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Engaging with Grand Challenges: An Institutional Logics Perspective

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Abstract

The institutional logics perspective has the explanatory power and potential to further contribute to our understanding of some of the most pressing societal concerns of our time. In this article, we develop the logics perspective along four analytical dimensions – macro-level positioning, contextuality, temporality and value plurality – which, we argue, can be leveraged to research and address grand challenges. We elaborate the currency of these dimensions in the context of the grand challenge of climate change. In doing so, we demonstrate the overall value of a logics perspective for engaging grand challenges.

Keywords

climate change, grand challenges, institutional logics, institutional theory, organizational institutionalism

Introduction

We live in troubled times. For thousands of years, humanity has sustained itself from the world's resources. Recently, however, excessive

production and consumption has threatened the 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al., 2009) that sustain our existence, resulting in catastrophes such as the current climate crisis (IPCC, 2014) and biodiversity loss (Díaz et al., 2019).

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At the same time, populism, extremism and the polarization of societies are on the rise (Foroughi, Gabriel, & Fotaki, 2019; Suddaby, Ganzin, & Minkus, 2017) and social cohesion is under threat, with digital technologies allowing orchestrated misinformation campaigns to aggravate and challenge peace, democracy and social stability (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018; d'Ancona, 2017). In the context of these and other major societal concerns, such as inequality, large-scale migration and public health, it is apposite to ask what is the role of institutional theory in general, and in this case institutional logics in particular, in furthering our understanding of these so-called 'grand challenges'.

Some scholars have argued that institutionalists have demonstrated a profound lack of critical engagement with and questioning of fundamental societal inequities and power differentials (Alvesson, Hallett, & Spicer, 2019; Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Munir, 2020; Willmott, 2015). Others have pointed to the inherent potential that exists within the institutional logics perspective to address global issues (e.g. Lounsbury & Wang, 2020). As we reflect on these debates, we see significant potential for the institutional logics lens to contribute to a better understanding of grand challenges. However, for this potential to be realized we advocate for a focused development of the logics perspective across four analytical dimensions.

Societal grand challenges, constituting fundamental, social, economic and political concerns, have been captured in various forms of discourse and framing, most notably perhaps in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These grand challenges are 'specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation' (Grand Challenges Canada, 2011, p. iv). To provide a focal point to our work, we direct our attention to one such grand challenge; climate change.

With this article, we contribute to current conversations on institutional logics and elaborate on the distinct affordances of logics for

studying grand challenges. Detailed insights into the institutional logics perspective (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012, 2017) and its link with adjacent fields (e.g. Durand & Thornton, 2018) have been well covered elsewhere. Recently, in this journal, Lounsbury and Wang (2020) have refreshed this literature by considering how an institutional logics perspective can engage with challenges to global society. Without seeking to replicate such previous work, we follow on from these scholars by engaging in a theoretical exercise of resurfacing, developing and interrogating four analytical dimensions of the logics perspective with the potential to extend our understanding of grand challenges. Reinvigorating these dimensions has also a transformative potential to both leverage a logics perspective for researching grand challenges as well as to observe and imagine social reality differently.

As we engaged with the literature and thought about how the institutional logics perspective can inform our understanding of climate change in particular and grand challenges more generally, we identified four dimensions that seemed particularly apt: *macro-level positioning*, *contextuality*, *temporality* and *value plurality*. We find these to be constitutive of the logics perspective but also to have been somewhat neglected within the literature. This neglect has reinforced certain institutional myths about social reality, making it difficult for us to 'think differently', which is necessary for studying the complexities of grand challenges. In the following sections, we first provide a short historical outline of institutional logics before elaborating each of the four dimensions. We then link the dimensions to the study of grand challenges with a particular focus on climate change.

Looking Back to Move Forward

Institutional theory has become 'one of the most vibrant theories of the last decades' in management and organization studies (Meyer & Höllerer, 2014, p. 1221), with institutional

logics being ‘one of the key terms in the institutional vocabulary’ (Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence, & Meyer, 2017, p. 10). Logics are the ‘socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’ (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). While the institutional logics concept has become well established as a comprehensive approach in institutional analysis, there has been an emerging debate over its increasingly widespread and uncritical application (Willmott, 2015). The logics approach has been criticized as a dominating theoretical perspective that crowds out alternative explanations, while at the same time not offering insights into key concerns of our time (Alvesson et al., 2019; Alvesson & Spicer, 2019).

To put this criticism into perspective, it is important to understand the historical evolution of institutional logics. The inspiration behind the development of institutional logics can be traced back to work by Selznick (1957) and Stinchcombe (1965) with their focus on commitment to diverse values and interests. However, it was the early work of neo-institutional theorists including Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Zucker (1977) who arguably provided the most important foundations for logics with their emphasis on the importance of culture and cognition in institutional analysis. Moving away from rational actor models of classical economists, Meyer and Rowan (1977) indicated that, in order to survive, organizations need to conform to the societally rationalized requirements of their external environment with the ultimate goal of achieving legitimacy – independent of the efficacy of such processes and practices. Put differently, organizations exist in systems of taken-for-granted rules, often expressed as rationalized myths, that enjoy popular acceptance regardless of their accuracy or appropriateness. Zucker (1977) also highlighted the taken-for-granted nature of institutions at a micro level and emphasized the role of cultural persistence as a measure of institutionalization.

The work of Meyer, Rowan and Zucker was developed, most notably by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Tolbert and Zucker (1983), who provided something of an intellectual antidote to a predominant rationalist and functionalist mode of reasoning. However, it was Friedland and Alford’s (1991) seminal piece that reunited thinking around the role of culture and cognition by outlining ‘institutional logics’. In their book chapter, the authors define logics as ‘a set of material practices and symbolic constructions [that] constitute organizing principles’ (p. 248) for institutions or ‘supraorganizational patterns of human activity’ (p. 234). Logics, for them, were rules, practices and symbols that guide institutions and social meaning. Thus, logics were positioned as not only different from, but also more powerful than, the institutions they *shape* and infuse with meaning. For example, the institution ‘capitalism’ is underpinned by an institutional logic – comprising symbols and practices – that guides (and is shaped by – see Thornton, 2004) human interaction with the institution. Each core institution of society has a central logic that guides human behaviour (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

With the help of influential pieces such as, among others, Haveman and Rao (1997), Thornton and Ocasio (1999) and Scott, Ruef, Mendel and Caronna (2000), Friedland and Alford’s (1991) work was quickly moved into the spotlight and onto the centre court of institutional analysis. Institutional logics as a perspective and concept not only offered a bridge between institutions and agency (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) but because it was rather easy to grasp and conceptually delimit, it also offered a seemingly straightforward application to a variety of empirical phenomena.

Over the next three decades, institutional logics soared in popularity, dominating studies across and beyond institutional theory. In terms of output, logics are a success story. The emergence of influential and highly cited publications, most notably perhaps Thornton and Ocasio (2008) and Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012), maintained the cohesive theoretical development of institutional logics

and provided important boosts in interest across disciplines, in particular sociology and organization theory.

As it became increasingly popular, the number of issues analysed through the institutional logics lens has grown enormously, ranging from topics as diverse as mutual funds (Lounsbury, 2002), health care organizations (Scott et al., 2000), Spanish manufacturing firms (Greenwood, Díaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010), Bolivian microfinance organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), French cuisine (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), cities (Weisenfeld & Hauerwaas, 2018) and medical education (Dunn & Jones, 2010).

Given this vast collection of studies, it is perhaps not surprising that institutional theorists and organization theorists more generally have at times become tired of reading studies using the institutional logics perspective. Reviewers deem contributions increasingly slim and, with the variety and quantity of published articles on the topic, it is difficult to overview theoretical developments. In Thornton and Ocasio's (2008, p. 99) words, in the process of achieving its deserved fame and influence, the logics concept has also been 'distorted and overextended'. While some of this criticism is well founded, at the same time we are optimistic as to the logics perspective's continued explanatory potential. We feel it still offers tremendous analytical and societal value, as we will demonstrate with our focus on grand challenges and the example of climate change. Theoretically, we focus here on four key analytical dimensions of logics that have been more or less implicitly associated with the concept from its birth but have been recently overlooked. These dimensions emerged both through our analysis of research on institutional logics and from our reflections on how to develop further its explanatory potential for the study of grand challenges.

Reflections on Four Dimensions

The four dimensions of institutional logics to which we attend – macro-level positioning, contextuality, temporality and value plurality

– have not always been to the fore, but offer great potential for furthering our understanding of grand challenges. First, the notion of macro-level positioning links organizing principles to macro-level orders and embeds them in the interinstitutional system. Second, contextuality takes into account the plurality of logics and their interaction across interinstitutional systems. Third, temporality is about the consideration of changing logics and logic constellations. Finally, value plurality brings back attention to the value-ladenness of logics. These four dimensions allow us to relate back to some of the original ideas of the seminal piece by Friedland and Alford (1991) as well as to advance a new agenda for logics research. In what follows, we first define and contextualize each dimension, and then proceed to discuss how individually and together they can be leveraged for research on grand challenges.

Macro-level positioning

As has been well noted, the origin of much institutional logics work refers to Friedland and Alford's book chapter in 1991. They locate logics in a societal context as central 'organizing principles' that entail 'a set of material practices and symbolic constructions' (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248). Logics, then, constitute the 'rules of the game' (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 802). Particularly, with the advent of modernity and its societal division of labour (Durkheim, 1964), such an ordering concept has helped us to explain the functioning of modern societies and its organizing institutions. As the concept has been increasingly employed, institutional logics has become something of a 'buzz word' in institutional theory and beyond (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 99). This is reflected in the increasing variety of slightly differing definitions (Kirchner, 2012) including logics as structuring axioms (Thornton et al., 2012) and logics as reasoning (McPherson & Sauder, 2013).

While for Friedland and Alford (1991) logics were bases for understanding macro-level societal ordering and organizing, the term

institutional logic has also sometimes become applied when a coherent set of organizing practices and principles is observed. McPherson and Sauder (2013), for example, identify what they depict as four ideal types of institutional logics in a court: criminal punishment, rehabilitation, community accountability and efficiency. These are not linked to underlying macro-level institutional orders and are ‘focused less directly on the constitutive aspects of logics’ (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020, p. 9). This makes it a complementary perspective to Friedland and Alford (1991), as McPherson and Sauder (2013) conceptualize institutional logics as logics of reasoning. However, to align with how institutional logics were originally conceived, we note that logics of reasoning would need to be connected to the macro level. For example, in the case of McPherson and Sauder’s work, the sub-logic of criminal punishment could be linked to the state, rehabilitation to professions, community accountability to community, and efficiency to the market logic.

Many influential and highly cited articles have, in fact, linked their observations back to macro-level logics (e.g. Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Greenwood et al., 2010; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015). This is also in line with recent work integrating the macro and micro, from inhabited institutionalism and ecosystems (DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, 2020) to practice-driven institutionalism (Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012) as well as with calls to consider the ‘even more macro’ in what Steele, Toubiana and Greenwood (2019) call integrative institutionalism.

When we attend to this macro-level positioning and the embeddedness of a given logic within the interinstitutional system, it alerts us in the context of climate change to the importance of an environmental logic. In 1991, Friedland and Alford (p. 232) specified five institutional orders each with a distinct logic: ‘capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christian religion’. Thornton et al. (2012, p. 73) noted three further orders: community, corporation and profession, and withdrew democracy. Similar to Weber’s

(2009) value spheres, Luhmann’s (1995) functional or subsystems and Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) orders of worth, these interweaving orders are understood to capture the social structures of modern societies.

Inspired by Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) green order, we assert however that there is a further central and distinct macro-level ordering principle that forms part of the interinstitutional system, namely the environment. We are not the first to claim this, as others have noted such an emerging green or environmental logic (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Grinevich, Huber, Karataş-Özkan, & Yavuz, 2019; Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019). We contend however that this logic is central to explain contemporary societal movements and transformations, ideas and discourse. It effectively presents a pervasive domain with material and symbolic patterns that offer meaning to some social and societal phenomena. The environmental logic is about caring for the commons and future generations, connecting humans with the natural environment, a human–ecosphere symbiosis as a socio-ecological ecosystem, as well as renewability and sustainability (Ansari, Wijan, & Gray, 2013; Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019; Weisenfeld & Hauerwaas, 2018). It resonates with arguments of breaking down ‘the age-old distinction between nature and society, between natural history and human history’ (Hoffman, 2019), making the environmental logic actually a societal one. Thereby it contributes towards a broadened perspective on society, particularly by considering ecological issues such as climate change.

Contextuality

Our second dimension relates to the issue of contextuality. Logics are instantiated, that is, they are situated and contextualized. While some influential articles have engaged with settings outside the global North (e.g. Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Smith & Besharov, 2019), the literature as a whole has been Northern/Western-centric. In fact, when Friedland and Alford (1991, p. 232) wrote about ‘central

institutions of the contemporary capitalist West', they were acutely aware of their analytical exclusion, yet may have not foreseen the biased theoretical developments of the logics perspective thereafter. Ironically, their concluding thought is applicable to this concern: 'the social sciences risk becoming ideologies of the institutions they study' (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 260). Connecting to this concern, we suggest that we risk depicting, privileging and universalizing a Northern-centric institutional scaffold. Furthermore, even when they are engaged with, non-Northern contexts are often misconceived with a 'Northern lens' and pejoratively labelled as being devoid of institutions (Bothello, Nason, & Schnyder, 2019; Mair, Martí, & Ventresca, 2012). As a result, the field intellectually omits potential sources of contextual richness. To alleviate this concern, one suggestion would be to draw on postcolonial theories to examine the specific historicity of logics. At the same time, we might need to look into how countries such as China offer alternative global organizing paradigms (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020) and reflect upon the taken-for-grantedness of institutions in the North such as democracies. These institutions may be taken for granted in the field, but they should not be by scholars studying them.

The institutional logics perspective conceptually allows us to be more nuanced and emphasize that logics exist across contexts and are shaped by their local conditions and respective cultures. Multiple interinstitutional systems – such as 'the West' identified by Friedland and Alford – coexist. Each system may have a different number, type and interplay of logics. Across these systems, we can observe intra-logic plurality (Gümüşay, 2020) that needs to be captured and explicated.

Given intra-logic plurality, institutional logics look different across cultures. For instance, Tanzanians might have a different understanding of the market logic than expatriates moving into these contexts from abroad (Tsuruta, 2006). Similarly, environmental issues such as CO₂ emissions or global warming and their perceived importance and origins are influenced

by local settings and contextual interpretations. This means that within an interinstitutional system, multiple orders of the same logic can coexist and collide. We can thus see the significance of different logic-related concepts and their potential intra-institutional complexity (Meyer & Höllerer, 2016) such as the diversity within the community domain, which can for example be more or less collectivist in its manifestation. The contextually induced plurality within each institutional logic category is also relevant when considering the interaction between interinstitutional systems. Hence, we need to consider the complexity not only between logics, but also within each logic.

Furthermore, when an organization introduces a logic from outside the present interinstitutional system, it not only interplays with other logics, but there is also a broader question as to how the logic 'fits' into the entire interinstitutional system. In fact, organizations' institutional acceptance and establishment may be inhibited not because the constellation of logics causes complexity, but because any instantiation of a logic from outside the interinstitutional system comes with institutional baggage that challenges an integration into a wider institutional context. As a result, we do not only observe institutional pluralism, but pluralisms, particularly across globally connected concerns such as grand challenges.

Moreover, interinstitutional systems may also – as a whole – relate to and engage with each other. Not only do logics interact across interinstitutional systems, but also these systems are continuously in contact and exchange, for instance due to the global diffusion and standardization of practices (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2007). These kinds of systemic interactions are not commonly examined in organization studies (Gümüşay, 2020), but are prominent in discourses about postcolonialism (Jack, Westwood, Srinivas, & Sardar, 2011) as well as civilizations and international relations such as world systems theory (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020; Wallerstein, 1974). Overall then, context features both in the plurality within each institutional logic as well as in the

interaction between interinstitutional systems: logics and systems are contextual and contextualized.

Temporality

Our third dimension relates to the issue of temporality. Contemporary societies are conceived as highly differentiated and complex. They are constantly in flux, *panta rhei*. However, our approach when examining logics is often quite static. This cognitive simplification confines their analytical accuracy and strength.

For many studies the temporal stability of logics is analytically sufficient. Several central articles focus on the change of a logic constellation, not change in the logics themselves (e.g. Goodrick & Reay, 2011). Logics as constitutive principles are well established and taken for granted. An individual or a group of actors, particularly over short time frames, will find it hard if not impossible to change a logic. Still, logics are not static ordering concepts (Ocasio, Mauskapf, & Steele, 2015; Quattrone, 2015). Their firmness does not imply that they are immutable. This is an important ontological nuance. As logics are firm but malleable, we can use them to analyse large-scale institutional transformations. For instance, in many places the logic of the family moved over time from large and patriarchal to smaller and more equal. In more recent times, it has also incorporated more diverse relationship constellations such as single-sex couples.

Logics, as resilient social patterns, are thus time-bound. The temporality of logics means that we may observe – and need to reflect upon – meta-level change of an individual institutional logic and/or its interplay. Change can be both due to a transformation within a logic and the set-up of logics in an interinstitutional system. An example for the former would be the shift in the corporate logic in the United States in the 19th and 20th century (Ocasio et al., 2015). An example for the latter would be the change of the dominant logic in the global North from religion to market. The example of an environmental logic is again apt. While between the

16th and 18th centuries, the Scientific Revolution and ‘Age of Reason’ exalted the human ability to understand and control the environment, today, the ‘Age of the Anthropocene’ signals that the worldviews of the Enlightenment are no longer adequate and that there are limits to attempts to purely dominate and control interactions with the environment (Hoffman, 2019). Furthermore, its stronger presence in the public discourse has developed recently through environmental activist groups and rising global protests.

Both the change of individual logics and the change of their interplay can be evolutionary or revolutionary. The former was evolutionary in the slow demise of patriarchal family norms, and more disruptive in some cases of shifts from aristocratic to democratic states. Of course, oftentimes, change is both incremental and radical across time. For instance, the decline of the significance of the religious logic in most of Europe is a slow but constant change in the interinstitutional set-up. In contrast, the increase in religious diversity in Europe and its implications shapes the core of the religious logic, which in turn impacts the interinstitutional system. More recently, rising temperatures connect ecological and social developments leading to new types of large-scale, disruptive migration patterns through so-called climate change refugees. Again, these developments may impact the very core of logics and their underlying characteristics and significance.

For interinstitutional systems, this means that they transform due to three reasons: a new weighting and significance of particular logics; for example, one logic becoming more or less relevant for the interinstitutional system and its fields (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999); a change in the characteristics of a logic, such as the ontology of a logic being altered (Quattrone, 2015); or, a radically new selection of logics, such as one logic being integrated or excluded from an interinstitutional system. This has relevance in particular for longitudinal studies on logics as the conceptual set-up may be in flux, which implies a dynamization of the interinstitutional system and change over time.

Value plurality

Our final dimension is value plurality. We contend that logics not only provide meaning, they are created through meaning – and understood and enacted differently because they are differently understood and believed in. While most work examines how logics influence field constituents, we see the need to examine the constructedness of logics, their interplay and their substantive change. We believe that this helps us to bring their contested critical potential to the fore (Lok, 2019; Willmott, 2015).

Logics are not *a priori* logical. They have their own reasons and reasoning, which confer legitimacy onto them. They are ‘transrational’ systems (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Underlying the notion that logics are constructed orders is that they are socially created and performed. Drori (2020, p. 6) rightfully points out that ‘institutionalism has a very clear perspective on value judgements – namely, that value judgements too are context dependent and, as such, they too become the object of study’. This makes values a central concern. In fact, values, while central to original institutional writing (Selznick, 1957), need to be reinfused as a central component to our understanding of institutions (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2002; Kraatz & Flores, 2015; Kraatz, Flores, & Chandler, 2020; Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010). Whereas important for Friedland and Alford (1991) and part of Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999, p. 804) definition of logics as patterns of ‘material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules’, the role of values has been rather neglected in work on logics. This is despite the fact that logics can ‘incorporate both the macro-level influences, disregarded by old institutional theory, and the role of norms and values, of underlying reasons for action, neglected by new institutional theory with its focus on cognitive legitimacy’ (Gümüşay, 2020, p. 9).

Logics then are infused with values. The logic of the market, for instance, is neither value-neutral nor the only interpretation of a market (Gümüşay, 2018). It does not exist *a priori*, but is one interpretation of the market

logic, which is based on certain values. It could be otherwise. Similarly, the state logic based on a democratic process is a decided social order and form of government. Interpretations and enactments of logics are values-driven manifestations. The normativity of, for instance, the state logic becomes particularly apparent when there is a discourse about who is part of the electorate. In history, the right to vote has been made dependent on characteristics such as disability, gender, national identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and social status. Currently, discourse about the environment concerns not only conflicts among logics, but also questions of definitional sovereignty and different ecological futures (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019; Slawinski & Bansal, 2012; Wenzel, Krämer, Koch, & Reckwitz, 2020). Logics in their conceptualization thus have underlying normative baggage.

Further, logics are not necessarily conceptually identical in terms of their normative implications. Some logics may have what Weber (1964) would describe as more formal rationality. For example, the market, in addition to many normative implications, focuses on utility as an outcome, such as simple means–end calculations. Other logics such as the family, religion and community can be depicted as having more ‘substantive rationality’, that is, ‘a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, entirely for its own sake and independently of any prospects of external success’ (Weber, 1964, p. 115).

The interplay of logics is also not one of equal social orders. Rather, we can observe how some logics take precedence over others in certain fields and situations. At an interinstitutional system level, we may conceptualize this as logic dominance. Macro-level change may thereby occur with three potential outcomes: the set-up remains unchanged in terms of the dominant logic with a potential increase in dominance; there may be a compromise among logic advocates; or, the ordering may change, and we see a switch of dominant logics.

In addition to such a logic interplay, logics may also form and transform each other. Habermas (1987) asserts that we observe a permeation of the lifeworld through the system. In particular, the market logic is pervasive and shapes other logics such as the family, religion, community and also the environment. The rationalization of society is effectively the penetration of the market logic in all spheres of life (Power, 2019; Weber, 1904). Social orders can thus claim prevalence as meta-logics as the boundaries between logics become blurred. As the social orders we draw from are transformed, so are resulting interpretations and enactments. This has key consequences with regard to individual psychology, organizational performance and purpose, and societal cohesion. For instance, a dominating market logic may alter the family logic from solidarity to efficiency considerations for families, family businesses and policies.

In terms of theoretical grounding, logics are not mutually exclusive, as they overlap in jurisdictions and are oftentimes ‘impure’ in that they are shaped by and contain attributes of other logics. However, a logic must also be somewhat incommensurable with regard to another logic as otherwise diverse beliefs, values and meanings could be reduced to one value instead of coexisting values (Berlin, 1969). On the whole, an interinstitutional system thus does not consist of fully mutually exclusive logics. This has significant consequences for the interaction of logics. For instance, when the market logic in the global North is a market logic shaped by Christian values, then it may be more difficult for another religious logic to coexist and draw upon this market logic, with more potential for an institutional struggle (Gümüşay, Smets, & Morris, 2020).

Institutional Logics and Grand Challenges

As we noted earlier, the logics perspective offers particular strengths in addressing key societal concerns such as grand challenges. The four dimensions that we outlined above create

further opportunities to leverage its explanatory potential. The dimensions map well onto Ferraro, Etzion and Gehman’s (2015) three facets of grand challenges: complexity, uncertainty and evaluativeness. Macro-level positioning is particularly relevant for complexity and evaluativeness; contextuality links strongly to complexity; temporality engages with the challenges of uncertainty; value plurality informs evaluativeness. More generally, the four dimensions help us to rethink how to conceptualize social reality and pressing societal concerns. While we focus our discussion on climate change, we believe that informing our theorizing of logics with these dimensions in mind will be key to studying and addressing other grand challenges as well.

Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that the logics literature has not stayed silent with regard to key ecological and social concerns (e.g. Amis, Munir, & Mair, 2017; Ansari et al., 2013; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015; Misangyi, Weaver, & Elms, 2008). In line with existing work, we argue that the logics perspective needs to be closely linked to societal concerns to stay relevant. We concur with Lounsbury and Wang (2020, p. 17) that a ‘focus on institutional logics directs us . . . towards major issues of systemic power and social organization related to poverty, religious and geopolitical conflict, rising populism and fascism, dehumanization, racism, and environmental destruction’. Thus, we see a particular necessity for phenomenon-driven studies that address issues of societal impact to revive logics.

Given the current pervasiveness of climate change movements and a rising tide of organizations and governments trying to tackle this grand environmental challenge, we choose to focus on the issue of climate change to illustrate the analytical value of our four dimensions. Climate change typically refers to long-term change in weather patterns. It is ‘one of the greatest challenges we confront in the 21st century’ (Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014, p. 615). According to the United Nations’ *Framework Convention on Climate*

Change (1992) human-induced climate change constitutes ‘a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods’. In the Foreword to the IPCC report (2014, p. v), Jarraud and Steiner state that ‘human influence on the climate system is clear and growing, with impacts observed across all continents and oceans’. They highlight that observed changes are ‘unprecedented over decades and millenia’ with ‘severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems, and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system’. The science around climate change ‘points to an increase in sea surface temperature, increases in the severity of extreme weather events, declining air quality, and destabilizing natural systems due to increases in greenhouse gas emissions’ (Luber & Prudent, 2009, p. 113). Thus, climate change is a *grand* societal challenge as it is global and local in nature at the same time, affects a variety of different populations, and is intricate and complex. In the following, we reflect on how the four dimensions can help us think differently about climate change and open up avenues for future research.

Macro-level positioning and the environmental logic

We suggest two options to engage climate change based on arguments regarding the macro-level positioning of logics. First, conceiving an environmental logic as a key macro-level factor allows us to conceptualize climate change as a dispute that draws from logics such as the environment and the market. The environmental logic sets limits to expansion and thus opposes growth logics such as the market. Its inclusion in climate change discussions would widen the conceptualization of the inter-institutional system from egocentric to ecocentric or at least eco-inclusive. This connects to the performative role of scholarly work, which

can offer the language, conceptual toolkit or ‘logic’ for practitioners to think and act differently.

It is important ‘to understand where activists come from’ (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020, p. 17) and to theorize accordingly. ‘Fridays for Future’, ‘Extinction Rebellion’ and other social movements highlight the significance of an environmental logic in contemporary societies; in many countries, a Green Party brings a political focus on this issue. Environmental concerns envisaged by such groups cannot be subsumed under other logics and their respective macro-level institutional orders, such as community: they warrant a distinct logic of their own. Unlike other logics, an environmental logic instantiates a sustainable ecosphere that encompasses and balances biophysical and human needs of current and future generations. In other words, in order to be able to generalize the discourse and action around climate change, we need to be able to link this to broader, macro-level institutional orders in ways not currently apparent.

Indeed, as noted above, the conceptualization of an environmental logic has already been intimated by several scholars including Bartlett, Tywoniak and Newton (2009, p. 5), who suggested that a ‘range of practices related to climate change initiatives and the environment have been constructed, legitimated and adopted by social actors’. In other words, discourse and disputes about climate change are shaped by a system of meanings and practices (Aykut, Morena, & Foyer, 2020) which can be linked to logics. These meanings and practices have, *inter alia*, emerged due to reputational and legitimacy pressures, and because of regulatory changes requiring compliance with certain environmental standards. Importantly and in line with our earlier arguments, Bartlett and colleagues (2009) allude to the necessity of viewing climate change as a problem that pervades different levels of analysis (individual, community, organization, field and society) and emphasize that each of these levels plays a role in defining the dominant logic underpinning

climate change. Considering macro-level positioning allows us to take into account shifting social reality and deepen our understanding of how the environmental logic is societally constructed in the processes of assessing and addressing climate change. This re-emphasizes the materiality of logics as well as the relationality between humans and nature which brings a focus on the socio-material drivers and consequences of climate change.

Climate change requires engagement across macro-level orders, particularly as modern tendencies such as fragmentation, quantification, accumulation and rankings in society have aggravated the ecological challenge (Göpel, 2016; Luhmann, 2004). This opens up opportunities to examine how the market with a notion of utility (for someone) and the family with a notion of solidarity (to someone) are significant in shaping climate change discourse and action. It also brings attention to the tensions between social foundations of societies and ecological ceilings of natural resources (Raworth, 2017). The institutional logics lens thus permits us to capture conceptually the interinstitutional system as a whole, allowing us to probe more deeply into how we address grand challenges. A lower discount of future generations' utility and increased intergenerational solidarity, for instance, would significantly impact the engagement of societies with climate change.

There are many empirical contexts and cases one could draw on to examine this interplay (e.g. Hiatt, Grandy, & Lee, 2015; Schüssler, Ruling, & Wittneben, 2014). For example, 'Fridays for Future' and 350.org are both young-activist groups seeking, in different ways, to address the climate crisis from the perspective of future generations. Again, such a connection to the macro level allows us to more appropriately generalize and theorize. This approach is also in line with the notion of grand challenges implying 'multiple criteria of worth' (Ferraro et al., 2015, p. 364), which means that climate change as a complex and multi-evaluative grand challenge needs to be examined with a focus on a constellation of logics including the environment.

Contextuality, logic plurality and interacting interinstitutional systems

Capturing the contextuality of logics requires taking into account the diversity of macro-level ordering systems that shape perspectives on climate change. As George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi and Tihanyi (2016, p. 1889) note: 'Societal norms or logics may influence how participants think of the goal, whether they engage, and how they act.' In the context of climate change, for example, a Northern development organization in Indonesia may seek to combat climate change in rural regions on the island of Borneo by offering incentives to halt deforestation. To do so, the organization will have to understand, value and take into account the perceptions of local populations on climate change, the locales in which they reside, and how they may envisage the slowdown of deforestation, if indeed they believe in the reality of climate change and its links to deforestation in the first place. Otherwise, as demonstrated by another example, the Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol to support emission-reduction or emission-limitation projects in developing countries, initiatives are likely to fail – at least from the perspective of some countries (Nakhoda, Caravani, Bird, & Schalatek, 2011). In the case of CDM, which were instantiated to catalyse climate-friendly projects in low-income countries by allowing developers to generate revenue by selling 'carbon credits' or 'offsets', developers did not believe (enough) or did not care (enough) about the detrimental effects of climate change in emerging economies. As a result, they not only ignored the needs and approaches of local populations but also dismissed them as unimportant (International Rivers, 2008). As such, it is important to understand how the diverse inter-institutional systems with varying understandings of climate change interact with each other (Hoffman, 2011).

In addition, climate change is a global problem that manifests locally. The issue of climate change may not only conceptually be conceived but also empirically perceived

differently across cultures and contexts. Climate change refugees in the Pacific islands or Africa, for example, are likely to experience this grand challenge very differently from corporate managers in Europe or North America. They will each have different understandings of the issues, care about different aspects of it, and have different ways of approaching the issues they see as most relevant.

Thus, we contend that we need to be aware of intra-institutional logic plurality to better capture how climate change is understood and can be tackled. We think that it is important to answer research questions such as how grand challenges are institutionally contextualized and how different contextual understandings of grand challenges relate to each other. Research contexts to examine these questions are abundant across the world. An example is the work of GIZ, a German corporation for international cooperation, to implement the Climate Support Programme in countries such as South Africa. In the design of their approach, they work closely with local populations in order to find locally appropriate ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions resulting from extensive landfilling. There are many other organizations that seek to introduce climate change initiatives into different cultural contexts and will have to face the fact that ‘climate change’ is understood differently depending on contextual specificities including language, education and cultural belief systems.

Temporality and the resilience of interinstitutional systems

Given the temporality of institutional logics, macro-level interinstitutional system developments such as the great transformation (Polanyi, 2001) or the emergence of the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2006) should be considered when examining grand challenges. We thus need to attend to current trends in macro-level institutional orders – as well as imagined, apocalyptic and desired future scenarios and simulations (Beckert, 2016; Hoffman & Jennings, 2018; Schneidewind, 2018). These great accelerations,

boundary breaches and potential collapses encode themselves into institutions both in the present as well as the projected future.

Underlying recent developments such as populist presidential elections in the United States and Brazil or the United Kingdom’s referendum on Brexit may be fundamental institutional transformations that influence institutional logics such as state, market, community, environment and so on. Potentially permanent shifts in socio-material planetary situations for instance due to the (mis)use of natural geo-resources such as minerals and water, or gene manipulation and the reduction of crop diversity, lead to a changing nature of nature. The Covid-19 pandemic, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, civil unrest and global protests further challenge institutional structures. Furthermore, key technological trends such as digitalization need to be connected to issues of sustainability (George, Merrill, & Schillebeeckx, 2020). For example, with regard to ecological sustainability, ‘cloud’ services will intensify energy resource usage while developments in machine intelligence may codify biases (O’Neil, 2017). These varied changes of macro-level institutional orders and settings highlight the temporality of our social order and impact the engagement with grand challenges such as climate change and thus our conceptualization and theorization of the issues involved.

Researchers wishing to examine the impact of climate change face the difficulties of it being not only a complex, uncertain, multifaceted and changing phenomenon, but also an evolving construct. As grand challenges evolve, our lens may obstruct us in observing and analysing these (trans)formations if we do not take the temporality of logics into account. An example of the evolution of climate change and, as a result, the underlying environmental logic can be found in the context of Rwanda. With a focus on ‘green growth’, Rwanda has seen its environmental issues evolve, moving from deforestation to the degradation of ecosystems such as wetlands and lakes to focusing more on the rising problem of non-biodegradable plastic

and packaging (Biruta, 2016). While such issues are interlinked in the present time, they are also interlinked temporally. With a commitment to restore and protect forests, wetlands and other ecosystems, forests such as Nyungwe and Mukura have been upgraded into national parks. This has led to an influx of tourists, which has been beneficial for Rwanda's economy and yet has also heavily contributed to the rise of plastic pollution. In other words, this is an example of how climate change and the underlying logic may manifest in and be shaped by evolving issues over time.

A similar but slightly different point has been made by Ansari and colleagues (2013). Using longitudinal data, the authors tracked the evolution of the global climate change field over 40 years, showing the construction of a logic to avoid the 'tragedy of the commons', that is, the situation that in a shared resource system, individual actors act out of self-interest and without the common good in mind. They argue that it is the frame shifts of the different yet interdependent actors that shape and enable consensus over what they call the 'transnational commons logic'. In other words, this logic is not static but changing through repeated interactions between actors and their changes in perception.

The important point we take from the examples of Rwanda and the tragedy of the commons is that acknowledging and weaving into one's study the temporality of logics and the ways they come into existence and change over time are important in order to capture an issue's intricacies and complexities. Historical and longitudinal studies should thus take into account the implication of material and social changes and the dynamic nature of both logics and grand challenges over time. Such an approach links well with the grand challenge facet of uncertainty and the difficulties of engaging with and forecasting the future.

The value plurality of logics

Finally, both logics and climate change are value-laden. For instance, we could envision a

(very different) market logic that is based less on quantification, monetization and accumulation, and more on a culture of sufficiency or one that is less anthropocentric and also encompasses a protection of the natural environment. Implicit values impact the desirability and ability of climate change engagement and need to be reflected upon when actors draw from logics. Similarly, grand challenges such as climate change have an underlying set of values and beliefs that are likely to be understood and evaluated differently across audiences and jurisdictional boundaries.

Given the debate over definitions, meanings and implications, it is not surprising that both in public and scientific discourse the term climate change is often employed loosely and with ambiguity. The multiplicity of definitions and understandings is a key feature of most grand challenges and, we contend, should not be considered as an obstacle, but rather an opportunity.

Acknowledging that climate change is an issue that comes with multiple facets and factors that are of different priority is a chance to capture the complexity of the issue and relate back to one of our key points: grand challenges and the logics by which they can be captured and explored theoretically vary across systems and cultures, both in their definitions and perceptions. As expressed by Todorov (1986, p. 259):

The question of climatic change is perhaps the most complex and controversial in the entire science of meteorology. No strict criteria exist on how many dry years should occur to justify the use of the words 'climatic change'. There is no unanimous opinion and agreement among climatologists on the definition of the term climate, let alone climatic change, climatic trend or fluctuation.

This might seem alarming to many scholars and be seen as an obstacle to engage with the grand challenge theoretically. However, we think that the existence of differing definitions also makes for interesting research endeavours. What it certainly confirms is our argument that both

logics and grand challenges are value-laden: depending on the aspects one wants to highlight in the climate change debate, some definitions might be preferred over others. This should allow researchers to examine incongruences in values applied to the grand challenge of climate change. In zooming in to understand why discrepancies between empirics and theory exist, scholars can point to potentially interesting mechanisms and processes that help further our understanding of climate change. In researching grand challenges, we thus need to be aware and question the underlying values of both our theoretical constructs such as logics as well as the empirical phenomenon and the way it is perceived by different actors.

An Institutional Logics Perspective for Grand Challenges

In sum, we have outlined four dimensions of institutional logics, and the implications of these for research into grand challenges in general and climate change in particular. Table 1 presents an overview of our arguments and some indicative research considerations.

The four analytical dimensions help us to interrogate and develop our understanding and conceptualization of a given social reality, especially around grand challenges. Indeed, neglecting them depicts a biased social reality that overlooks the environment, is Northern-centric, static and market-driven. At the same time, we are aware that such dimensions can also serve to change reality performatively. In that sense, our work here is both analytically reactive and active. It takes into account the present as is – the future is already here – and also brings the future into the present – imagining and theorizing a future scenario in the present.

If not at the centre of societies, then at least in many social movements and real utopias at the fringe (Wright, 2010), we can already see a perception and enactment of reality that is closely linked to the four dimensions. These groups incorporate the

environmental logic at their core, think oftentimes holistically across contexts, take critically into account the morphability of institutions over time, and understand that societal spheres are value-laden.

Zooming out from climate change, the four analytical dimensions can also inform our thinking about other settings more generally and about other grand challenges in particular. An analysis of poverty, hunger, health, education, equality and so on (Sustainable Development Goals 1 to 5) would certainly benefit from linking the empirical situation to the overall dynamic set-up of macro-level orders, understanding the contextualized logic specificities, the malleability of logics and their associated implicit values. This would offer a more holistic conceptualization of social reality through a revised logics lens along central coordinates that need to be considered: bringing in the macro level, space and time, and the social constructedness of logics. The result would be a more fluid understanding of logics – an understanding that more closely reflects social reality and offers insights into the impetus for social change as well.

Conclusion

Grand challenges are fundamental societal concerns, and as such will affect all of us in one way or another. We believe in the explanatory power and potential of the institutional logics perspective to further contribute to our understanding of some of the most pressing issues of our time. For this, we advocate for further reflection on the four analytical dimensions: macro-level positioning, contextuality, temporality and value plurality. This, we contend, will represent a transformative institutional logics perspective in the sense that it offers implications for our thinking about grand challenges and speaks directly to policy and practice domains. It will also further open up opportunities for institutional scholars to make substantive contributions to society's most pressing concerns.

Table 1. The four analytical dimensions of logics applied to climate change.

Analytical dimensions	Macro-level positioning	Contextuality	Temporality	Value plurality
Concerns to take into consideration	Logics are not free of macro-level orders	Logics are not the same everywhere	Logics are not static	Logics are not value-free
Definition	Logics are based on macro-level institutional orders	Logics are instantiated and situated; there is intra-logic plurality	Logics are time-bound; resilient but changing	Logics are value-laden, constructed organizing principles
Particular relevance for grand challenge facet	Complexity, evaluativeness	Complexity	Uncertainty	Evaluativeness
Current analytical situation	Society narrowed (absence of environment)	Northern-centric (absence of contextuality)	Static, present-focused (absence of temporality)	Market-driven (absence of alternative values)
Future scenario	Environmental logic incorporated	Holistic and across contexts	Past-present-future inclusive	Value-ladenness acknowledged
Considerations for researching climate change	Integrate environmental logic; examine interplay of logics and their impact on climate change	More holistic capture of logic plurality to examine climate change across coexisting and interacting institutional systems	Consider logic stability and change to examine impact of macro-level institutional system developments on climate change	Take into account implicit values of how logics impact climate change engagement
Exemplary research questions	- How does the environmental logic relate to the grand challenge of climate change? - How are logics and their interplay affected by and shape climate change?	- How are grand challenges institutionally contextualized? - How do different contextual understandings of grand challenges relate to each other?	- How do new social developments impact the macro-level interinstitutional system? - How can new social developments be explained by developments in the macro-level interinstitutional system?	- How do value-laden institutional developments impact our understanding of and approach to societal grand challenges? - What are the implicit values, their origins and impact in the way logics and grand challenges are understood and engaged with?

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