Validation as a Binding Condition of Operative Reality: Institutional Admissibility in Social Ontology

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Abstract

Institutional systems repeatedly generate a structural divergence between intrinsic adequacy and institutional operability. Entities possessing coherent structure, competence, or evidential support frequently remain unable to circulate within organized domains, while other entities continue to generate authoritative consequences despite contested intrinsic adequacy. This asymmetry indicates that institutional operability is not governed by epistemic truth, causal capability, or intrinsic properties alone. The operative condition lies in admission. Within institutional systems capable of enforceable recognition, entities become effective only after passing the admission threshold that authorizes participation in the domain's decision structure. The present analysis develops a social-ontological model specifying validation as the binding condition of institutional admissibility. The investigation proceeds through analytical reconstruction of institutional mechanisms combined with comparative conceptual illustration across three structurally distinct domains: monetary circulation, professional jurisdiction, and scientific publication. These domains isolate the distinction between intrinsic reality, defined as the material, semantic, or causal constitution of entities, and operative reality, defined as the authorization under which entities may function within institutional systems regulating participation, responsibility, and circulation. The analysis establishes that institutional systems stabilize action through validation regimes governing admissibility rather than through direct evaluation of intrinsic adequacy. Validation admits entities into the domain's operative field and thereby permits circulation, authority, and responsibility allocation. Withdrawal of validation produces immediate institutional inoperability while intrinsic properties remain unchanged. This discontinuity shows that institutional efficacy depends on admission status rather than intrinsic capability, establishing operative reality through validation within social systems.

Keywords: Validation; Operative Reality; Institutional Admissibility; Recognition Regimes; Institutional Authority

Introduction

Institutional systems routinely generate a structural divergence between intrinsic adequacy and institutional operability. Entities possessing coherent structure, verified competence, or evidential support often remain unable to circulate within organized domains, while other entities continue to generate authoritative consequences despite persistent doubts regarding their intrinsic adequacy. This recurring asymmetry appears across diverse institutional settings including legal authority, monetary circulation, professional accreditation, and scientific publication.

Conventional explanations frequently interpret institutional efficacy through epistemic categories such as truth, competence, or causal reliability. Yet institutional practice repeatedly demonstrates that such intrinsic properties alone do not determine whether an entity can function within a governed domain. The operative condition lies elsewhere: within the admission structures that regulate institutional participation. Within

contemporary social theory, this problem intersects with several established lines of inquiry. Social ontology examines how institutional facts emerge through recognition and status attribution (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Institutional theory investigates how authority structures regulate participation and legitimacy within organized systems (Andrews, 1993). Systems theory analyzes how social systems maintain operational closure through internally regulated decision structures (Görke and Scholl, 2006). Despite these developments, the precise mechanism through which entities become capable of producing institutional consequences remains insufficiently specified. Recognition, legitimacy, and authority are frequently invoked as explanatory categories, yet the structural condition that determines whether an entity may function within a domain's operative field remains analytically underdefined.

The present study isolates this condition through the concept of validation. Validation refers to the institutional admission procedure through which entities become authorized participants within domains capable of enforceable recognition. Once validation is conferred, entities acquire operative status: they may circulate, authorize decisions, allocate responsibility, and generate consequences within the institutional order. When validation is withdrawn, these capacities disappear even though the entity's intrinsic properties remain unchanged. Institutional operability therefore depends not on intrinsic adequacy but on admission status. The withdrawal of validation provides the decisive diagnostic: entities retain their intrinsic constitution while losing their capacity to function within the institutional domain. This structural distinction requires separating two analytical registers frequently conflated in institutional analysis. Intrinsic reality concerns the material, semantic, or causal constitution of entities. Operative reality concerns the authorization under which those entities may function within institutional systems regulating participation, responsibility, and circulation. Intrinsic properties determine what an entity is capable of doing under appropriate conditions.

Validation determines whether those capacities are permitted to produce institutional consequences at all. Confusing these registers produces a persistent category error in the interpretation of institutional action. The central research question addressed in this article is therefore the following: under what structural conditions do entities acquire operative status within institutional systems capable of enforceable recognition? More specifically, the analysis investigates whether institutional operability is governed primarily by intrinsic adequacy or by admission structures regulating participation within organized domains.

The argument proceeds within the analytical framework of social ontology and institutional theory. Methodologically, the study employs conceptual reconstruction of institutional mechanisms combined with analytical illustration across three domains in which admission structures are clearly observable: monetary circulation, professional jurisdiction, and scientific publication. These cases serve not as empirical generalizations but as structural demonstrations revealing how validation regimes regulate institutional admissibility. Currency demonetization, revocation of professional credentials, and publication gatekeeping illustrate how withdrawal of admission eliminates institutional operability without altering intrinsic properties.

The analysis advances three claims. First, institutional systems stabilize action through validation regimes that regulate admissibility rather than intrinsic adequacy. Second, invalidation provides diagnostic evidence revealing that operability depends on admission status rather than intrinsic constitution. Third, the distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality clarifies how institutional systems distribute authority and responsibility independently of epistemic truth conditions. These claims together establish validation as the binding condition governing institutional admissibility.

The contribution of the article lies in formalizing operative reality as a distinct analytical category within social ontology. Existing scholarship has demonstrated that institutional facts depend on recognition structures and authority regimes (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Jasanoff, 2004; Porter, 1995). The present analysis specifies the structural mechanism through which such recognition becomes operational: the admission procedures that determine whether entities may function within institutional decision structures. By identifying validation as the binding condition of institutional admissibility, the study clarifies how institutional authority organizes recognition, circulation, and responsibility across complex social systems.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The next section specifies the methodological framework used to analyze institutional admission structures. Subsequent sections develop the distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality, examine invalidation as diagnostic evidence of validation, and analyze how validation regimes structure responsibility and conflict across institutional domains. The final section specifies the limits and falsification conditions of the proposed framework and reflects on the implications of operative reality for social ontology and institutional analysis.

Method

The study employs analytical reconstruction within the framework of social ontology and institutional analysis. The objective is to isolate the structural condition governing institutional operability by distinguishing intrinsic properties of entities from the admission mechanisms that regulate their participation within organized domains. The analysis proceeds through conceptual clarification combined with comparative institutional illustration. The methodological strategy consists of three analytical stages. The first stage reconstructs the conceptual distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality by examining how institutional systems regulate participation through recognition structures rather than intrinsic adequacy. This reconstruction draws on established debates in social ontology and institutional authority concerning the formation of institutional facts and recognition regimes (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The second stage identifies validation as the admission mechanism through which entities acquire operative status within institutional systems capable of enforceable recognition. Validation is treated not as an epistemic evaluation but as a procedural condition governing admissibility. This stage analyzes institutional admission structures that regulate participation in domains where authority, responsibility, and circulation must be stabilized across complex social environments. The third stage employs comparative conceptual illustration across three institutional domains in which admission structures are clearly observable: monetary systems, professional accreditation, and scientific publication. These domains provide analytically distinct cases demonstrating how institutional operability depends on validation rather than intrinsic adequacy. Currency demonetization, revocation of professional credentials, and publication gatekeeping illustrate how withdrawal of admission eliminates institutional efficacy while intrinsic properties remain unchanged. These cases function as analytical demonstrations rather than empirical generalizations. Their purpose is to reveal the structural mechanism governing institutional admissibility by exposing the divergence between intrinsic constitution and institutional operability. The diagnostic role of invalidation serves as the principal analytical test: if withdrawal of recognition removes institutional efficacy without altering intrinsic properties, operability must depend on admission rather than intrinsic adequacy. The methodological framework therefore combines conceptual analysis, institutional reconstruction, and comparative illustration to formalize validation as the binding condition governing operative reality within domains capable of enforceable recognition.

Results and Discussion
1. Intrinsic Reality and Operative Reality

Institutional analysis requires separating two explanatory registers that are frequently conflated in discussions of authority, knowledge, and social order. The first register concerns the intrinsic constitution of entities. Intrinsic reality refers to the material composition, semantic organization, or causal capability through which entities possess functional capacities. Scientific theories possess internal logical coherence; professional actors possess knowledge and technical competence; economic artifacts possess material substrates and symbolic representations.

These intrinsic properties determine what entities are capable of doing under appropriate conditions. The second register concerns institutional admissibility. Operative reality refers not to the intrinsic constitution of entities but to the authorization under which those entities may function within institutional systems that regulate participation through enforceable recognition. This distinction therefore separates capability from admissibility. Intrinsic adequacy evaluates the potential capacities of entities, whereas validation determines whether those capacities are permitted to generate institutional consequences (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Kelsen, 2017). Within institutional systems capable of enforcing recognition, entities become operative only after satisfying the domain's admission structure. An admission structure refers to the set of procedural mechanisms through which institutions determine which actors, objects, or claims may participate in decision processes. Such mechanisms include certification systems, regulatory approvals, professional licensing, and publication gatekeeping. These institutional procedures define the admissible set of entities capable of producing consequences within the domain.

Institutional operability therefore depends on admission rather than intrinsic adequacy. Intrinsic properties may influence admission decisions, yet they do not control them. Institutional procedures ultimately determine whether entities become operative participants in the system (Abbott, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 2000). The structural relation between intrinsic properties and institutional admission can be clarified through the concept of a constraint regime. A constraint regime refers to the ensemble of rules, sanctions, and recognition procedures that regulate participation within institutional domains. Such regimes stabilize action by determining which entities are recognized as legitimate participants and which remain excluded. Within these regimes, admission occurs through validation procedures. Validation constitutes the institutional operation through which entities enter the domain's operative field. Once admitted, entities acquire the capacity to circulate, authorize decisions, and allocate responsibility. When admission is withdrawn, this capacity disappears even though intrinsic properties remain intact (Barinaga, 2026; North, 1990; Douglas, 1986; Luhmann, 2008).
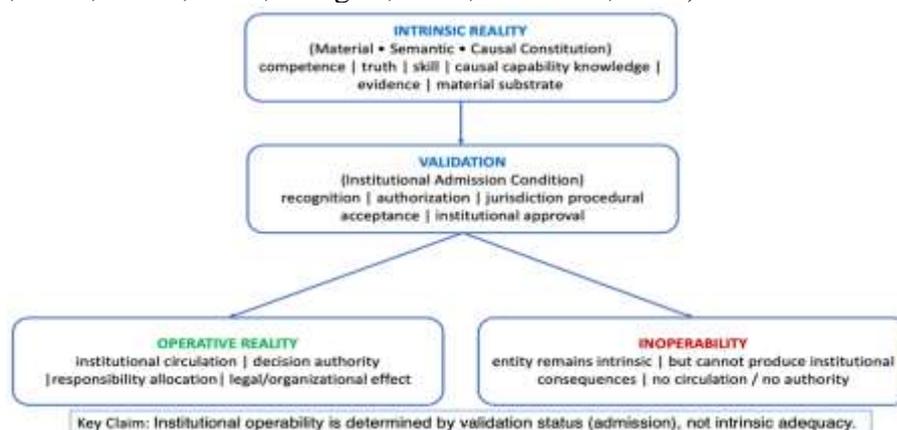

Figure 1. Structural Model of Validation and Operative Reality (Own)

Figure 1 illustrates the structural relationship between intrinsic reality and operative reality. Intrinsic reality refers to the material, semantic, or causal constitution of entities. These intrinsic properties alone do not determine institutional operability. Entities become capable of producing institutional consequences only after satisfying the admission condition termed validation. When validation is granted, entities acquire operative reality within the domain, enabling circulation, authority, and responsibility allocation. When validation is denied or withdrawn, entities remain intrinsically unchanged but become institutionally inoperative.

Concrete institutional examples clarify this distinction. Monetary systems demonstrate that economic operability depends on institutional recognition rather than intrinsic material properties. Currency derives its capacity to circulate from institutional validation rather than from its physical substrate. When a currency is demonetized, the banknote retains its material form and symbolic inscription, yet it immediately loses its capacity to function as money because institutional recognition has been withdrawn (Polanyi, 2001; Simmel, 1978).

Professional accreditation systems provide a second illustration. Technical competence may exist independently of institutional certification, yet participation in regulated professions requires admission through licensing systems. Medical practice, legal advocacy, and engineering services are governed by accreditation regimes that determine who may perform recognized professional activities. A professional whose license is revoked retains knowledge and skill yet becomes institutionally unable to practice within the recognized system. Institutional admission therefore determines whether intrinsic competence becomes socially operative (Mahajan et al., 2016).

Scientific publication systems provide a third empirical case. Scientific claims possess intrinsic epistemic properties such as empirical evidence, methodological coherence, and theoretical consistency. However, participation in scientific communication networks requires admission through editorial and peer-review gatekeeping. A manuscript rejected by a journal retains its intrinsic epistemic structure yet cannot circulate as recognized scientific knowledge within disciplinary communication systems (Gieryn, 1983).

These cases demonstrate that institutional systems stabilize action by regulating admissibility rather than correctness. Entities possessing strong intrinsic adequacy may remain institutionally ineffective when admission is denied. Conversely, entities possessing weaker intrinsic foundations may continue to produce consequences once validation has been granted. Institutional operability therefore follows the structure of admission rather than the structure of intrinsic truth (Espeland and Sauder, 2007). Institutional authority operates through procedures that regulate which entities may enter the domain's decision structure. These procedures define the domain's recognition regime. Validation refers to the institutional operation through which recognition is conferred. Importantly, the authority responsible for validation does not necessarily evaluate intrinsic adequacy directly. Instead, it determines whether entities satisfy the procedural criteria required for participation. Admission therefore functions as a binding constraint governing the field of admissible action (Löhlein and Huber, 2022).

Recognition should therefore not be interpreted primarily as a cognitive belief or collective attitude. Institutional recognition operates as a procedural mechanism embedded in organizational rules and decision structures. Institutions enforce recognition through accreditation systems, licensing rules, regulatory approval procedures, and jurisdictional authority. Operability emerges from these procedural structures rather than from shared conviction regarding intrinsic adequacy (Fourcade and Gordon, 2020; Johns, 2019). Finally, operative reality is domain-specific.

Validation procedures vary across institutional contexts, and entities admitted within one domain may remain invalid within another. Scientific claims recognized within academic communities may possess no authority in legal or regulatory systems. Professional credentials valid within one jurisdiction may lack recognition within another. These divergences arise from differences in admission regimes rather than differences in intrinsic properties.

The analytical separation between intrinsic reality and operative reality therefore provides the conceptual foundation for understanding institutional operability. Institutional systems regulate action by controlling admission into the domain's operative field. Intrinsic properties determine the potential capabilities of entities, but validation determines whether those capabilities may generate institutional consequences. Once admitted, intrinsic adequacy governs performance. When admission is withdrawn, performance becomes irrelevant because the entity no longer possesses the authorization required to function within the institutional structure.

2. Invalidation as Diagnostic Proof and Limit Case

The distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality becomes empirically observable when institutional admission is withdrawn while intrinsic properties remain unchanged. This phenomenon reveals the operative function of validation more clearly than cases of successful admission. When an entity loses the institutional authorization that previously permitted it to generate consequences within a domain, its operative capacity disappears even though its internal structure remains intact. Such events constitute diagnostic instances through which the admission mechanism governing institutional operability becomes analytically visible.

Institutional systems regularly produce such diagnostic events through procedures of invalidation. Invalidation refers to the withdrawal of institutional admission previously granted through validation procedures. Importantly, invalidation does not alter the intrinsic constitution of the entity involved. Rather, it alters the institutional permission structure that determines whether the entity may continue to function within the domain's operative field. The effect of invalidation therefore demonstrates that institutional operability depends on admission status rather than intrinsic adequacy (Paulson, 2019).

Legal systems provide particularly clear illustrations of this mechanism. Within modern legal orders, the authority of legal acts depends on their recognition within jurisdictional procedures rather than solely on their intrinsic coherence or moral adequacy. A judicial ruling that is overturned on appeal retains its textual structure and legal reasoning yet loses the authority to produce enforceable consequences within the legal system. The intrinsic document persists, but its operative status within the judicial hierarchy disappears. This demonstrates that legal operability is determined by institutional recognition within procedural hierarchies rather than by the intrinsic content of the ruling itself (Guardiola-Rivera, 2003).

Educational credentialing systems demonstrate the same structural mechanism. Academic degrees function as institutional signals authorizing participation in professional and organizational domains. When a degree is revoked due to procedural violations such as plagiarism or credential fraud, the individual's knowledge and skills remain materially unchanged. However, the institutional capacity of the degree to authorize employment, professional recognition, or academic status disappears. The revocation does not alter the intrinsic competence of the individual but withdraws the institutional validation that previously enabled those capacities to function within organizational systems (Brown, 2001).

Economic systems provide an additional illustration through monetary invalidation. Currency derives its operative capacity not from its material composition but from recognition by institutional authorities that regulate monetary circulation. When a currency unit is demonetized or withdrawn from circulation, the physical object remains materially unchanged yet loses its ability to function as a medium of exchange. The banknote retains its physical substrate and symbolic markings but no longer possesses institutional authorization to circulate within the economic system. This event demonstrates that monetary operability is governed by validation regimes rather than intrinsic material properties (Krippner, 2001).

Scientific communication systems display a similar structure through editorial gatekeeping and publication recognition. Scientific claims may possess empirical evidence, methodological rigor, and logical coherence. However, participation in recognized scientific discourse depends on institutional validation through peer review and editorial acceptance. When a manuscript is rejected or later retracted, the epistemic structure of the argument remains intact. What changes is the institutional status that permits the claim to circulate as recognized scientific knowledge within disciplinary communication networks (Gieryn, 1999).

These examples reveal a structural regularity across institutional domains. Invalidation modifies institutional permission without altering intrinsic constitution. The persistence of intrinsic properties alongside the disappearance of operative consequences indicates that institutional operability is governed by admission regimes rather than by intrinsic adequacy. The withdrawal of validation therefore provides empirical evidence for the analytical distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality. The concept of a constraint regime clarifies how these admission mechanisms operate.

A constraint regime refers to the institutional architecture of rules, procedures, and sanctions that regulate which entities may participate in decision processes within a domain. Such regimes establish the boundaries of admissible participation by defining validation criteria and procedures for revocation. Entities functioning within the regime remain operative only as long as their admission status remains valid. When validation is withdrawn, the constraint regime removes the entity from the set of admissible participants even though its intrinsic structure persists (Hall and Taylor, 1996).

The admission structure embedded within constraint regimes therefore determines the conditions under which entities may produce institutional consequences. This structure typically consists of three operational components. First, entry procedures establish criteria through which entities become recognized participants within the domain. Second, monitoring mechanisms evaluate continued compliance with institutional standards. Third, revocation procedures permit authorities to withdraw admission when entities no longer satisfy the criteria governing participation. Together, these mechanisms regulate the boundary between operative and inoperative entities within institutional systems. Understanding invalidation as diagnostic evidence of validation therefore clarifies the mechanism through which institutional systems regulate participation. Institutional authority does not operate primarily by evaluating intrinsic adequacy but by controlling the admission boundary that determines which entities may generate recognized consequences within the system.

Validation confers operability; invalidation withdraws it. The structural significance of invalidation extends beyond isolated institutional cases. Across legal, educational, economic, and scientific domains, institutional systems stabilize action by maintaining control over admission procedures. These procedures regulate who may act, which claims may circulate, and which artifacts may produce enforceable effects. The persistence of intrinsic properties alongside the disappearance of operative consequences

demonstrates that institutional systems function through authorization structures rather than through direct evaluation of intrinsic adequacy. Invalidation therefore performs a critical analytical role within the framework developed in this article. It reveals the underlying architecture through which institutional systems regulate the boundary between intrinsic existence and operative participation. By observing how institutional consequences disappear without changes in intrinsic structure, the analysis demonstrates that validation functions as the binding condition governing institutional operability.

3. Responsibility Without Truth and Validation Conflict

Institutional systems distribute responsibility through procedural validation rather than through direct verification of substantive truth. Responsibility within organized domains is therefore attached not primarily to intrinsic correctness but to the institutional procedures that authorize actions as legitimate. Once validation has been granted, actions carried out under that authorization become institutionally protected even when their intrinsic adequacy remains contested. Responsibility is thereby transferred from the evaluation of substantive outcomes to the verification of procedural compliance.

The institutional question shifts from whether the claim is intrinsically correct to whether the correct procedures were followed. This structural shift explains why institutional accountability frequently operates through audit trails, certification procedures, and documentation requirements rather than through independent verification of substantive truth (Espeland and Sauder, 2007).The mechanism underlying this shift can be specified through the interaction between validation regimes and procedural authorization.

Validation establishes the conditions under which entities become admissible participants in institutional decision structures. Once admitted, actions performed within the scope of this authorization are evaluated primarily according to procedural conformity. Responsibility is therefore redistributed from substantive evaluation to compliance with the procedural framework governing institutional participation. This mechanism explains why decision-makers operating within validated procedures may remain institutionally protected even when outcomes later prove erroneous. Responsibility attaches to whether the procedural framework was followed rather than to the intrinsic accuracy of the resulting decision.

Quantification systems illustrate how this mechanism operates in contemporary governance structures. Modern institutional environments increasingly rely on metrics, rankings, and indicators to regulate decision-making processes. These quantification systems function as validation devices that transform complex evaluations into standardized procedural indicators. Once such indicators are adopted, institutional responsibility becomes attached to adherence to the measurement framework rather than to independent evaluation of substantive outcomes.

Decisions justified through recognized metrics are therefore treated as procedurally legitimate even when their substantive adequacy remains debated. Public policy evaluation systems provide concrete examples of this proceduralization of responsibility. Regulatory agencies often rely on standardized impact assessments, cost-benefit analyses, and compliance metrics when evaluating policy decisions. Once these evaluation procedures have been institutionally validated, policy outcomes are judged according to whether the correct analytical procedures were followed rather than whether the underlying assumptions of those procedures were intrinsically accurate.

Responsibility therefore shifts from substantive truth claims to procedural adherence within the recognized evaluation framework. Legal systems provide an additional empirical illustration. Judicial decisions frequently rely on procedural

admissibility rules that determine which forms of evidence may enter legal proceedings. Evidence excluded on procedural grounds cannot influence legal outcomes even when its factual content remains uncontested. Conversely, evidence admitted through recognized procedural channels may determine the outcome of a case even when its reliability remains debated.

Legal responsibility therefore depends on adherence to evidentiary procedures rather than on direct verification of factual truth. Institutional validation of evidentiary procedures thus structures the distribution of responsibility within judicial decision-making. Validation regimes also generate conflicts between institutional authorities when different domains operate under distinct admission structures. Such conflicts occur when entities validated within one institutional system remain invalid within another. These conflicts reveal that operative reality is domain-specific and governed by distinct recognition regimes.

Public policy controversies frequently illustrate this phenomenon. Scientific advisory bodies may validate particular research findings as epistemically credible within scientific communication networks, while regulatory agencies may reject the same findings when evaluating policy decisions. The divergence does not necessarily arise from disagreement regarding intrinsic evidence but from differences in institutional admission criteria governing decision authority. Legal-administrative conflicts provide a second example.

Administrative agencies may implement regulatory decisions based on procedural compliance with statutory mandates, while courts later invalidate those decisions for failing to satisfy constitutional or jurisdictional requirements. The intrinsic policy reasoning underlying the regulation may remain unchanged, yet its institutional operability disappears once the relevant authority withdraws validation. The conflict reveals the existence of multiple overlapping validation regimes governing the same domain of action (Mashaw, 1983).

Economic governance also demonstrates such conflicts through regulatory jurisdiction disputes. Financial instruments validated within one regulatory framework may become invalid when evaluated under another jurisdiction's regulatory standards. The intrinsic economic structure of the instrument remains unchanged, yet its institutional operability varies depending on the admission regime governing the relevant regulatory domain (Carruthers and Stinchcombe, 1999). These conflicts reveal that responsibility within institutional systems is structured through hierarchies of validation authority. When multiple authorities possess competing admission regimes, responsibility is redistributed according to the hierarchy that ultimately determines institutional admissibility. Actions authorized under one regime may become invalid once a higher authority withdraws recognition. Responsibility therefore follows the structure of institutional validation rather than the intrinsic properties of the actions themselves.

The analysis therefore clarifies the mechanism through which validation reshapes responsibility within social systems. Institutional systems regulate action through admission procedures that determine which entities may produce recognized consequences. Once validation has been granted, responsibility shifts from substantive evaluation to procedural compliance within the recognized framework. Conflicts between authorities arise when competing validation regimes govern the same domain of action. In such cases, institutional operability depends on which authority ultimately controls the admission structure governing the domain.

4. Explicit Non-Claims, Limits, And Falsification Conditions

The argument advanced in this article specifies validation as the binding condition of operative reality within institutional systems. This claim establishes a structural explanation of institutional operability but does not assert that validation replaces or subsumes other categories frequently used in institutional analysis. The framework therefore requires explicit clarification of its analytical limits. In particular, validation must be distinguished from concepts such as legitimacy, consensus, audit, and epistemic truth, which operate at different explanatory levels within social theory.

First, the argument does not equate validation with legitimacy. Legitimacy concerns normative acceptance of authority within social orders. Institutional actors may regard decisions as legitimate because they conform to shared values, moral expectations, or cultural norms. Validation, by contrast, refers to the procedural admission through which entities become authorized participants within institutional decision structures. An entity may be validated without being widely regarded as legitimate, and legitimacy may persist even when institutional validation has been withdrawn.

The two concepts therefore operate at distinct analytical levels: legitimacy concerns normative justification, whereas validation concerns procedural admissibility within institutional systems (Suchman, 1995). Second, validation must not be confused with social consensus. Consensus refers to the convergence of beliefs or judgments among members of a community. Institutional systems frequently operate in the absence of consensus, relying instead on procedural rules that authorize particular actors to make binding decisions despite ongoing disagreement. The admission structures governing institutional participation therefore function independently of collective agreement.

Validation determines which entities may generate institutional consequences even when consensus remains absent (Habermas, 2006). Third, the argument does not reduce validation to audit procedures or monitoring systems. Audits operate as mechanisms for verifying compliance with existing institutional rules. Validation precedes such monitoring mechanisms by determining which entities may enter the domain of regulated participation in the first place. Audit systems therefore function within established validation regimes rather than constituting the mechanism that generates operative status itself (Power, 2003).

Fourth, the framework does not claim that institutional validation guarantees epistemic truth. Scientific, legal, and administrative institutions frequently validate claims or decisions whose intrinsic accuracy remains contested. Validation determines whether claims may circulate within institutional communication networks; epistemic truth concerns whether those claims correspond to empirical or logical standards of correctness. Institutional operability therefore cannot be reduced to epistemic adequacy. The distinction between institutional recognition and epistemic reliability has been widely documented within studies of scientific knowledge production and boundary formation. Clarifying these non-equivalences establishes the analytical boundaries of the proposed framework. Validation operates as a structural mechanism governing institutional admissibility, while legitimacy, consensus, audit, and truth operate as evaluative or interpretive categories that may influence, but do not determine, the admission process itself.

The analytical limits of the framework also specify the conditions under which the argument could be falsified. The central claim would fail if empirical evidence demonstrated that institutional operability consistently follows intrinsic adequacy rather than admission status. In such cases, entities possessing strong intrinsic properties would reliably produce institutional consequences regardless of admission procedures. Alternatively, the argument would fail if institutional systems were shown to operate

without identifiable admission structures regulating participation. If institutional decisions occurred independently of validation procedures, the concept of operative reality proposed here would lack explanatory necessity. Empirical falsification could therefore arise under three observable conditions. First, if institutional actors were able to generate binding consequences within a domain without passing through identifiable admission procedures, the admission-based explanation of operability would collapse. Second, if intrinsic adequacy alone systematically determined whether entities could produce institutional consequences, the distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality would become analytically redundant.

Third, if the withdrawal of institutional validation failed to alter the operative capacity of entities within a domain, the diagnostic role attributed to invalidation would no longer hold. These falsification conditions anchor the framework within empirically testable institutional processes rather than within purely normative speculation. Institutional systems provide numerous observable sites in which validation procedures regulate participation, including professional accreditation, regulatory approval systems, judicial jurisdiction, and scientific publication gatekeeping. The persistence of admission mechanisms across these domains supports the structural interpretation proposed here, while also identifying the empirical terrain within which the framework must remain accountable.

The analytical limits therefore perform a methodological function within the argument. By distinguishing validation from adjacent concepts and specifying observable falsification conditions, the framework integrates its explanatory claims within the broader theoretical traditions of social ontology and institutional analysis. The purpose of this clarification is not to extend the concept of validation into a universal explanation of social order, but to identify a specific structural mechanism governing institutional operability within organized systems of authority and recognition.

Conclusion

Institutional systems organize action through admission structures that regulate participation, not through direct verification of intrinsic truth. The analysis developed in this article demonstrates that institutional operability depends on validation regimes that determine whether entities are permitted to generate consequences within governed domains. Intrinsic properties determine what entities are capable of doing; validation determines whether those capacities are institutionally admissible. The distinction between intrinsic reality and operative reality therefore clarifies a structural feature of organized social systems: entities may retain their intrinsic constitution while losing the authorization required to function within institutional decision structures. The argument contributes to ongoing debates in social ontology and institutional theory by identifying validation as the operative mechanism linking recognition, authority, and institutional consequence. Existing scholarship has demonstrated how institutional facts depend on collective recognition and authority structures. The present analysis specifies the procedural mechanism through which such recognition becomes operational: institutional admission procedures that regulate which entities may participate in decision systems capable of enforceable recognition. By formalizing operative reality as a distinct analytical category, the article provides a conceptual framework for explaining how institutional systems stabilize action through admission regimes rather than through direct evaluation of intrinsic adequacy. The implications of this framework extend across multiple domains of social research. In legal systems, the distinction clarifies how jurisdictional authority and procedural admissibility determine the operative force of legal acts independently of their

intrinsic reasoning. In public governance, it explains how regulatory compliance and procedural authorization structure responsibility within administrative decision-making. In scientific institutions, it illuminates how editorial recognition and disciplinary gatekeeping regulate the circulation of knowledge claims within communication networks. Across these domains, institutional systems function by controlling admission to operative participation rather than by guaranteeing epistemic correctness. Recognizing operative reality as an analytical category therefore strengthens the conceptual vocabulary available for the study of institutional authority, recognition, and governance. Institutional systems maintain stability not by resolving disagreements over truth but by regulating which entities are permitted to act within recognized domains. Validation regimes define the boundaries of this operative field. By identifying validation as the binding condition governing institutional admissibility, the analysis clarifies how organized social systems coordinate action, allocate responsibility, and stabilize decision processes under conditions of persistent epistemic uncertainty.

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