space of human actions?" and "What happens when scaffolding does not hold?"

In addition, interesting questions could emerge when time and space are brought into the picture. Future research could explore, for example, whether different materials are particularly important in different stages of institutionalization, or whether the same material changes role. Analogously, historical studies could investigate which materiality still counts in the age of virtual relationships and whether the same conditions apply in different societies and cultures.

Appendix

Table A1. Efforts Constituting Mimicry With Sample Data.

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of mimicry
"We launched the prize aiming at amplifying what was a new buzzword in the political agenda, the direction of the government." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)	Supporting the official reform agenda	Connecting to governmental ideals
"The ability to produce results measurable through clear indicators"; "The introduction of new management models." (ReformCo documents, evaluation criteria, call for nominations 2009)		
"We are an observatory of the reform, of the change process. We work together with the Minister's staff . . . We are inside the political decision-making processes, which means we know the objectives in real time . . . [The themes for prizes] are always chosen in the light of the political agenda of the moment." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)		
"Given that the Italian healthcare system faces a number of challenges . . . due to the lack of resources, having economic sustainability as an evaluation criteria is particularly relevant nowadays. The awarded projects must represent innovative practices . . . able to change people's lives but done at low cost." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Mirroring official concerns for cost saving	
"Attention to the costs of a contestant's project is important, and is now more relevant than ever . . . we must prize the creativity necessary to came up with low-cost innovations. That is what the award must recognize." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"A best practice is . . . any successful initiative regarding the contextual improvement of the efficiency (value for money) and efficacy (properly satisfying citizens' needs and expectations) of healthcare structures." (CareCoop documents, booklet 1999)		
"We want to make it clear that you can even start at no cost, and it is not necessary to always have a specific budget." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"[A prize for best practices] is very positive for civic organizations like ours [CareCoop], because it demonstrates that we believe in the capacity of public administration." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Sidestepping CareCoop's image of critic of the government	
"What we want is to make people understand that we are not, *a priori*, against the government or the various laws that are enacted." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"Last year there was the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of [CareCoop]'s first initiatives in the health sector, so we strongly wanted to take re-launch the prize . . . and make the awards ceremony in a government building." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Hosting the prize in official places	Approaching a central position
"We, normally . . . try to host the final event in a hall of an official building, it can change but this is usually the aim." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"[The Strategy Prize] is awarded at the fair because it is the annual meeting place for the public administration." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)		
"[We invited judges] with special experience and authority to ensure a rigorous evaluation process . . . Generally, they are public officials who have some importance, those who somehow influence the political agenda." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)	Inviting relevant actors in the field as jury members	
"The jury, then always included one representative from the Ministry of Health, a general manager from a health organization . . . last year a representative of the National Institute of Health joined the committee." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"This is very important because it creates a good image of us. Having jury members drawn from important institutions might prove useful one day, because someone in that institution will be involved in our work and be aware of our approach." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		

Table A2. Efforts Comprising Theorizing With Sample Data.

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of theorizing
"An experiment [the Strategy Prize] that [ReformCo] decided to repeat this year, based on awareness that new ideas on strategic governance are vital for transforming public administration in times for crisis." (ReformCo documents, prize website, Strategy Prize)	Proposing strategic governance as a tool to improve the public services	Presenting models as an update
"[CareCoop] has organized specific strategies over this period to stress that quality is of capital importance. This principle makes it possible to fulfill citizen's needs for appropriate care, to optimize health service resources and to rationalize the system." (CareCoop documents, booklet 1999)	Proposing humane care as essential to the quality of health care	
"[Because] there is not only bad news in healthcare"; "Recognition of healthcare that does work." (CareCoop documents, call for nominations, 2001)		
"Healthcare, despite many shining examples of dedication, modernization and help given to the vulnerable, is still seen by many as a depersonalized and sometimes inhuman world. Often no account is taken of those coping with illness and deeply distressed family members may left to fend for themselves." (CareCoop documents, prize website, Humane Prize)		
"We have also suggested the multiple channels through which the public administration as a productive sector affects the overall economy and why it is perhaps now the key to closing the growth gap between Italy and the rest of Europe." (ReformCo documents, publication by the Minister for the Public Administration and Innovation)	Positing New Public Management ideas as a way to national prosperity	Framing contestants as solutions
"The second purpose of the reform is to foster economic growth by boosting the efficiency and productivity of a sector that accounts for about 20 per cent of Italy's payroll." (ReformCo documents, ministerial publication 2009)		
"The [name] report covering healthcare was submitted in the morning. Conversely, in the second part of the event we wanted to present the other side of the coin, showing what works in healthcare." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Positing humane care projects as solutions to the deficiencies identified in CareCoop's report	
"Last year marked a watershed for it was the first time we followed a critical report on the state of the [Italian] healthcare system with an award for what does work. We made a point of awarding the prize straight after presentation of the report. It is a format that works well, because the idea is that you are the someone that who not only points out the flaws in the healthcare system but also praises the health services for some of the wonderful things they do for citizens. It is fundamental and it is why we will do it again this year on [date of awards ceremony]." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		

Table A3. Efforts Constituting Educating With Sample Data.

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of educating
"What I saw was that many, then, kept in touch after the prize, exchanging experiences, helping each other in trying to solve shared problems because those who had faced and solved them in the past became a point of reference for others who found themselves in the same situation." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Making the awards ceremony a venue for interactions	Connecting people around models
"The ceremony was an occasion to make your project known, to find collaboration partners and even to network with other public administrations." (Interview, winner Strategy Prize 2009)		

(continued)

Table A3. (continued)

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of educating
"There is always an interest for creating a community of practice . . . in our meetings and working groups it is clear that we invite projects that are particularly representative . . . awarded administrations. This way . . . it all does not end with the ceremony, with the symbolic award . . . we organize large events and working groups during the year." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)	Nurturing a knowledge-sharing community	
"With the best practice database, [CareCoop] aims to promote a network among all those sensitive to the quality of the health services in order to not only foster pooling of information and experience but also to encourage mutual help." (CareCoop documents, booklet, 1998)		
"Yes, absolutely. . . . We, of course, continue to create a network, between us and the actors from the various projects we come in contact, sometimes involving them in our activities. This is because our intent is to create knowledge sharing opportunities among us." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize).		
"Other public administrators have contacted us after the prize, asking how are we developing the project using the strategic model. There is of great interest in understanding this approach in concrete terms." (Interview, winner Strategy Prize 2009)	Consulting winners about their projects	Supporting exchange opportunities
"On top of this initiative [the best practice database], CareCoop has created a quarterly newsletter, [name of newsletter] as an information device and as a way to keep professionals updated." (CareCoop documents, booklet 2000)	Building and maintaining ties	
"Our newsletter is highly recognized, which means that it is followed not only by the subscribers but it is also featured in other media . . . All that serves to reach an audience of professionals in the field." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)		
"It is tactical to showcase and award best practices . . . for health care managers so that they learn a humane model for healthcare from real cases." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Spreading examples of the models	Broadcasting exemplary ideas and didactic information
"In its activities, CareCoop aims to facilitate the dissemination of the body of initiatives through printed materials and the media." (CareCoop documents, booklet 1998)		
"This is why we decided to start the series Almanac of Best Practices in Healthcare last year. The aim was to provide a toolbox for ensure professionals either already involved or willing to take part in initiatives for more humane healthcare." (CareCoop documents, Pocketbook, 2000)	Providing information on the approaches	
"An exemplary quality manual built together." (CareCoop documents, CD 2002)		
"We want to ensure that the database does not remain an archive . . . but that it becomes an instrument for developing and implementing [humane] practices in places where they do not exist." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"We ask participants to tell us how their project is evolving; who are their partners, how they work together . . . we did that in the first three editions. At times we also went in the locality, gathering feedback from those involved to understand the project performance." (Interview, organizer Strategy Prize)	Assisting implementing the strategic model	

Table A4. Efforts Constituting Reconfiguring Normative Networks With Sample Data.

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of reconfiguring
"At that time, e-mail was not so popular. Then there was the call for nominations of the [Humane Prize] that stirred up interest . . . we often sent it in May, just after Easter." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Advertising the prize	Promoting interest
"The winners of the prize and all the others deemed appropriate will be part of the following initiatives: they will be included in a database of [ReformCo]; they will be disseminated through specific publications; they will participate in exchange opportunities." (ReformCo documents, call for nominations 2009)	Promising dividends	

Table A4. (continued)

Illustrative quotations	Concrete activities	Institutional work of reconfiguring
"[CareCoop] shall disseminate news through the media on the outcome of the project. In addition, it will use its database to publish information on all submitted projects. This database (which will be given appropriate visibility and promotion) will be available on [CareCoop's portal]." (CareCoop documents, publicity document 2012)		
"The following health units are allowed: public and private health units, hospitals, local and social health organizations and civic associations that provide care for citizens." (CareCoop documents, call for nomination, 1999)	Displaying inclusive criteria	
"The focus has always been on micro-projects. To reward projects . . . that might not be visible from the outside . . . we consider them seeds and expect that they might yield benefits in time." (Interview, organizer Strategy prize)		
"After the award given to [name of winner], further measures were taken in the press, on television to make it the flagship for the [name of region of winner]." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Delivering prestige and visibility	
"Certainly there was an impact. After the prize, our project was covered in all the national newspapers and it was also picked up by local newspapers." (Interview, winner Strategy Prize)		
"The [Humane Prize] and the activities of [CareCoop] created a national showcase . . . it put the project in the public spotlight. The idea is to make regional results known at the national level." (Interview, first place Humane Prize 2010)		
"Applications may only be made by completing and submitting the appropriate form." (ReformCo documents, call for nominations 2009)	Applying to the prize	Linking contestants and prize
"Let's say, the general manager of the hospital asked me whether we could participate with the project in the prize. So I told him we could . . . I and someone appointed by the hospital filled in the forms together." (Interview, third place Humane Prize 2010)		
"Instead, the [name of winner] really represents humanization. I get goose bumps when I think about the award giving moment. It was a moment I was very proud of . . . the ceremony is where the humanization theme becomes visible." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Making the models tangible	
"We serve each other, because we serve as examples of what [CareCoop] believes in and, in turn, we receive visibility given that [CareCoop] is fairly well-known in Italy and that boosts our activities." (Interview, runner-up Humane Prize 2010)		Capturing winners as torchbearers
"Yes, once they received the award they became part of the movement, we have pulled them inside . . . so basically they even felt authorized to proceed and present the model." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)	Enlisting allies as evangelists	
"A group of professionals came into being in the first years of the prize and struggled to create training initiatives, seminars, conferences etc." (Interview, organizer Humane Prize)		
"The prize is known among those involved in this field at a national level . . . locally, we also tried to advertise our achievements to the general public." (Interview, winner Strategy Prize, 2009)		

Notes

1. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, especially Reviewer 3, for noticing this specific point and encouraging us to develop this section.
2. We would to acknowledge the contribution of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out some of these directions to us.

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