# From "institutions"
# to "institutionalized social structures" – bringing a more nyanced understanding of institutions to s-d logic

*Koskela-huotari Kaisa, Vink Josina*

**Purpose** – Since the "institutional turn" in service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo, 2018), there has been an increasingly widespread use of the concept of an 'institution' to aid in understanding a variety of service-related phenomenon (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). Within S-D logic, institutions are understood as "humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs that enable and constrain action and make social life at least somewhat predictable and meaningful" (Vargo and Lusch, 2016 p. 11, based on Scott, 2001). This means that, in essence, all social structures are assumed under the label of an institution. We argue that this sweeping use of the term 'institution' limits the theorizing potential of this important development in S-D logic and that a transcending processual understanding of institutions is needed to support more nuanced theoretical developments within the metatheoretical framework. The purpose of this paper is to propose such alternative frame for thinking about institutions in S-D logic.

**Approach** – This conceptual paper draws from seminal contributions in organizational institutionalism (e.g., Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Jepperson, 1991; Zucker, 1977) and the broader sociological literature around institutions and social structures (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992) to inform the conceptualization of institutions in S-D logic.

**Research implications** – We suggest the need to shift our language of theorizing from "institutions" to "institutionalized social structures." This shift acknowledges that institutions are social structures that have over time *institutionalized*, meaning that they have gained a presumed objectivity or a 'law-like' status (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and become "reproductive processes" (Jepperson, 1991, p. 144). This language further implies that only the most highly entrenched and widely-spread social structures are called as institutions (cf., Giddens, 1984). Furthermore, enabled by such a framing, we bring forward a deeper understanding of the evolving properties of social structures through the processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. We also explicate the process mechanisms that contribute to changes in the properties of social structures over time.

**Originality/value** – The more nuanced, processual view of institutionalized social structures brought forward in this paper contributes to the evolving S-D logic narrative by offering sharper tools for theory building, particularly in relation to change and stability in value-creating service ecosystems.

**Key words** – Institutions, institutionalization, social structures, service-dominant logic

**Paper type** – Conceptual paper