

on defining “institution”

I’m defining institution but not rhetoric (or rhetorical). We tend to see our home discipline in more complex and nuanced ways that make definition difficult to achieve (and not particularly helpful). My analogy is the march of history: the distant past fits neatly into categories, but as we draw nearer to the present, categories blur and even collapse under the shear weight of our knowledge about now (and near now). WE CAN ADD TO THIS.

Direct definitions

from OED

noun

1a. The action of instituting or establishing; setting on foot or in operation; foundation; ordainment; the fact of being instituted. [1460]
b. spec. The establishment or ordination of a sacrament of the Christian Church, esp. of the Eucharist, by Christ. Hence, that part of the office of Baptism, and of the prayer of consecration in the Eucharist, which consists in reciting the words used in institution (more fully words, commemoration, or recital of institution).[1540]

2a. The giving of form or order to a thing; orderly arrangement; regulation.
b. The established order by which anything is regulated; system; constitution. Obs. [1475]

3. Establishment in a charge or position.
a. Ecclesiastical. In Episcopal churches, the establishment of a clergyman in the office of the cure of souls, by the bishop or his commissary. [1380]
b. Roman Law. The appointment of an heir. [1880]

4. Training, instruction, education, teaching. [1531]

5. Usually in pl.
a. Elements of instruction; first principles of a science or art.
b. A book of first principles, an elementary treatise; = INSTITUTE n. 3.Obs. [1537]

6.a. An established law, custom, usage, practice, organization, or other element in the political or social life of a people; a regulative principle or convention subservient to the needs of an organized community or the general ends of civilization. [1551]
b. colloq. Something having the fixity or importance of a social institution; a well-established or familiar practice or object. [1839]

7.a. An establishment, organization, or association, instituted for the promotion of some object, esp. one of public or general utility, religious, charitable, educational, etc., e.g. a church, school, college, hospital, asylum, reformatory, mission, or the like; as a literary and philosophical institution, a deaf and dumb institution, the Royal National Life-boat Institution, the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution (instituted 1798), the Railway Benevolent Institution, etc. The name is often popularly applied to the building appropriated to the work of a benevolent or educational institution. [1707]

b. Often occurring, like INSTITUTE n. , in the designations of societies or associations for the advancement of literature, science, or art, of technical knowledge, or of special education. Such are the Royal Institution of Great Britain (incorporated 1800), the British Institution (1805), the London Institution (1806), the Plymouth Institution (1812), the Edinburgh Watt Institution and School of Arts (1821), the Liverpool Institution (1825); the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, U.S. (1830); the Institution of Civil Engineers (1818), Institution of Mechanical Engineers, of Gas Engineers, of Electrical Engineers, etc. Cf. INSTITUTE n. 4.

8. attrib. and Comb.
1905 Daily Chron. 27 Sept. 4/5 To any high-spirited woman, the tyranny of institution life must be almost unbearable.

from Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (pp. 168-9)

Institution is one of several examples (cf. CULTURE, SOCIETY, EDUCATION) of a noun of action or process which became, at a certain stage, a general and abstract noun describing something apparently objective and systematic; in fact, in the modern sense, an **institution**. It has been used in English since C14, from fw *institution*, oF, *institutionem*, L, from nv *statuere*, L - establish, found, appoint. In its earliest uses it had the strong sense of an act of origin - something **instituted** at a particular point in time - but by mC16 there was a developing general sense of practices established in certain ways, and this can be read in a virtually modern sense: ‘in one tonge, in lyke maners, institucions and lawes’ (Robinson’s translation of More’s *Utopia*, 1551); ‘many good institutions, Lawes, maners, the art of government’ (Ashley, 1594). But there was still, in context, a strong sense of custom, as in the surviving sense of ‘one of the institutions of the place’. It is not easy to date the emergence of a fully abstract

sense; it appears linked, throughout, with the related abstraction of SOCIETY (q.v.). By mC18 an abstract sense is quite evident, and examples multiply in C19 and C20. At the same time, from mC18, **institution** and, later, **institute** (which had carried the same general *sense* as **institution** from C16) began to be used in the titles of specific organizations or types of organization: 'Charitable Institutions' (1764) and several titles from 1C18; **Mechanics' Institutes, Royal Institute of British Architects**, and comparable organizations from eC195 here probably imitated from the *Institut National*, created in France in 1795 in consciously modern terminology. **Institute** has since been widely used for professional, educational and research organizations; **institution** for charitable and benevolent organizations. Meanwhile the general sense of a form of social organization, specific or abstract, was confirmed in mC19 development of **institutional** and **institutionalize**. In C20 **institution** has become the normal term for any organized element of a society.
See SOCIETY

in Situ definitions

sometimes a framework for interactions:

An institution is the fixing of stereotyped social interactions in the form of rules. In most cases these rules are made explicit and there are sanctioning mechanisms behind them. Yet sometimes these characteristics are absent, for example when people adhere to such rules simply because they feel urged to act in this way. An institution does not need to be a large organization. The largest institutions known are states or multinational organizations like the United Nations, yet there are also much smaller institutions, as for example marriage or monthly meetings of a group at a certain pub. Therefore, institutionalization is not a matter of size. (Christoph Henning, entry on "institution" in Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology 2007)

or

This can be restrictive (power laden): "the case of the medical interview is an outstanding instance of the institutionalized discourses in which the value of the individual's linguistic expression is measured strictly by the place he or she has in the institution. Only utterances which meet the criteria of the official discourse are allowed . . ."
(Mey, *Pragmatice: An introduction*, 2001, p. 301).

sometimes seen as settings or occasions or discourse events:

This book is about language, power and institutions. It examines language and power across a variety of institutional settings, showing institutions are shaped by discourse and how they in turn have the capacity to create and impose discourses. In this way, they have considerable control over the shaping of our routine experiences of the world and the way we classify that world. They therefore have power to foster particular kinds of identities to suit their own purposes. In this book we consider a number of such institutional settings and contexts: the university, the prison, the media and the military. (p. 1)
Andrea Mayr *Language and Power, An introduction to institutional discourse*

or

In addition to 'workplace discourse', other terms used include 'institutional discourse', 'professional discourse' and 'business discourse'. I discuss each of these terms in turn and try to ascertain whether they all describe the same thing, or whether they refer to different kinds of discourse.

The terms 'workplace discourse' and 'institutional discourse' are usually more general, and are often used interchangeably in the literature. For example, Drew and Heritage (1992, p. 3) describe 'institutional talk' as 'task-related', involving 'at least one participant who represents a formal organization', which can also be said of workplace discourse. Almut Koester, *Workplace discourse*

sometimes seen as [or stabilized through] a building:

[most universities prominently display buildings as representations of colleges or schools within them]

"It is paradoxical that three thousand years of architectural ideology have tried to answer the very opposite: that architecture is about stability, solidity, foundation. I would claim that architecture was used '*a conttemploi*', against and despite itself, as society tried to employ it as a means to stabilize, to institutionalize, to establish permanence. Of course, this prevailing ideology meant that architecture had to ignore other terms of its equation (i.e., to be nothing but 'the artful building of spaces,' '*le jeu correct at magnifique des volumes sous la lumiere*'), or to coincide with frozen rituals of occupancy—a court of justice, a hospital, a church, even the vernacular one-family house—in which the rituals of the institution were directly reflected in the architectural spaces that enclosed them. Foucault's discussion on architecture

and power ultimately echoed Sullivan's 'form follows function.'" (pp. 19-20) Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and disjunction*

a profession, field, or even disciplinary organization:

[IEEE, ACM, AMA, ABA, NCTE, ALA, MLA]

these run off memberships and may include: prep for qualifying exams, job boards, ethics/proper conduct statements, sponsored publications, sponsored conferences, lobbying groups, etc.

a subunit of society or social system:

"An *institution* will be said to be a complex of institutionalized role integrates [he footnotes this: Or status-relationships. There are no roles without corresponding statuses and vice versa.] which is of strategic structural significance in the social system in question. The institution should be considered to be a higher-order unit of social structure than a role, and indeed it is made up of a plurality of interdependent role-patterns or components of them. Thus when we speak of the "institution of property" in a social system we bring together those aspects of the roles of the component actors which have to do with the integration of action-expectations with the value-patterns governing the definitions of rights in "possessions" and obligations relative to them. An institution in this sense should clearly be distinguished from a collectivity. A collectivity is a system of concretely interactive specific roles. An institution on the other hand is a complex of patterned elements in role-expectations which may apply to an indefinite number of collectivities. Conversely, a collectivity may be the focus of a whole series of institutions. Thus, the institutions of marriage and of parenthood are both constitutive of a particular family as a collectivity." (pp. 39-40) Talcott Parsons, *The social system*