Working paper

Organizational Responses to Conflicting Logics and their Implications for Field-Level Change

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Abstract

Recent studies acknowledge that institutional change can start from within the organization in a bottom-up way until the entire organizational field is transformed. This theory building study adds to this new understanding of institutional change by examining the effects of organizational responses to conflicting logics in terms of creating field-level change. Organizations respond to conflicting logics through compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation, among other strategies. Here, I theorize how these foundational organizational responses can lead to institutional change. I develop systematic predictions in the form of propositions that capture the effect of organizational responses to conflicting logics on field-level change. I suggest that organizational responses create change by increasing or decreasing field fragmentation, the degree of formal structuring and centralization. By connecting organizational responses back to the field, I advance recent scholarly work on institutional change as a product of organizational actions.

Key words: conflicting logics, organizational responses, field structure, institutional change

Introduction

Organizational response strategies when confronting conflicting logics can cause field-level change or maintenance. For example, the oil industry has responded to the conflict between profit maximization (shareholder logic) and climate change mitigation (sustainability logic) through several strategies including climate change denial. As a result, the fossil fuels industry's influence has contributed to a suppression of the sustainability logic and granting of salience to the shareholder logic for several decades (Nyberg et al., 2023). Nevertheless, in recent years, a logic shift has occurred as the sustainability logic garnered a critical mass of support (Furnari, 2018) from various constituents that oil companies cannot ignore anymore. By 2021, most oil companies had formulated carbon emission reduction targets, although companies still decouple their public communication from their industrial practices and continue to lobby against climate legislation. Hence, organizational responses to conflicting institutional demands can influence field-level change or maintenance.

In support of this assertion, Seo & Creed (2002) and Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury (2012) conclude that opportunities for change can arise from the interstices of conflicting institutional demands. Hence, Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta & Lounsbury (2011) call for institutional organization scholarship to examine the consequences of organizational responses to conflicting logics on the field. Although Pache & Santos (2021) attempt to answer this call, their work focuses on implications of organizational responses on organizational efficiency or effectiveness. The effects of organizational responses on the field remain unclear.

There is however, a growing body of literature which acknowledges that field-level change can be influenced by organizational-level change (e.g. Gray, Purdy & Ansari, 2015; Smets, Morris & Greenwood, 2012; York, Hargrave & Pacheco, 2016). This understanding of change is described as a novel mode of theorizing institutional change (Micelotta, Lounsbury & Greenwood (2017) which requires further attention. In this study, I contribute to this pathway of investigation by bridging the gap between organizational responses to conflicting logics and institutional change. Smets et al. (2012: 878) describe this gap as a "less developed account of change [that] focuses on the triggering role of endogenous field level contradictions”. Here I investigate how organizational responses to conflicting logics influence field-level change?’

I proceed to build on two perspectives from within institutional theory. I draw from the organizational responses and the organizational fields perspectives to build theory about the influence of responses on field structure. I combine these perspectives and predict how organizational responses can cause alterations to field structure resulting in institutional change (Micelotta et al., 2017). By doing so, I contribute to institutional theory by showing how institutional change can occur because of organizational efforts to protect their status quo. This approach differs from the traditional view of institutional change as a product of heroic efforts of privileged institutional actors (DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). I conclude by highlighting theoretical implications and emerging avenues for future research in this field.

Theoretical Foundation

I follow Scott's (1995) definition that institutions are normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive structures that provide collective meaning and stability to social behavior. For the purposes of this study, logics can be understood as macro-level belief systems that are available to organizations for shaping cognition and decision making (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, 2004). Hence, logics provide “taken for granted social prescriptions” (Battilana & Dorado, 2010: 1420) to which organizations should conform in order to meet expectations and legitimacy goals (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). I define institutional change to be the adjustments in the architecture and relationships between organizations and other field constituents (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990). According to Scott (2001), these changes comprise of either (a) the formation of a new institution, the birth of a new logic or the development of a new governance structure, (b) deinstitutionalization of an existing logic or governance structure, and/or (c) re-institutionalization (replacement) of an existing logic or governance structure. In this paper, my investigation of institutional change focuses on the changes in logic arrangements rather than transformations of the institution itself.

The processes of institutional change are known to develop through various mechanisms which include institutional disruption from exogenous shocks (Clemens & Cook, 1999; Hoffman, 1999), endogenous institutional contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002), intraorganizational processes that in turn affect field-level processes (Pache & Santos, 2010) and through praxis or "common sense routines of everyday life" (Powell & Colyvas, 2008: 276). Here, I focus on institutional change that results from response strategies to conflicting logics at the organizational level. I do so by bridging the gap between organizational responses and organizational fields. Figure 1 shows the two theoretical perspectives that I attempt to merge to develop a theory of how institutional change arises because of organizational action. In the following sub-sections, I elaborate on the different constructs that fall under each of the two theoretical perspectives.

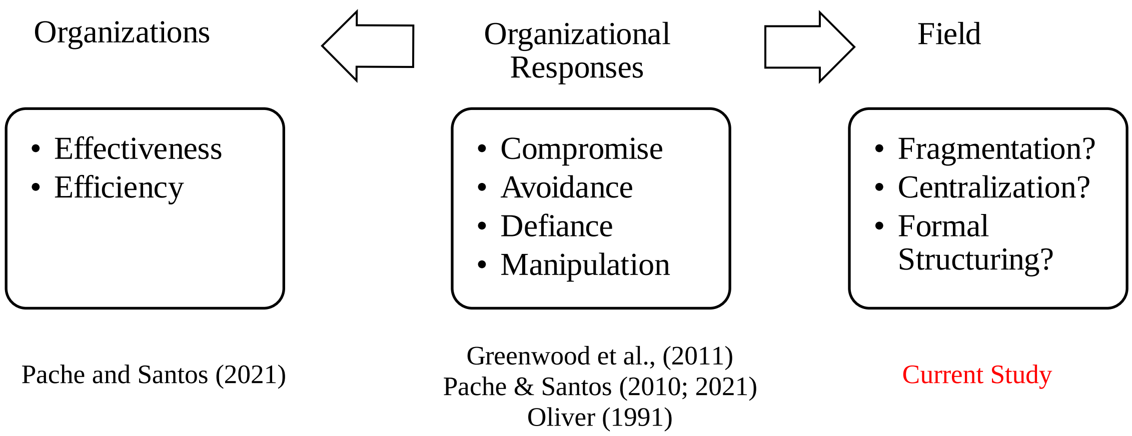

Figure 1: Organizational responses to conflicting logics, effects on the responding organizations and effects on the field.

Emergence of Conflicting logics and Organizational Responses

Logics can multiply in institutional fields through several mechanisms. For example, multiple logics are inherent in most organizations due to multiple rationalities within these organizations (Schedler & Rüegg-Stürm, 2014). Multiple logics also arise when organizations are trapped between the influence of global cultural trends and the need to stay aligned with local environmental norms and values (Almandoz, Marquis & Cheely, 2017). For instance, pressing global issues such as climate change, human rights and sustainability may interfere with local fields (Furnari, 2018).

Multiple logics can either be reconcilable or incompatible. Many organizations grapple with balancing the market logic and the sustainability logic and some find the two logics reconcilable while others do not (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Orlitzky, Schmidt & Rynes, 2003). Inevitably, when multiple logics impose incompatible prescriptions, conflicting logics arise for organizations (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2011).

Organizations confronted with conflicting logics respond in several ways. Pache & Santos (2010) and (2021) provide a systematic theory for predicting organizational responses to conflicting logics. They posit that organizations respond through either compromise, avoidance, defiance, or manipulation. Pache and Santos build their work upon Oliver's (1991) typology of organizational responses to institutional processes, although excluding one of Oliver's suggested responses, acquiescence, arguing that this strategy is not applicable to conflicting logics.

Oliver's (1991) collection of response strategies that organizations adopt when confronting conflicting logics is not exhaustive. Literature on multiple rationalities shows that managers may also employ polarization, avoidance, exploitation, and/or tolerance to deal with multiple rationalities (Schedler & Rüegg-Stürm, 2014). Although these rationalities differ from logics in that they are cognitive operations for recognizing and assessing situations, both rationalities and logics render organizations pluralistic, hence amenable to the same response strategies. In addition, several studies from the strategic management domain highlight other response strategies. For example, as part of their investigation into organizational responses to intra-conflicting logics (i.e. contradictions arising within the same institutional order), Meyer and Höllerer (2016) point to ambiguity and neutralization as alternative response strategies.

Micelotta et al., (2017) argue that the study on organizational responses to conflicting logics is still expanding. This expansion is attributed to the emergence of new institutional logics. For instance, Bertels and Lawrence (2016) conducted a study on Aboriginal schools in Canada in which the authors highlight a new logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness. They argue that the repertoire of organizational responses provided by Oliver (1991) and further supported by Pache and Santos (2010) does not apply to emerging institutional logics. Instead, Bertels and Lawrence (2016) outline a new set of responses namely advocacy, reinterpretation, integration, isolation that are unique to their study. Nevertheless, I adopt Oliver's typology considering its seminal nature and applicability to a wide range of traditional industries. I argue that Oliver's typology is ground-breaking and has influenced many studies since its dissemination. Further, Pache and Santos' (2021) assert that this repertoire of responses, after 30 years, is even more relevant than before as conflicting logics are increasing due to the influence of global issues that interfere with local field structures.

Field Structure

A 'field' is the collection of institutional actors interacting more fatefully and frequently within a particular community of meaning than they do with actors from outside that community (Scott, 2001). Fields may include any constituents able to impose coercive, mimetic, or normative influence on an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 1991). Hence, field constituents may range from government, sources of funding, trade and professional associations, critical exchange partners, any special interest groups, and the public.

Fields also possess a unique structure. The structure of fields can be compared according to the degree of fragmentation, formal structuring/rationalization, and centralization/unification (Figure 1). Greenwood et al. (2011) assert that these dimensions offer a more nuanced approach for analyzing the relationship between field structure and conflicting logics.

Field fragmentation is the number of uncoordinated institutional constituents critical to an organization for its legitimacy and access to resources (Greenwood et al., 2011). According to Pache and Santos (2010), fields are fragmented through the coexistence of uncoordinated actors carrying different institutional prescriptions. Also, fragmentation alone has the potential to increase conflicting logics (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Formal structuring refers to the degree by which different institutional demands are formally or informally organized. Formal structuring is critical because the level of conflicting logics is a function of whether demands originate from "formally organized interests, sovereigns, and constituency groups, as opposed to environments made up of less formally organized groups, communities, or associations" (Meyer, Scott & Strang, 1987: 188). However, there is a paucity of empirical literature linking formal structuring at field-level and conflicting logics.

Centralization refers to the hierarchical power structure of field level institutional constituents. Centralization results in the standardization of organizational forms as well as the reduction of conflicting logics (Greenwood et al., 2011). Meyer et al., (1987) posit that centralization renders the environment more unified, organizational rules clearer, better specified, more uniform and more integrated. Where there is high centralization, dominant actors can enforce compliance. Also, field level actors can work out competing demands at a higher level thereby reducing complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011). Conversely, Greenwood et al. (2011) assert that low centralization amplifies conflicting logics by exposing organizations to competing and authoritative institutional demands. This assertion conforms with Pache and Santos’ (2010) argument that fields with moderate decentralization have a higher probability of exposing organizations to conflicting demands.

Based on these premises, I proceed to systematically connect organizational responses to possible changes in field structure (Figure 1). As highlighted earlier, my inquiry focuses on ‘how organizational responses to conflicting logics influence institutional change at the field level?’ To answer this question, I investigate how fragmentation, formal structuring and centralization change in response to compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation.

Theory Development

Building on the repertoire of responses suggested by Pache and Santos (2010) and (2021), I examine how compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation affect field structure. My investigation focuses on three key functions of field structure: fragmentation, degree of formal structuring and centralization. I systematically theorize how each response strategy may influence each field construct. Table 1 illustrates the mechanism by which different response strategies affect field structure resulting in new institutional arrangements. First, organizations facing conflicting logics develop a particular perception. Second, organizations respond according to this perception. Third, the adopted response strategy generates field-level dynamics that transform the field resulting in new institutional arrangements. The mechanisms that I observe suggest that organizational responses create institutional change by increasing or decreasing, fragmentation, degree of formal structuring and centralization.

Table 1: Organizational responses to conflicting logics and their effects on field structure.

Organizational Response	**Effect on field structure**			**New institutional Arrangement**
	Fragmentation	**Centralization**	**Formalization**	
Compromise	Increase	Increase	Increase	Pluralistic field dominated by one hybrid logic
Avoidance (Detected)	Decrease	Increase	Increase	Field dominated by one logic
Defiance	Increase	Increase	Increase	Field dominated by one logic
Manipulation	Decrease	Increase	Increase	Field dominated by one logic
Manipulation (Unsuccessful)	Increase	Increase	Decrease	Pluralistic field

Compromise

When organizations find themselves confronted with conflicting logics, they may opt to balance or placate the expectations of multiple institutional constituents. Organizations also accommodate institutional elements or negotiate with institutional stakeholders (Oliver, 1991). To achieve compromise, organizations can combine multiple, potentially conflicting, institutional templates (Pache and Santos 2010). Hence, the process of balancing, placating, and accommodating various logic elements accords organizations with partial conformity to conflicting demands. However, these strategies are employed only when institutional referents are open to hybridity, or conflicting logics are perceived to be manageable (Pache & Santos, 2021).

Organizations may, thus, employ compromise strategies against either purely contradictory logic (Battilana et al., 2017; Pache & Thornton, 2020) or conflicting, yet complementary, logics (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Smets et al., 2015). Such situations of conflicting, yet complementary, logics include ethnographic accounts of Stone City drug court (McPherson & Sauder, 2013) and Lloyd’s reinsurance trading company (Smets et al., 2015). McPherson and Sauder's (2013) study shows that drug court professionals innovatively combine their own logics with those of others to manage complexity. The authors attribute this success in balancing conflicting logics to the ability of professionals to adapt to and negotiate the available resources to solve problems. Similarly, Smets et al., (2015) illustrate how Lloyd's reinsurance balance conflicting, yet complementary, logics successfully. According to this ethnographic account, individuals can balance logics through segmenting, bridging, and demarcating elements of conflicting logics. In this way, actors dynamically reconcile coexisting logics and maintain their distinction while benefiting from their independence. Lastly, Smets et al. (2015) show how conflicting logics become institutionalized through compromising strategies. Therefore, compromising strategies on conflicting, yet complementary, logics allow for logic coexistence, thereby causing no change on field structure.

In cases of purely contradictory logics, compromise results in hybrid organizational forms (Battilana et al., 2017; Pache & Thornton, 2020). For example, Battilana et al., (2017) demonstrate how hybrid organizations are formed through patterns similar to cultural hybridization. This conceptualization views hybridization as the combination and blending of different cultural elements (Waring, 2015). The process of blending cultural elements begins with individual interpretive efforts which become adopted at the organizational level (Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006). Eventually, blended organizational level cultures can lead to hybrid logics at the field level (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010; Tan & Wang, 2011). This view shows that hybridization enacted at the organizational level can result in hybridization at the field-level.

Organizational change through ambidexterity and organizational hybrids, respectively further translates to changes at the field level (Smets et al., 2012; York et al., 2016). For example, York et al.'s (2016) study of Colorado wind energy shows how multiple logic hybridization steps alter field structure. They demonstrate that proponents of seemingly incompatible logics of 'ecologizing' and economizing could engage in compromising and reframing to initiate logic hybridization. The resulting hybrid logic reduced field centralization such that wind energy firms could operate in ways that blended elements of these previously contradictory logics. The product of this hybridization process was a blended field-level logic which the authors described as "rules of action, interaction, and interpretation that integrate the goals of previously incompatible logics through material forms, practices, and governance arrangements" (York et al., 2016: 580). Therefore, compromise strategies against purely contradictory logics can promote the blending of logics and coordination of institutional actors. This blending of logics results in the formation of new organizational forms and, hence, in an increase in field fragmentation. Therefore:

Proposition 1(a): Compromise strategies directed at purely contradictory logics increase field fragmentation.

Centralization produces a more unified environment, with clearer organizational rules that are more uniform and integrated (Meyer et al., 1987). Haveman and Rao (1997) illustrate compromising tactics through an account of organizational and institutional co-evolution in the savings and loan industry. They show how founders of thrift banks developed hybrid organizational forms that combined attributes of competing models. These blended forms co-evolved with a hybrid institutional logic that subsequently dominated the field. Hence, a field where previously separate institutional logics are hybridized, and respective constituents are coordinated, becomes more centralized. Hybridization enables coordination among the "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, values, assumptions, rules and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: 804). As a result, the field tends to become more unified with clearer organizational rules that are also better specified, more uniform and more integrated (Meyer et al., 1987).

Formation of hybrid organizational forms and hybrid field-level logics, however, does not necessarily result in the complete disappearance of legacy organizations. Gümüsay, Smets, and Morris (2020) demonstrate this phenomenon through a study of Islamic banks in Germany, which are hybrid organizations in that they respond to both religious and market logics, but religious congregations and traditional banks remain despite logic hybridization. Nonetheless, I argue that such blended hybrid logics gain salience over individual legacy logics as they produce a clear hierarchical power structure of field-level institutional constituents. As a result, centralization results in the standardization of organizational forms as well as the reduction of complexity among logics (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Hence:

Proposition 1(b): Compromise strategies directed at purely contradictory logics increase the degree of centralization.

Similarly, formal structuring is a function of the nature of sources of institutional pressure which can be either formally or informally organized groups (Meyer et al., 1987). Thus, examining the driving force behind a new hybridized logic is necessary to understand the effect of compromise on the degree of formal structuring. For example, York et al.'s (2016) study of Colorado wind energy shows that hybridization allows firms to operate effectively after the blending of elements from two previously contradictory logics. Further, the authors show how creation of a new field level logic results in an environmentally relevant sector supported by policy makers. Compromising strategies may, thus, result in field-level structures that are supported by formally organized groups such as policy makers. Therefore:

Proposition 1(c): Compromise strategies directed at purely contradictory logics increase the degree of formal structuring.

Avoidance

Organizations can also respond to conflicting logics by avoidance, employing tactics such as concealing, buffering, or escaping (Oliver, 1991). Through the process of concealing, organizations disguise conformity, whereas they loosen institutional attachments when buffering. Organizations implement the ‘escape’ strategy by changing their goals, activities, or domains. Concealing inappropriate behavior and rejecting expected behavior may raise ethical issues and exposes organizations to the risk of losing legitimacy (MacLean & Behnam, 2010). Hence, avoidance is adopted when organizations anticipate low scrutiny from institutional referents or when organizations do not depend on those referents for critical resources (Pache & Santos, 2010). Since avoidance thrives on concealing non-conformity, this strategy is difficult to adopt when all institutional referents are internally represented. As a result, organizations tend to avoid only in situations when one institutional referent at most is represented within the organization (Pache & Santos, 2010).

One widely documented practice of avoidance is decoupling. Through decoupling organizations separate action from structure and proceed to claim conformity to institutional demands when in reality they do not (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). For instance, Crilly, Zollo & Hansen (2012) show how companies adopt Corporate Social Responsibility policies without changing their internal processes. According to this study companies achieve avoidance by limiting their Corporate Social Responsibility to public relations and communication. As a result, decoupling can have positive implications for organizations by affording organizations legitimacy without full conformity (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). Such legitimacy may lead to strategic gains such as superior financial performance. For example, symbolic organizational actions can generate positive stockholder reactions while deterring more substantive governance reforms. Westphal and Zajac (1998) demonstrates this phenomenon through a study of stock market reactions to symbolic governance mechanisms. In addition, Meyer and Rowan (1977) assert that decoupling internal structure from external pressures enables organizations to maintain internal efficiency when external pressures threaten organizational performance.

Another account of avoidance is given by Kieser (2011) examining the long term relationship between the logics of rigor and relevance in management science. Kieser shows how business schools respond to the institutional pressure for more practically relevant and less theoretically rigorous research. Kieser argues that business schools manage this conflict by separating the social spheres associated with each logic and symbolically conforming to one of the conflicting demands. Kieser demonstrates that competing logics can survive in the long term only through decoupling and decoupling is, thus, a mechanism that explains the "coexistence of competing logics" Kieser (2011: 245). Hence, given that successful avoidance practices promote logic coexistence over a long time, I argue that undetected avoidance will have little to no effect on field structure.

Such avoidance strategies can nevertheless be detected and result in serious organizational and field consequences. A particularly popular, recent case of avoidance is Volkswagen's (VW) emissions scandal which became public in 2015. VW was confronted with the conflict of conforming to institutional pressure for environmental responsibility while having to maximize profits. The company decided to conceal actual practice through deceptive communication (Jung & Sharon, 2019; Welch, 2019). When this corporate scandal of public deceit came to light, VW suffered far-reaching financial, reputational, legal, and managerial consequences (Gaim, Clegg & Cunha, 2021). Apart from negative organizational implications, the VW scandal also affected the field. The widespread loss of legitimacy across the industry sector also affected other automakers such as Audi and Porsche. Regulators tightened the screening of diesel engines, thereby affecting vehicle producers, auto parts manufacturers and diesel technology firms alike (Gaim et al., 2021). Other automakers and vehicle dealerships had to contend with inventories of tainted cars and grappled with the stigma that 'haunted' diesel technology in general. The resulting tightening of emission regulations as well as several lawsuits (which VW agreed to settle) show how the sustainability logic was gaining dominance over the market logic.

The VW scandal had far-reaching consequences for stakeholders beyond the auto industry, adversely affecting people and organizations. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency, the California Air Resources Board, and researchers from West Virginia University began to raise environmental and health concerns. These groups noted that deceiving the public about true emissions meant a release of tons of pollutants which could lead to respiratory problems and premature death (Gaim et al., 2021). The emergence of constituents raising health concerns, in addition to the corresponding environmental and legal concerns, signify the multiplication of constituents in the field. These constituents were unequivocally organized in fighting against and advocating for reprimanding the losing (economic) logic. Hence, when avoidance fails as a strategy, institutional referents counter-attacking the avoiding organization may multiply and unite, while constituents under the resented logic may face serious reprisals, which could constitute an existential threat. These dynamics emphasize how the field may become less fragmented and I, therefore, propose that:

Proposition 2(a): Unsuccessful avoidance strategies decrease field fragmentation.

Failed avoidance strategies can also give salience to the resented logic while eliminating any room for organizations to conform to other logics. Of course, multiple logics usually remain at play after the rise of a new, dominant logic in an institutional field (Sonpar, Handelman & Dastmalchian, 2009; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011). Although this is the case in VW's emission scandal, the state of the field showed no evident signs of a continued relevance of the market logic. Hence, even if the market logic continued to exist, it was no longer visible in the field. This notable submergence of the market logic to dominate the field points to an increase in field centralization by the prevailing sustainability logic.

Similarly, the exposition, shaming, and suppression of one logic together with its defeated proponents resulted in a field that became more centralized. As posited by Meyer et al., (1987), a centralized field is more unified, has clearer organizational rules, is better specified, more uniform and more integrated. In this particular field and example, sustainable business became the only way to conduct business. Hence:

Proposition 2 (b): Unsuccessful avoidance strategies increase the degree of field centralization.

The widely publicized, public defeat of VW, due to the exposition of its unethical pursuit of profit maximization, resulted in the suppression of the market logic. This also meant that only ethical business practice could continue as regulators, customers and other value chain members strove to safeguard their interests against further deception. As a result, the field became dominated by only formal authority and business acumen. Hence:

Proposition 2(c): Unsuccessful avoidance strategies increase the degree of field formalization.

Defiance

Organizations defy institutional demands by either dismissing, challenging, or attacking the sources of those demands (Oliver, 1991). Dismissing means organizations ignore explicit norms and values. By challenging, organizations contest rules and requirements. When organizations attack, they assault the sources of institutional pressure. Defiance strategies are considered risky and, therefore, are less commonly used by organizations. Defiance strategies are usually short-lived or serve as a transitory stage from status quo to a new organizational or institutional form (Pache & Santos, 2021). Pache & Santos (2010) point out that defiance as an organizational response only works when invoked against relatively weak institutional referents. This notion corroborates Meyer & Rowan's (1977) argument that organizations are in constant motion with powerful actors changing institutionalized conditions. Hence, the presence of powerful organizations and weak referents must enable institutional change through defiance.

Defiance can award organizations with legitimacy when they gain support from constituents which also resent the same institutional demands. Elsbach & Sutton (1992) and Helms & Patterson (2014) document such positive outcomes of defiance on social movement organizations and mixed martial arts (MMA), respectively. Elsbach and Sutton (1992) show that organizations can acquire legitimacy through illegal actions. The authors demonstrate how illegal actions such as disruption of filming, church, and state events as well as blocking of roads and bridges performed by two social movement organizations became endorsed by key constituents. In their study, two social movement organizations namely *Earth First!* and *ACT UP*, called for change through unconventional, inappropriate, and illegitimate tactics. However, these actions created legitimacy dilemmas for the organizations. Nevertheless, the subsequent publicity bolstered the organizations' reputation among a few constituents that supported such controversial actions. By managing this publicity appropriately, the two organizations eventually acquired legitimacy from the broader societal segment.

Similarly, Helms and Patterson (2014) show how organizational actors may respond to stigma, resulting in the acceptance of stigmatized organizations by relevant audiences. The authors examined MMA organizations and audiences such as doctors and journalists who defied economic and social sanctions imposed on MMA and further supported the sport. These actors gained audience support by co-opting stigmatizing labels to attract the attention of target audiences and then solicit support from those audiences. The actors also used stigmatizing labels to correct unfavorable perceptions of MMA.

Defiant strategies can also be successful when organizations are able to frame strategies in a manner aligned with a dominant institutional logic. For example, Rhee & Fiss (2014) analyze how firms framed the adoption of the poison pill in the US. Poison pill refers to defense strategies that companies can adopt to avoid hostile takeover by activist investors, competitors, or any potential acquirers. According to Rhee and Fiss (2014) framing this practice as a gain associated with a widely accepted institutional template results in positive stock market reactions. On the other hand, efforts from opposing speakers lead to negative reactions by the markets. Thus, defiance strategies can accord organizations with endorsement and support.

The creation of active money management within the US mutual funds industry provides an illustration of successful defiance strategies. Lounsbury and Crumley (2007) show how active money management proponents could defy political resistance to establish a new practice in the US mutual funds industry. According to their findings, funds that initiated active money management innovatively challenged traditional norms of money management that had dominated the industry for years (Lounsbury & Crumley (2007). Initially, this new practice faced resistance from Boston-based and other incumbent funds which supported conservative investment. Active money management proponents then re-theorized the mutual fund money management field using concepts such as risk to incorporate the new practice. Eventually, active money management gained legitimacy in the mutual funds field. Also, active money management strategies co-existed alongside traditional norms of money management, such that the field became more crowded. Hence:

Proposition 3(a): Defiance strategies increase field fragmentation.

Defiance strategies may also take the shape of social movements. As posited by Snow (2004), social movements are collective efforts meant to challenge institutional or cultural domains so as to effect change in various levels of social life. These movements can take the form of identity movements, whereby movement participants oppose dominant cultural codes. Identity movements also consist of a communal 'we-feeling' sustained through movement member interactions and expressed through cultural materials such as narratives, names, rituals, and symbols (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). One example is the institutional change account in Toque Ville (Rao et al., 2003). In this case study, institutional actors faced a dilemma between conforming to a logic of classical cuisine or a logic of nouvelle cuisine. Actors managed to dump negative feedback on the existing logic (classical) through sociopolitical legitimacy of activists, theorization, defection of peers and subsequent reputational gains on defectors. The result of these identity movements by French chefs was the replacement of the traditional cuisine logic and its role identity by the nouvelle cuisine logic. Collectively, these accounts show that when defiance strategies are successful, previous tensions are worked out and a clear hierarchy in terms of logic dominance is established. As a result, the field becomes more unified, organizational rules clearer, better specified, more uniform and more integrated (Meyer et al., 1987). Hence:

Proposition 3(b): Defiance strategies increase centralization.

In theory, defiance might not seem to affect the degree of formal structuring positively because this strategy relies on attacking, dismissing, and challenging sources of institutional pressure (Oliver, 1991). Hence, the new organizational forms and field structure are bound to contradict the shared meaning of legitimacy. Legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper and appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574). Counterintuitively, all the cases analyzed above indicate that defiance strategies can end up affording organizations with legitimacy from constituents that were previously on the opposing side. For instance, earlier I refer to studies by Elsbach and Sutton (1992) and Helms and Patterson (2014), which document evidence of legitimacy gains regardless of prior controversial practices by social movement and MMA organizations. The new institutional arrangements in these cases were supported by formal groups or sovereigns within the respective fields.

One might argue that the above cases simply illustrate a shift in allegiance to conflicting logics and not necessarily a change from informal to formal organization. I counter-argue that the shift in allegiance to a previously resented logic signifies an increase in the number of formally organized groups or sovereigns that support the winning logic. The silencing of opposing voices also produces the same effect. For instance, in the 1990s, the US oil and automotive industries first built a dominant coalition within the sector and moved on to challenge the science underpinning climate change (Levy & Egan, 2003). The result of these defying efforts was the gaining of salience of fossil fuel usage, a move that formal sovereigns including powerful political allies in the US Congress temporarily allowed to win. These dynamics suggest that there is an increase in formal support or decrease in ‘opposing’ formal support than prior to the employment of defiance strategies. Hence:

Proposition 3 (c): Defiance strategies increase the degree of formal structuring.

Defiance in other contextual settings, however, such as the manufacturing industry, can have negative implications. For example, Lamin & Zaheer (2012) show the negative implications of defiance through a study of responsible sourcing in the manufacturing industry. The authors demonstrate that defiance can invite negative reactions from the public, while failing to attract positive reactions from shareholders. In addition, society members often generalize deviant behavior by one organization to other organizations possessing similar characteristics. Jonsson, Greve and Fujiwara-Greve (2009) give evidence of this phenomenon through a case study of two scandals by a Swedish insurance firm. Top managers of the firm, Scandia AB were reportedly involved in diversion of assets and misallocation of real estate properties. These scandals ended up affecting other insurance firms which possessed similar characteristics. This case illustrates failed defiance strategies which also resulted in the spread of legitimacy loss to other organizations in the same field. Hence, unsuccessful defiance negatively affects defiant organizations but may not change institutional prescriptions that organizations seek to defy. Ultimately, when defiant strategies fail, field structure remains unchanged.

Manipulation

Organizations manipulate by co-opting, influencing, or controlling sources of institutional demands (Oliver, 1991). According to Oliver (1991), co-opting involves importing key constituents, whereas influencing refers to the shaping of values and criteria. Oliver (1991) defines controlling as the dominating of influential constituents and processes. The attempt by organizations to change problematic institutional demands enables them to redefine rules and contribute towards institutional innovation and change. For instance, a common manipulation strategy in the fossil fuel industry is lobbying. In the 2018 election campaign period, fossil fuel companies contributed US$84 million to US Congressional candidates so as to encourage these decision makers to accommodate fossil fuel industry interests and vote against environmental policies (Goldberg et al., 2020). Similarly, a study of election campaign contributions in the US by Peoples (2010) showed that political action committees (PACs) responsible for pooling campaign contributions always influenced a similarity in the voting of lawmakers. This study relied on a dataset covering the period 1991 to 2006, showing that there was a causal relationship between voting behavior and PAC contributions among US House of Representatives. Thus, organizations actively manipulate through lobbying policy makers who will accommodate the interests of lobbying organizations against the opposing logics.

Pache and Santos (2021) suggest that manipulative strategies are employable under two conditions. First, manipulation works when organizations perceive institutional referents to be relatively malleable and susceptible to influence. Second, manipulation is employable when the field possesses high ambiguity allowing for institutional entrepreneurship. For example, elite accounting organizations once transformed field level legitimacy criteria and future organizational economic performance in their field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). To accomplish this change, the accounting firms introduced a new organizational form in a sector that is highly regulated. The firms owed this achievement to their exposure to alternative, international organizational forms.

The case of manipulative strategies by proponents of fracking for shale gas in the United Kingdom (UK) provides similar insights (Nyberg, Wright & Kirk, 2017). This case study investigates the justifications for (dis)continuing fracking through four parliamentary debates in the UK. Proponents of fracking justified the practice on economic grounds while opponents disputed fracking by highlighting effects on climate, the natural environment and health. Proponents of fracking advanced their arguments using discursive strategies, which aimed to promote their interests and the interests of others. By way of example, proponents argued that with depleting oil/gas reserves in the North Sea, without fracking, the UK would move from a major producer to a significant importer. They also justified fracking by pointing to the volatile political relationship between the UK and its sources of oil/gas such as Russia and the Middle Eastern energy providers. Further, proponents supported their argument highlighting how fracking would bolster economic growth and job creation. To counter opposing sentiments, proponents also framed shale gas as a cleaner gas than coal.

Conversely, opponents of fracking such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), climate scientists and local community groups emphasized the dangers of fracking for the environment. For instance, they pointed out that although shale gas was cleaner during combustion, the extraction process would release fugitive gases as well as methane. The total emissions would, thus, render shale gas production as unclean. Opponents also highlighted how adopting fracking would deter future investments in cleaner energy alternatives, such as solar and wind. Finally, opponents pointed to associated, negative implications for local communities such as water pollution and seismic activity.

The corresponding parliamentary inquiry resulted in field-level change which North (1990) and Ostrom (1990) describe as adjustments to the architecture and relationships between organizations and other field constituents. The result of this debate was the establishment of a hierarchy of logics. In this hierarchy, the UK government focused on a market-oriented context for exploiting the resource rather than environmental concerns. This was a success on the part of organizations that adopted manipulative strategies to influence policy. Hence, when successful, manipulation results in institutional change. Institutional change may also materialize in the form of elimination or coordination of previously contradictory logics. Elimination of some logics or coordination of previously contradictory logics results in subsequent elimination or coordination of respective constituents that carried the affected logics. In Nyberg et al.'s (2017) study, government dissuaded public concerns about fracking by promising government oversight. As a result, government eliminated pressure from sources such as protestors, local community groups and NGOs. Hence:

Proposition 4(a): Manipulative strategies decrease fragmentation.

Minimization of fragmentation causes the field to become more unified, organizational rules clearer and better specified, as well as more integrated (Meyer et al., 1987). The UK government, for instance, created a hierarchy of logics, making it clear that economic benefits of fracking would dominate over environmental concerns (Nyberg et al., 2017). In a similar fashion, fossil fuel hegemony has been constructed in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the US (Nyberg et al., 2023). In a hegemonic construction, institutional actors engage in a political contest aimed at forging a collective and formal world view among all societal classes and groups (Gramsci (1971). For instance, through a range of political activities, fossil fuel companies have managed to manipulate public policy and enabled the dominance of fossil fuel usage. To do so, companies may employ tactics such as political campaigns focused on sidelining renewable energies (Wright et al., 2021), lobbying and funding of politicians (Brulle, 2018) and founding of think tanks and social movements that support the industry (Dunlap & McCright, 2011). The result of these manipulative activities has been the hegemonization of fossil fuel dependency, disguised under corporate capitalism over a transition to a less carbon intensive economy. Although the public now appreciates the link between burning fossil fuels and climate change, failure to dramatically move away from fossil fuels indicates the strength of the dominance of the shareholder logic in the fossil fuel industry. Hence, the dominance of this logic through manipulative tactics shows that:

Proposition 4(b): Manipulative strategies increase the degree of centralization.

Manipulative strategies typically thrive on co-opting, influencing, or controlling sources of institutional pressure (Oliver, 1991). Manipulative strategies employed by ExxonMobil in the US, for instance, and organizations advocating for fracking in the UK were targeted at policy making processes. In other jurisdictions, through hegemonic political activities, the fossil fuel industry has both gained and maintained the support of key institutional constituents including governments and political allies (Nyberg et al., 2023). Further, Mitchelle (2013) outlined how political activities such as lobbying, political campaigns, and funded social movements have engrossed major political parties and garnered their support for fossil fuel expansion. In another example, fossil fuel advocates have promoted the adoption of methane gas, dubbed as 'natural gas,' as a transition fuel towards future decarbonization (Nyberg et al., 2023). The political work done in this area has received echoes from government officials interested in the growth of the fossil fuels industry. Ultimately, and despite its higher potential warming impact and its extraction associated with fugitive emissions, methane has become widely accepted as a cleaner fossil fuel option (Bomberg, 2017). Consequently, when manipulative efforts are successful, they result in the creation of new formal institutional arrangements or the gaining and maintaining of formal institutional support. Hence:

Proposition 4 (c): Manipulative strategies increase the degree of formal structuring.

Institutional change through manipulative strategies does not always work, however. Micelotta et al. (2017) discuss the challenging nature of changing institutional norms and how very few such institutional change projects succeed. For example, Tracey, Phillips & Jarvis (2011) show how combining a for-profit with non-profit institutional logics was successful, although the resulting organization later on collapsed. Similarly, MacKay & Munro (2012) show how ExxonMobil and Greenpeace engaged in information 'warfare' over climate change using manipulative strategies. ExxonMobil funded groups skeptical of climate change (labelled as NGOs) and policy think tanks to fight the science supporting climate change. Conversely, Greenpeace leveraged counter attacks aimed at showing legislators that ExxonMobil's 'scientific' reports did not follow established science. Greenpeace also showed how the reports were merely a weapon for preempting regulation and influencing public perception.

While this dispute on climate science raged, economists contributed to opposing policies that could slow global warming. For example, Franta (2021) traces groups of influential economics consultants that were hired by oil companies to estimate climate policy costs. The economists inflated predicted costs and ignored policy benefits in their analyses. Again, their work was frequently portrayed as 'independent' and independent of funding by oil companies. For this reason, the arguments provided by economists received credibility from the National Academies report, resulting in the continued use of coal as a primary source of energy under the Reagan administration (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). However, during the same period of climate change denial, multiple organizations opposing climate skeptics also arose. Therefore, manipulation, though unsuccessful, caused further fragmentation of the field through multiplication of constituents either supporting or fighting the contested logic. For example, the emergence of Green Peace and 360.org occurred during the failed manipulative efforts of ExxonMobil (MacKay & Munro, 2012). In the case of continuing climate change debates, a new societal expectation emerged as oil companies are now being compelled to compensate for historical damages caused by decades of deliberate climate change denial. This societal expectation is supported by twenty-one US states signifying a new set of institutional constituents entering the field (Morris & Thomas, 2021). Hence:

Proposition 5(a): Unsuccessful manipulation strategies increase field fragmentation.

Failed manipulative strategies increase fragmentation. Increasing fragmentation causes the field to become less unified, organizational rules become less clear, poorly specified, less uniform and, also, less integrated (Meyer et al., 1987). Nyberg et al., (2023) discuss how fossil fuel companies may try to construct shared interests with those opposed to fossil fuel exploitation by promising to supply cheap energy and managing associated environmental concerns. As part of this process, fossil fuel organizations may attempt to co-opt environmental organizations such as NGOs to dampen or incorporate potential criticism. In such cases, fossil fuel companies fund NGOs and occupy the role of setting project goals for the environmental groups that they fund (Girei, 2016). One such example is WWF's Earth Hour Event of 2007. This event initially involved turning off electricity by businesses and households for one hour on a specific date, an effort which subsequently evolved into an awareness campaign. The event also became a major fundraiser for WWF and much of this financial support came from emission-intensive companies like Toyota, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton, Origin Energy, Vale, among others.

Not all environmental groups, however, buy into such tactics of co-opted fundraising. There are groups that that refuse to be co-opted in such a manner. Such groups may then be labelled as extremists. I argue that this leads to reinforced antagonism between constituents of conflicting logics, thereby producing a less centralized field. Hence:

Proposition 5(b): Unsuccessful manipulation strategies decrease the degree of centralization.

Manipulative strategies may thrive and rely on co-opting, influencing, or controlling sources of institutional pressure. When such strategies fail, the sources of institutional pressure, e.g. policy-making bodies, remain unchanged, while the manipulating organization loses legitimacy. This strategy, therefore, results in the creation or maintenance of formal institutional arrangements. Hence:

Proposition 5(c): Unsuccessful manipulation strategies increase the degree of formal structuring.

Discussion

Although pathways through which institutional change occurs have been previously explored, much work has focused on the top-down work of institutional entrepreneurs. This understanding of change explains how institutional entrepreneurs leverage their power and position to create or alter existing institutions (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Change, however, may also occur from within organizations transforming the field in a bottom-up direction. As Micelotta et al. (2017) point out, this bottom-up pathway is "still [relatively] novel and offers many exciting opportunities to examine how institutional change may be triggered by micro-level events and pragmatic responses to conflicting logics." My study sought to contribute to this change pathway by systematically extending organizational responses to conflicting logics to possible changes at the field level.

There is, however, a convergence point between the top-down and bottom-up approaches to institutional change. According to Pache and Santos (2021), manipulation is akin to institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009) since both practices involve active attempts to alter institutions. Nonetheless, Hardy and Maguire (2008) argue that, although institutional entrepreneurship involves maintaining or disrupting institutions, this work is more understood as responsible for institution building and change (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Manipulation, therefore, merges the two approaches, as this practice reflects organizational attempts to maintain institutional status and disrupt or hinder pressure for change. These attributes are more observable in the manipulative efforts of oil companies from the UK and the US, which aimed at maintaining the salience of a market logic over a sustainability logic. In addition, the defiance and avoidance strategies examined here reveal organizational tendency to maintain institutional arrangements and resist conformity to other logics.

My study also corroborates the paradox of embedded agency (Holm, 1995). This paradox questions how actors embedded in institutions can change the same institutions that influence them. Fields characterized by institutional contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002) or conflicting logics (Greenwood et al., 2011) enable reflexivity in organizations. Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue & Hinings, (2017) suggest that this reflexivity moves actors to adopt action that is not fully embedded. Eventually, actors proceed to either partially conform, completely decouple their actions, openly defy or work to manipulate sources of contradictions (Oliver, 1991;Pache & Santos, 2021; Pache & Santos, 2010). Hence, actors are able to change institutions by disentangling themselves from the institutions before responding in ways that protect their situations. However, as I have shown, such response strategies can then have consequences that may alter field level arrangements.

The predicted field level changes may, however, not be permanent, due to continuous dynamism within fields. For example, Sonpar et al. (2009) and van Gestel and Hillebrand (2011) assert that the stability of field level structures is never guaranteed. Instead, the salience of competing demands is often altered by shifts in status rankings. They also posit that multiple logics remain at play after the rise of a dominant logic in an institutional field. Another dynamic behavior is illustrated by Haack Schoeneborn & Wickert, (2012) who show empirically that organizations may, over time, substantially adopt policies that, previously, they only adopted symbolically. According to their study, organizations manage to shift from symbolic to substantive adoption through organizational adaptation. These dynamics can trigger rearrangements to field structure. Thus, there is constant dynamism within fields such that the field level consequences of organizational responses are bound to be in constant dynamism too.

Several instances of conflicting logics show that grand challenge objectives are affected during the different contestations. For example, manipulation by oil companies resulted in the delay of climate policy in the US (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). During the delay, the market logic dominated over the sustainability logic for several decades. Similarly, manipulative strategies employed by proponents of fracking in the UK resulted in a hierarchy of logics that gave salience to the market logic over the sustainability logic. Nyberg et al., (2017) further assert that the dynamics in the UK parliament illustrate the depth of energy policy contestations. These dynamics also illustrate the difficulties surrounding the potential of renewable energy technologies to challenge existing business models. Lastly, the diesel emissions scandal by VW shows how avoidance allows organizations to conceal information on actual practices from the public. Such practices, when undetected, allow logics to coexist over an extended period, contributing to much derailment of efforts on tackling grand challenges. Hence, this study provides managers with an enhanced understanding of the societal implications of their choices of response strategies when facing conflicting logics.

Future Directions

My study assumes that conditions necessary to propagate change are satisfied before organizational responses can cause field level change. However, studies on institutional entrepreneurship point to power and position being important for institutional actors to propagate change. For instance, Fligstein (2008) asserts that new institutions are built by powerful actors who aim to create rules that stabilize their situation against that of other actors. Additionally, Hardy and Maguire (2008) posit that institutional change can be propagated by powerful actors occupying dominant positions in fields. In an HIV/AIDS advocacy study in Canada, Maguire et al., (2004) found that change was enabled by actors occupying subject positions that allowed them to exercise power. Due to their central position, these actors were able to bridge stakeholders and access resources. Peripheral, and less dominant, actors may also initiate change, however. For example, the institutionalization of recycling practices was driven by activist groups such as non-governmental organizations (Lounsbury, Ventresca & Hirsch, 2003). Lastly, Hardy and Maguire (2008) contend that field state is associated with the likelihood of institutional entrepreneurship. Fligstein (1997) distinguishes field states as emerging, mature, and stable or in crisis. Faced with this range of conditions, therefore, we require a deeper understanding of the circumstances that enable institutional change in a bottom-up manner.

Future studies should empirically investigate how organizational responses affect the fight to solve societal grand challenges. This may be achieved through sustainability performance assessments of companies that adopt certain responses to complexity. For example, future studies may examine how companies that routinely adopt compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation as their chosen response strategies perform in terms of carbon emissions. This is an important future direction, as Wooten and Hoffman (2017) show that we have not yet grasped how the process of field development and erosion contributes to societal challenges like climate change.

Conclusion

Our understanding of how the actions of individuals or organizations influence institutional change remains limited. While a few studies explored this complex topic previously, a paucity of systematic theory for predicting field-level effects of organizational actions remained. In this study, I addressed this gap by developing a model that ties organizational responses to conflicting logics with organizational field structure. I have shown how organizational responses influence field-level change and I count this development to be a useful contribution to theory on institutional change processes.

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