



Citation for published version:

Vince, R 2019, 'Institutional Illogics: The Unconscious and Institutional Analysis', *Organization Studies*, vol. 40, no. 7, pp. 953-973. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618765866>

DOI:

[10.1177/0170840618765866](https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618765866)

Publication date:

2019

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

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Institutional Illogics: The Unconscious and Institutional Analysis

Abstract

The theme of this essay is how to engage with unconscious dynamics in our analysis of institutions. The essay clarifies the ways in which the unconscious influences institutional structures and organizational practices, and this is the main theoretical contribution to organization studies. A conceptual framework is presented that can help scholars of organizations and institutions to deepen analysis and understanding of how peoples' organizational lives can be shaped by dynamics that are beyond reason; as well as how such dynamics are embedded in social structures. The terms unconscious and institution are aligned to illustrate a new concept, 'institutional illogics'. This refers to the structuring and unsettling effects of unconscious dynamics, particularly social defenses and shared fantasies, on organizations and institutions. Examples from published, empirical papers are used to illustrate the value of the framework. The concept of illogics is intended to encourage balance alongside the influence of logics on institutional analysis.

Introduction

An impressive, recent flow of empirical research and theoretical development has enhanced our understanding of emotions and institutions (Creed et al, 2014; Fan and Zietsma, 2017; Gill and Burrow, 2017; Jarvis, 2017; Lok *et al*, 2017; Massa *et al*, 2016; Moisander, Hirsto and Fahy, 2016; Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017; Voronov and Weber, 2016; Wright, Zammuto and Liesch, 2017). Much of this work builds from Voronov and Vince's (2012) theoretical paper, but none of it engages with the part of their theory that highlighted the role of the *unconscious* in institutions. Psychoanalytic theory has been identified as an important strand for our future understanding of emotion and institutions (Voronov, 2014; Lok *et al*, 2017). It has been argued that psychoanalysis offers an 'advanced and compelling conception of human subjectivity' (Fotaki, Long and Schwartz, 2012: 1106); and that psychoanalytic theories can help to advance a 'richer comprehension of organizational functioning... by taking the effects of the unconscious into account' (Arnaud, 2012: 1130). However, the potential of the unconscious as an aspect of our ability to understand institutions has not yet been fully explored. The theme of this essay therefore, is how to engage with unconscious dynamics in our analysis of institutions.

My main theoretical contribution to organization studies is to clarify the ways in which the unconscious influences institutional structures and organizational practices. I have coined the term *institutional illogics* to represent the intersection between the unconscious and institutions. Illogics refer to the structuring and unsettling effects of unconscious dynamics, particularly social defenses and shared fantasies on organizations and institutions. Illogics are without reason, they can defy and disrupt our frames of reference, but they are also intimately connected to the everyday challenges of peoples' lives within social structures. Illogics are as powerful as the prescriptive frames that support and inform peoples' choices, language and sense of self within organizational and institutional contexts. My argument is that learning to accept and relate to unconscious dynamics within an institutional context is important because it offers an expanded perspective on how we regard institutions and our efforts within them.

Although my primary focus in this paper is to introduce and explain illogics, I am also suggesting that institutional illogics exist in relation to institutional logics. Illogics and logics are two sides of the same coin, and I argue that together they can create a deeper discussion of emotion and institutions (see Table 1). Institutional logics represent taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin frames of reference, guide actors' sense of self and identity, and provide stability and meaning (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012). These frames of reference or 'rules of the game' (Fan and Zietsma, 2017; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012) regularize behaviour and offer opportunities for agency and change (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

(Insert Table 1 here)

The term *institutional illogics* offers insight into the likelihood that our frames of reference can be illusory or nonrational despite also feeling natural or normal. Mechanisms associated with identifying illogics (outlined below) can help us to analyze unconscious dynamics, and to recognize how people are connected emotionally to institutions in ways that may be disassociated from logics. Illogics operate in the interface between the person and the organization, as an integral part of our lived experience of institutions. We feel, interpret and defend ourselves against anxieties and unknowns, as well as knowingly and unknowingly creating fantasies through our relatedness with others (French and Vince, 1999). Fantasies are

personal and social materializations of unconscious life that are deeply connected to organizational and institutional systems of conformity and control (Vince, 2014; Willmott, 2013). For example, fantasies arise in response to issues that are avoided at the same time as it seems that they are being dealt with (Baum, 2011); from defenses against differences that are feared to be destructive, even though they may be creative (Levine, 2003); and in relation to unacknowledged aspects of the self or the organization that are projected onto others (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

My theme is relevant to organization studies in general as well as to institutional analysis. I contribute to our understanding of the role of psychoanalysis in organization studies, which is (in part) ‘to demystify the illusory positivity of organizational issues and management practices’ (Arnaud, 2012: 1130). In addressing such illusions, it becomes possible to work with complex and often contradictory emotional dynamics that influence so much of our organizational lives, as well as understanding how our lives are embedded in social structures (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014). Psychoanalytic theories of organization connect with that strand of organizational institutionalism (Greenwood *et al*, 2008) with a focus on *living institutions* (Lok *et al*, 2017).

Contemporary institutional theories ‘all have come to terms with one or another version of the idea that society is made up of interested, purposive, and often rational actors’ (Meyer, 2008: 792). My argument is that such intentionality is also likely to be informed by defenses against emotion, fantasy and irrationality. The rationale for using psychoanalytic theory for institutional analysis has already been strongly argued (Voronov 2014: 12). We now need a more specific framework to analyze unconscious dynamics as part of our understanding of organizational institutionalism. The essay proceeds as follows. I briefly outline the literature and themes of a systems psychodynamic approach, which underpins my framing of illogics. I then discuss the terms unconscious and institutions, consider how they combine, and outline the dynamics that characterize their interaction. I apply the idea of illogics to three published papers to illustrate the potential value of the construct for institutional analysis. In the final section of the paper, I reflect on developing and researching institutional illogics as well as suggesting some potential research themes and implications for practice.

Systems Psychodynamics

My framework is informed by systems psychodynamic theory. I briefly outline the key themes in this area of knowledge before discussing the unconscious and institutions in more detail. Systems psychodynamics is a psychoanalytic theory of group relations and their institutional implications. A central idea of this approach is that unconscious anxieties are often reflected in organizational structure and design, which function to defend against them (Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001). The history and development of this way of thinking has been comprehensively covered elsewhere (Fraher, 2004a; Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001). However, it is particularly associated with the work of Bion (1961) who developed a theory of group mentalities ('basic assumptions') that described the unconscious processes behind group functioning and dysfunction within a social context. Contemporary thinking on systems psychodynamics is informed by a broader, psychosocial approach to organization studies (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014), which aims to reveal interconnections between psyche and society as a way of recognizing complex emotional and relational dynamics in organizations and institutions (Hoggett, 2015).

The systems psychodynamic approach addresses three themes that help us to comprehend how unconscious emotions are embedded in social order. First, *social defenses are created to manage painful anxieties and fears* (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015; Krantz, 2010), they inform attempts to 'eliminate situations that expose people to anxiety-provoking activity altogether or they insulate people from the consequences of their actions' (Krantz, 2010: 194). Social defenses protect groups of actors against anxieties inherent in a system. For example, one of the first studies to identify the functioning of defenses against anxiety in an institutional system was Menzies' (1960) study of nursing services in a general hospital. She found that organizational approaches to scheduling, decision-making and work assignment 'created a depersonalized and fragmented pattern of care. Coupled with infantilizing management practices, the system promoted dependency, ritualistic work, impersonal relationships with patients, and other characteristics that had the effect of shielding nurses from the painful anxieties stimulated by close and intimate contact with patients and their families' (Krantz, 2010: 193).

Second, *there are unconscious dynamics associated with the emotional impact of organizational roles and relations*. Systems psychodynamic theory moves beyond an

understanding of persons' organizational roles as expressions of individual personality or performance. It seeks to identify the implicit relational processes that construct persons within their roles; and to understand the unconscious functioning of roles and relations within and for the organization. For example, Fraher (2004b) examined how American commercial airline pilots' desire to carry guns post-9/11, emerged from pilots' regression to a heroic, individualistic character, fears of 'foreigners', and the role of guns in American culture as a means of taking action and restoring order. Similarly, Handy and Rowlands (2017) use systems psychodynamic theory to explore the creation and reproduction of gendered inequality within the New Zealand film industry. They describe how anxieties underpin 'a complex web of connections linking emotional, interpersonal and structural aspects of gendered inequality within project-based creative labour' (Handy and Rowlands, 2017: 20).

Third, *there is an inevitable interplay between emotions and power relations*. Systems psychodynamics helps us to engage with questions concerning how and why collective emotional dispositions come to dominate within specific organizational contexts (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002); as well as how the opposite of what is espoused can become the norm. For example, Diamond and Adams (1999) examine the psychodynamics of ethical behavior within a Department of Public Welfare that espoused an ethic of care at the same time as (unconsciously) undermining ethical behavior. People within this organization found themselves 'operating in an unfriendly and, at times, hostile work environment, often characterized by a rhetorical patina of pleasant and collegial interaction' (Diamond and Adams, 1999: 252). Similarly, Prins (2010) used systems psychodynamic theory to look at multiparty collaboration within the institutional domain of foster care. She showed how a 'false consensus' was mobilized, driven by the desire to remove asymmetries of power and resourcing; to reduce the emotional complexity of stakeholders needs; and to avoid the uncertainty of new ways of working. Emotional and political responses to collaboration thereby unwittingly undermined the potential for collaboration within the institution.

Conceptual Framework

Institutions

'Institutions comprise regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life' (Scott,

2014: 56). People within institutions are both ‘creatures of the rules and creators of them’ (Meyer, 2008: 793), they are embedded in larger institutional structures that constrain their ability to act at the same time as they can intentionally influence changes in such structures. Most studies from an institutional perspective address the organizational field or environment as the level of analysis (Greenwood *et al*, 2008), but there has also been increasing attention paid to improving comprehension of how institutions are ‘inhabited’ (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010), which refers to ‘the socially embedded, inter-dependent, relational and emotional nature of persons’ lived experience of institutional arrangements’ (Creed *et al*, 2014: 278).

There are (at least) two ways in which psychoanalytic theories of organization can be interesting to institutional theorists. First, institutionalists emphasize both ‘the larger drama rather than the individual player’ and the continuing impact of the ‘existing on the becoming’ – that persons’ actions make use of pre-existing materials, prevailing social contexts, and the cognitive and affective dimensions that shape them both (Scott, 2014: 262-263). Lok *et al* (2017) suggest that a psychoanalytic perspective offers a research approach that moves beyond a focus on the individual actor to analyze institutional micro-foundations ‘as intersubjective, as residing in transpersonal exchanges that are double embedded in systems of relationships and in institutionalized systems of meaning’ (Lok *et al*, 2017: 46). There are two different interpretations of the ‘existing’ here, one which refers to how people and practices accommodate to institutionalized structures and processes; the other that recognizes the ‘affective thrust’ (Dey, Schneider and Maier, 2016) of unconscious emotions, dynamics and processes on systems of relationships and systems of meaning. I think that studying both can provide additional depth of insight on how the existing is both knowingly and unknowingly embedded in what becomes.

For example, Baum (2011) explores the ‘larger drama’ concerning how institutions mobilize unconscious desires and anxieties in ways that create social inequality and then shape policies that do little to reduce it. He describes the approach used by US planners in relation to issues of poverty, and considers the role of unconscious emotional interests in shaping public policy. The problem he outlines arises from the tension between planners’ ethical position based on ‘the fair and honest treatment of colleagues and clients in the process of planning’ (Baum, 2011: 112) and their positioning of ‘the poor as a discrete group, isolated from the economically successful, as if poverty were somehow caused by the poor themselves, or at

least as if it could be reduced by changing only the poor' (Baum, 2011: 117). This produced a fantasy relationship underlying planners' systems of meaning, where they believe that they are 'doing good' while 'they fail to analyze housing land use, employment, income and other issues realistically or act in ways that affect these problems very much' (Baum, 2011: 119).

Second, although 'the concept of institution provides a way of examining the complex interdependence of nonrational and rational elements that together comprise any social situation' (Scott, 2014: 269), it is the rational elements that have been privileged. Scholars have been concerned with institutions as frameworks for rational or purposive action, and particularly with how organizations construct their collective rationality (socially constructed frameworks of beliefs, rules, norms) at a field level of analysis. My aim here is to balance this with a perspective on unconscious dynamics manifested through social defenses, disavowed assumptions and shared fantasies. I contribute to a relational and intra-institutional analysis by providing insights into how action and inaction can be shaped by dynamics that are beyond reason or intent. This supports attempts to understand how conscious and unconscious emotions are integral to the constant process of negotiating systemic order (Voronov, 2014). One value of analyzing institutions from a psychoanalytic perspective arises from the fact that what people bring into their institutional lives is not only rationalized, purposive or intentional. There are likely to be aspects to purposiveness that are unconscious and unwitting, that are shaped by individual and social defenses, and that are active despite being hidden from awareness.

The unconscious

The unconscious refers to mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness but that influence judgements, feelings, and behaviour. 'What is known cannot be thought, yet constitutes the foundational knowledge of oneself: the *unthought known*' (Bollas, 2007: 34). Freud considered unconscious wishes to be indestructible and timeless, always active, always present. 'Nothing can be brought to an end in the unconscious; nothing is past or forgotten' (Freud, 1911/ 2015: 180). Energies in the unconscious are *dynamic* and liable to recombine into new configurations in an active process. The unconscious is therefore continuously at work, continuously affecting behaviour, often in unexpected and unwanted ways.

There are many descriptions of the unconscious in clinical work. However, I want to use an analogy from Freud (1910), that might resonate with organizational scholars. In describing the unconscious, Freud talks of delivering a lecture and having a heckler in the audience interrupt proceedings. Several burly people evict the heckler from the audience, placing chairs against the door to ensure that the heckler cannot get back in. Even though the door is closed, the muffled protest is still audible:

‘It may very well be that the individual who has been expelled, and who has now become embittered and reckless, will cause us further trouble. It is true that he is no longer among us; we are free from his presence, from his insulting laughter and his sotto voce comments. But in some respects, nevertheless, the repression has been unsuccessful; for now, he is making an intolerable exhibition of himself outside the room, and his shouting and banging on the door with his fists interfere with my lecture even more than his bad behaviour did before’ (Freud, 1910: 26).

At the heart of this analogy is a central dynamic of the unconscious mind, a narrative description of knowledge and emotion that remains hidden from awareness and yet is still active (dynamic), still pushing for release (Frosh, 2002).

The unconscious reveals itself in language slips; in strange juxtapositions and associations; through individual and social defenses against emotion; in shared fantasies and collective ‘dreamworlds’ (Gabriel, 1995); and as part of institutional dynamics that are bound up with the reproduction of social structure and systems of domination (Voronov and Vince, 2012). It influences both creative and destructive ideas and images about what an organization is for the people who inhabit it; as well as how contradictory and powerful personal and social dynamics are created. For example, leaders may unconsciously project hated aspects of the self onto subordinates, who are then punished for representing what is despised (Vince and Mazon, 2014). It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the unconscious only influences what is dark and disturbing about behaviour in organizations. For example, Komporozos-Athanasiou and Fotaki (2015: 321) show how unconscious and preconscious imagination is ‘an inexhaustible psychosocial force driving organizations and organizing; and setting the institutionalization process into motion’ (321). Our unconscious ability to imagine, and thereby to give form to social institutions and organizations, is inseparable from our lived experience of them (Komporozos-Athanasiou and Fotaki, 2015).

Identifying Institutional Illogics

Illogics refer to the structuring and unsettling effects of unconscious dynamics; to raw organizational and social processes that do not align with a logic and that threaten to destabilize it, creating anxieties, paradoxical tensions and experiential contradictions. Institutional illogics can be identified through three inter-related dynamics: *social defenses*, *disavowed assumptions*, and *structuring fantasies*. These dynamics help people (and organizations) to deal with destabilizing structures, imposing experiential coherency onto their lives, and supporting prevailing logics. They also represent and reinforce illogics. Logics and illogics can be understood as two sides of the same coin, always in tension, yet mutually necessary. Together they create an opportunity for deeper discussion of emotion and institutions, based on the idea that institutional logics are also accomplished, paradoxically, through non-rational (unconscious) processes.

Social defenses

Social defenses both support and constrain peoples' experience in institutions. They underpin our allegiance to institutional order in ways that alleviate anxiety; and they are an emotional element of systems of control and domination that exacerbate anxiety. As I have explained above, unconscious defenses are social in the sense that they are an aspect of the structures, practices, policies and authority relations that characterize a system. Their main purpose is the collective management of anxiety and other emotions (Bain, 1998; Krantz and Gilmore, 1990). Defenses reflect patterns of relating that might, for example: arise from the systemic consequences of persistent projection onto others; assist in the collective avoidance of fears and conflicts; or give rise to shared fantasies and subsequent ways working that shape both individual and collective desires. Attempts to change structures, practices, policies and authority relations can undermine the social defense system and weaken support for individuals' psychic defenses. 'The prospect of change, then, is accompanied by the prospect of frightening emotional experience coming to the surface. This, in turn, stimulates resistance to change' (Krantz, 2010: 194). For example, Fotaki and Hyde (2015) identify organizational 'blind spots' that develop as a defense against unrealistic or failing strategy or policy goals. 'Unrealistic strategic aims mobilize and reinforce blind spots through processes of splitting,

blame and idealization, thus enabling organizations to persist with unsuccessful courses of action' (Fotaki and Hyde, 2015: 441).

Disavowed Assumptions

Defenses contribute to established power relations and patterns of domination (Hyde *et al*, 2014). Analyzing social defenses in the context of prevailing power relations 'enables an understanding of how unconscious and embodied processes operate to reproduce the social order, illustrating how domination takes place with the active (and passive) consent of the dominated, but *not* with the conscious intention of the dominant' (Dick and Nadin, 2011: 307, *original emphasis*). For example, Dick and Nadin's (2011) research in the private care sector shows how the psychological contract between employers and employees is bound up with the interests of power holders. Making an explicit link between unconscious dynamics and power in institutions can help us to interpret whether and how certain values or assumptions might be *disavowed*, which is to say, how they are denied, but continue to have an impact on institutional behavior and action.

Disavowed assumptions demonstrate a link between unconscious dynamics, political values and irrational practices. They give rise to practices that perpetuate (e.g.) detachment, exploitation or abuse that come to be accepted as natural or normal. Through the disavowal of certain assumptions or values, institutions can generate harmful practices that are recognized as normal, but that guide behavior and action that is reprehensible (Kenny, 2016). Let's not deceive ourselves (which is exactly what disavowal attempts to accomplish), harmful practices are not extraordinary dynamics within institutions, particularly those that sustain abuse under the guise of care.

For example, the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (<https://www.hiainquiry.org>) set up by the Northern Ireland Executive, published their report in January 2017 of the neglect, humiliation and abuse of children in residential care institutions, run by both Church and State, between 1922 and 1995. The report provides considerable detail on how systemic failings were built and sustained through: the normalization of commonly adopted abusive childcare practices within institutions; the condoning of abusive practices by staff in managerial positions; the encouragement or condoning of abusive practices by people in positions of responsibility for the institutions running residential services; and by the people

responsible for the inspection, oversight, policy-making or funding of the institutions (HIA Inquiry, 2017). In other words, abuses implicit within relations that inform accepted practices of 'care' are disavowed, and in this way, they become integral aspects of an institutional justification for abuse. Such responses are accepted as normal, even though in retrospect it is obvious that they are hateful.

Structuring fantasies

'Fantasy is the name given to the endless materializations of unconscious life... the mind is always active, constantly generating unconscious ideas, and it is through the lens provided by these ideas that reality is perceived' (Frosh, 2002: 51). Different psychoanalytic theories understand fantasy in different ways. Freud saw fantasy primarily as the expression of repressed desires (Freud, 1911/ 2015). For Klein, fantasies (phantasies) link feelings with objects, which allow the infant to make sense of and relate to the external world through projection and introjection (Mitchell, 1986). Klein believed that the fantasies that underpin such 'object relations' never stop playing a part in all mental life. Klein's thinking on projection has been used to comprehend unconscious dynamics at work within social systems. For example, Obholzer (1994) identifies unconscious dynamics within the UK National Health Service (NHS) that function as socially sanctioned, defensive routines against death and survival related anxieties. He shows how an unconscious 'keep-death-at-bay' service is an intimately connected yet unwanted element of 'health' services (Obholzer, 1994). Fotaki (2006) develops this further by explaining how life and death drives are unconsciously acted out in public policy formulation processes. She argues that healthcare systems provide collective protection from painful realizations of death and decay. Policies reflect the simultaneous articulation of shared aspirations and the containment of inadmissible fears, with both providing legitimacy to political projects.

For Lacan, fantasy lies at the core of subjectivity, but it is also inaccessible to the subject because it is not solely the product of a person's imagination (Lacan, 2014). It is deprived to us, because we can never consciously experience it (Žižek, 2009); it signifies a scenario promising to cover over what we individually and collectively lack. The Lacanian concept of fantasy helps us to understand how subject and organized Other become implicated in the institution and reproduction of social life. 'Lacanian theory can illuminate the (negative) dialectic between subject and organized Other and account for obedience and attachment to

organized frameworks of social life in two ways: first, by focusing on the symbolic presuppositions of authority and power; and, second, by exploring the role of fantasy and enjoyment in sustaining them and in neutralizing resistance' (Stavrakakis, 2008: 1037). From this perspective, we can start to see that fantasy also inspires many of our political projects and social choices (Fotaki, 2010; Stavrakakis, 2008). For example, Fotaki (2010) shows how public policy-making 'expresses societal fantasies originating in the imaginary strivings of the subject' (704). The fantasy of effective policy, purposeful organizations, a harmonious society all stem from 'an impossible desire for unity' (Fotaki, 2010: 710).

Following on from this insight, I use the term fantasy to describe how the unconscious is collectively expressed in organizations, as well as its structuring or political effects (Hoedemaekers and Keegan, 2010; Dey, Schneider and Maier, 2016). Fantasy is not working against social reality (because it expresses individuals' private desires) but it is integral to social reality (Stavrakakis, 2008; Glynos *et al*, 2014) – it 'reaches out to the unspoken components of social belonging' (Rose, 1998: 6). Žižek (1999) captures a powerful example of the everyday political effects of fantasy when he argues that a shared lie is often a stronger bond for a group than the truth, because a lie requires more collective emotional effort to sustain it. To put it a different way, ideas that are personally or politically expedient hold people together in groups and help to define how peoples' inner worlds are connected to both organizational and institutional systems of conformity or control. People invest in fantasies that help to sustain institutional order, to contain and limit the intensity of emotion within systems, as well as the implications of emotions in practice.

For example, Levine (2003), in exploring organizational commitment to diversity, identifies a 'fantasy of the organization as the peaceable kingdom. In this fantasy, cultural differences and the group identities through which they exist do not foster bias-related behaviour. The organization becomes the community of the diverse, the place where they live together peaceably. In the peaceable kingdom, ethnic, racial, gender, religious and class differences do not promote bias-related behaviors, as of course they have through much of human history' (Levine, 2003: 283). In this way, the fantasy of a peaceable kingdom imagines an organizational community brought together by a diverse (and therefore creative) workforce – despite, or perhaps because of, the evidence of 'human history'. It is a fantasy that discourages the idea that differences are integral to group identities and that such differences are often implicitly mobilized in the service of the institution.

Similarly, Ekman (2013) identifies a fantasy of ‘limitless potential’ in an institution, which has emotional and political effects on both managers and employees. The idea of persons’ limitless potential arises from increased relational intensity in response to the personalization of expectations. These expectations work both from above and below. Managers exploit relational intensity to try and increase employees’ productivity and consent. Employees exploit it to promote idealized images of work, where each person can be shown to be striving to do their best for the institution. Through a fantasy of limitless potential, both ‘managers and employees alike have become deeply attached to their own domination. As a consequence of this attachment, they take turns trying to seduce and control each other...’ (Ekman, 2013: 1177). The idea that shared fantasies have political implications helps us to understand how people reproduce practices and values, based on fantasmatic identification with them (Lok & Willmott, 2013).

The organizational fantasy of a ‘peaceable kingdom’ or a fantasy of the ‘limitless potential’ of people within institutions are not distorted perceptions. It is not that these fantasies are (completely) a defense against the difficulties and complexities of institutions, or that they represent a wish or an ideal concerning what the institution could or should be. Rather, to understand the role of the unconscious in institutional analysis it is important to connect with the structuring effects of fantasy, with the fact that the fantasy of a ‘peaceable kingdom’ or of ‘limitless potential’ shows us how desire and control are linked in institutions. I want to restate and reinforce the point I made above. Fantasy is not a distortion of experience; it ties together the inner world of individuals with social and political dynamics generated in institutions. Thus, the notion of an organization as a ‘peaceable kingdom’ is not solely a fantasy in the sense that it helps to avoid differences arising from (e.g.) race and gender, and the potential conflicts that might arise from them. Fantasy here is also a process that controls difference; thereby ensuring that ‘peacefulness’ becomes a dominant disposition, a mechanism to control what difference means, as well as defining implicit expectations surrounding social relations. Ideas that are politically expedient create strong social bonds for people within groups and help to define how our inner worlds are connected to institutional systems of conformity or control.

Applying Illogics: Some Examples

In this section of the essay I discuss how my ideas are connected to institutional research and explore how institutional and organizational scholars might take up and work with *institutional illogics*. As a way of illustrating the construct, I reinterpret data from three empirical papers. I reflect on recent papers that contribute to studies of emotion and institutions; two with a focus on institutional logics (Fan and Zietsma, 2017; Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017); and one on how moral emotions help to sustain professional values in institutions (Wright, Zammuto and Liesch, 2017).

Fan and Zietsma (2017) studied a water stewardship council involving actors who were embedded in disparate logics across multiple fields who constructed a shared governance logic together. Institutional logics are understood in this paper as ‘rules of the game’ that guide and prescribe individual and organizational behavior within specific social settings such as institutional fields. The authors outline how conflict between actors with diverse home logics transformed into togetherness based on a shared ‘passion for water’ (22). Two moments from their interviews stood out for me. First, a comment from a respondent on strength of feeling: ‘*Wow, you feel very strongly about this. Let me understand why, see if I can understand this, and maybe we can come up with something like a dream*’ (23). Second, this potential dream of togetherness was judged as miraculous: ‘*Initially they were fighting like cats and dogs ... All of a sudden, the fights go away. They made a number of changes that just made sense. ... They weren’t forced to do it. It was interesting to see the transition from fighting all the time to working together... and coming up with some neat ideas. ... Accomplish what is seen as a miracle*’ (27).

The authors’ interpretations show how the constraints of actors’ home logics may be unlocked by positive social and moral emotional connections among actors embedded in diverse logics. These connections arise when people are open and reflexive about their home logics and committed to and engaged in a shared governance logic. However, being positive, open and reflexive is impossible to sustain in the messy political context of everyday organizational relations (Arnaud, 2012; Denis et al, 2010), as well as not always having positive effects (Fineman, 2006; Vince and Mazen, 2014). Unlocking logic differences through something like a dream, or as something like a miracle, is a form of fantasy work that guides behaviour. Fantasy unconsciously structures the desire to work together, not so much

despite of, but rather because of the emotional intensity of differences ('fighting all the time'). Such transformations must be collectively imagined and, as a result, may well seem miraculous. From this point of view, a 'passion for water' can be understood not only as a shared connection, but also as a *structuring fantasy* within the organization, one that transforms fears about the costs of conflict between competing values and assumptions *when it is politically expedient to do so*.

Toubiana and Zietsma (2017) explore how emotions influence organizations in situations of institutional complexity. They discuss the opposing logics that characterized a non-profit organization concerned with *care* for people suffering from a degenerative disease, and *research* to find a cure for the disease. An emphasis on research over care violated member's expectations, triggered escalating emotions, and destabilized the organization. Institutional logics are understood in this paper as socially shared, deeply held assumptions and values that form a framework for reasoning, provide criteria for legitimacy, and help organize time and space. The authors argue that logics have different emotional 'registers', or prescriptions about appropriate emotional content and expression. The care logic prescribed emotional expression as an important and valid source of information for decision making about individual suffering. The research logic prescribed objective evidence, rationality and dispassionate reasoning for professional decision making.

Members expressed strong negative emotions, particularly anger and betrayal, when the organization prioritized research over care. Professional staff in the organization sought to eliminate emotion by emphasizing scientific method and medical expertise, which only exacerbated members' emotions. The authors present a Facebook post by the CEO that stirred considerable anger from members for its lack of empathy (32). The CEO's post started with: '*I have carefully listened to those of you who have expressed disappointment and anger at what has been perceived to be the DDF's negative stance...*' However, members' anger was considerably amplified by experiencing its direct opposite, a strong feeling of the inability or unwillingness to listen. Reading through this paper it struck me that the members had no problem picking up on and responding to the strong feelings that had *not* been communicated by the CEO.

This is not only about different frameworks of reasoning or different registers of emotion, but also, the unsettling effects of social defenses against strong emotions on both sides. It was

easy for me to imagine how the CEO might have felt about the tirade of member emotion that suddenly became integral to the CEO role; and how the denial of emotional intensity might have seemed like a sensible approach. From an illogics perspective, the CEO's 'dispassionate reasoning' can be understood as a defense against anger and betrayal, both personal and external. Such a disconnected response from the formal leader of an organization with a strong legacy of *both* care and research cannot only reflect personal reasoning. In systems psychodynamic terms, the CEO is the primary recipient of system-wide emotion in the form of projections (Gabriel, 1997). This will be the case however a CEO might articulate it or consciously feel about it. Toubiana and Zietsma (2017) argue that the conflict in their study was exacerbated because the two logics of the organization had very different emotional registers that influenced the ways in which the factions reacted to the event and each other. 'The two groups were at an emotional impasse, failing to respond in the appropriate emotional language of the opposing logic' (45). Another way to look at this would be that these emotions are part of the same emotional experience, the same defensive 'illogic' (or passionate unreason) that seeks to maintain entrenched positions between care and research.

Institutional scholars conceptualize professions as institutions, and a profession's values as part of an institution's normative pillar (Scott, 2014). In their paper, Wright, Zammuto and Liesch (2017) consider how professionals maintain the values of their profession in everyday work. They raise two issues: keeping values alive when specialist identities emerge, creating different interpretations of the same value and the potential for conflict; and the conflict that arises between professional values and broader organizational practices. They suggest, quoting Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), that a profession, in this case Emergency Department physicians, is maintained as an institution through 'more or less conscious action of individual and collective actors'. Their analysis reveals that perceptions of problems with achieving the profession's values elicit 'moral emotions' (for example, the care that professionals feel about the interests of patients and clients). However, their analysis does not explicitly address 'less conscious' dynamics.

For example, reflecting on what the creation of different specialist identities meant for the professional value of prioritizing patient interests, an experienced specialist says:

Sub-specialization doesn't mean we don't all care about the patient. We all care. But in medicine, there are so many sub-specialities that we take responsibility for patients at different points in their journey through the hospital. We work for the best interests of a patient when they're in our department and we're responsible for them. That's when we care the most about a patient—when we're responsible for their interests. We can't all be responsible for every single patient at every single moment in time. (Wright, Zammuto and Liesch, 2017: 217).

For the authors, this quote 'speaks to the core puzzle of how specialization creates conflicts in translating the medical profession's common value... into everyday work at the micro level inside the hospital' (217). However, reflecting on the 'less conscious', I think that there are also structuring fantasies about the profession being articulated here. For example, the idea that 'we all care' and 'we work for the best interests of a patient when they are in our department' is both true and unlikely. It is true because care is integral to professionals' effective use of their skills on vulnerable people. It is unlikely because care is never that ubiquitous or consistent in organizations (Fotaki and Hyde, 2015), and because unconscious defenses help to remove depersonalized and fragmented pattern of care from view (Krantz, 2010). How feasible it is that 'we all care' does not matter as much as the structuring effects that the articulation of this idea has on professionals' notions of their identity, and on managing the conflicts between sub-specialties within a system. It seems to me therefore, that we could interpret the specialist's statement not only from the perspective of moral emotions, but also as a fantasy that helps to 'shape the contours' (Rose, 1998) of this highly emotive and politicized environment.

These examples illustrate what can be gained by analyzing illogics alongside logics. I do not doubt that connections between institutional actors embedded in disparate logics arise when people are positive, open and reflexive about their home logics, and committed to and engaged in a shared logic (Fan and Zietsma, 2017). However, positivity can also function as a defense. There is an aspect of positivity that is connected to fantasy, to an illusory disavowal of the continuation of the conflict between disparate logics. This dynamic is further illustrated by the idea that caring can be consistent (Wright, Zammuto and Liesch, 2017) and, to a certain degree, split from the intersecting emotions and relations that represent the whole. The splitting of what is prescribed by different logics can pinpoint different emotional 'registers' (Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017) but this does not help us to see how they may be

unreasonably bound together as part of the same illogic, that tensions can belong to those processes and practices for no apparent reason. The unconscious dynamics that influence institutions emerge from the intersection of complex and conflicting emotions that are part of the whole. My claim that illogics are as powerful as the prescriptive frames that support and inform peoples' choices, language and sense of self within organizational and institutional contexts, comes from this continuous intersection between structuring fantasies and the somewhat hidden and defensive dynamics that are an integral part of structures within organizations and institutions.

Developing and Researching Illogics

I have introduced the term institutional illogics to help explain how the unconscious can be included in our attempts to analyze institutions. Illogics can be used to encourage attention to the complex emotional and political dynamics involved in people being both 'creatures of the rules and creators of them' (Meyer, 2008: 793). Emotional experiences do not merely represent reactions to institutional order but are constantly at work as part of peoples' experiences of building, maintaining and living within that order (Creed *et al*, 2014; De Rond and Lok, 2016; Fotaki and Hyde, 2015; Jarvis, 2017; Massa *et al*, 2016). For example, an analysis from an illogics point of view suggests that we would not only be looking to elaborate on the 'dispassionate reasoning' of the CEO in the Toubiana and Zietsma (2017) study, but also the *passionate unreason* involved in actively disavowing the intensity of emotions associated with the CEO role and the dual values of the institution.

Unconscious processes tie people together into collective emotional and political relations. Peoples' 'unconscious actions reflect their emotional experience of coping with the anxieties and traumas associated with the ongoing work of navigating the fields in which they are embedded' (Voronov and Vince, 2012: 61). Our organizations and institutions are complicated and dynamic environments. If we try and over-simplify or exclude their relational contradictions and emotional complexities, then we are in danger of presenting overly rational and excessively positive reflections on social life. An interest in illogics implies a willingness to expand our understanding of how people are attached emotionally to institutions, and to follow and reveal underlying emotional dynamics that help to explain, for example, how the opposite of what is espoused becomes the norm (Diamond and Adams, 1999).

One purpose I had in coining the term institutional illogics was as balance alongside the term logics in organizational and institutional scholarship. Most studies portray institutional logics as consistent in their prescriptions (for exceptions, see Friedland, 2017; Lok and Willmott, 2013; and Quattrone, 2015). It is assumed that fields are dominated by one or multiple logics, and that organizations face discreet, coherent sets of institutional expectations; that contradictions reside either in the multiplicity and incompatibility of logics (Greenwood *et al*, 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008); or in the potential conflict between the prescriptions of institutional logics and individual values (Seo and Creed, 2002; Creed, DeJordy and Lok, 2010). This conveys no sense of the irrational and unwitting that is integral to actors' interpretations, their vocabulary for action, or to everyday self-other relations within institutions. Institutional logics imply taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin frames of reference, guide actors' sense of self and identity and provide stability and meaning (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012). Institutional illogics additionally suggests that aspects of institutional identity that are consistent with a prevailing logic (or logics) can be unconsciously disavowed, which does not mean that they have gone away. Rather, like Freud's 'heckler', they are expelled from the room yet continuing to disturb the peace.

There is a continuing need for scholarship that recognizes how unconscious dynamics contribute to the shaping of the social and political environment within which individual and collective emotions are both active and hidden from awareness. An interest in institutional illogics can provide scholars with an option to look beneath tentative links between psychoanalytic theory and institutions. So far, such connections have been with 'nonconscious' processes (Pratt and Crosina, 2016), or with 'more or less conscious' actions within institutional fields (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Wright, Zammuto and Liesch, 2017). My view is that it will be difficult to fully comprehend the role of emotions in institutional analysis without a better understanding of: what it is that ties people together into collective emotional and political relations that they are largely unaware of; and how unconscious dynamics reflect persons lived experience of coping with the anxieties and traumas embedded in institutional order (Voronov and Vince, 2012).

How do we research illogics?

What approaches and methods might be needed to research illogics in institutions and organizations? The starting point for my answer is to highlight how processes of inquiry for illogics might be similar or different to established approaches for capturing logics (see Table 1). In their paper on qualitatively capturing institutional logics, Reay and Jones (2016) identify three such approaches – pattern deducing, pattern matching and pattern inducing. The study of institutional illogics is necessarily inductive and abductive, involving the articulation of persuasive interpretations, strong associations, and the organizational consequences of spoken and unspoken collective emotions. In addition to grouping text in ways that show behaviour or beliefs guided by logics (Reay and Jones, 2016), studies interested in illogics will also look for what seems unreasonable, irrational, unwitting and nonsensical. This might be represented: in defended positions, projective relations, compulsive attachment to one side of a story, to the ongoing impact of shared fantasies; or in bringing out connections between contradictory emotions and institutional order, for example, the unforeseen consequences of the CEO's 'unwanted self' (Petrigelieri and Stein, 2012) in Toubiana and Zietsma's (2017) study.

Psychoanalytic approaches to the study of organizations encourage researchers to use methods that help them to perceive the underlying emotional and relational complexity of the context within which research is taking place (Arnaud, 2012). A variety of research methods have been employed to reveal these dynamics. Visual methods have been recognized as particularly useful in generating data relating to emotional and unconscious aspects of individual and collective experience (Sievers, 2008 and 2014; Vince and Broussine, 1996; Warren, 2012). This is because they evoke emotional responses in different ways to those generated through language. For example, Sievers (2014: 134) shows how photographs taken by inmates within a prison, evoked associations, fantasies, affects, desires and memories from respondents, but also give rise to reluctance, numbness, resistance and defenses against 'the mental pain derived from such freedom to think' within a prison. In Vince and Broussine's (1996) study of change in public service organizations in the UK, drawings were used to capture defenses arising from emotional tensions (excitement and fear, hatred and hope), which undermined managers desire to act in support of change. Attempts to capture unconscious dynamics within organizational research involve the effort to listen to and interpret what people leave unsaid.

It is equally important not to downplay the emotional experience of the researcher, as it is not only research respondents who will be leaving things unsaid. One approach that addresses the projective dynamics within qualitative research is the ‘pair interview method’ (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015), which is designed to bring out emotional elements of the researcher’s experience in her role. These include: the researcher’s feelings of attachment to the organization researched; or conversely, strong feelings of ‘otherness’; or additional common feelings, like discomfort or excitement, that are mobilized by researching with others in an organizational context. Such methods acknowledge that hidden desires and reflections of past experiences can mark the encounter between the researcher and research participants (Kenny and Gilmore, 2014).

Other researchers have outlined the role of fantasy in data generation, analysis and theory building (Clancy and Vince, 2016; Lapping, 2016). For example, Clancy and Vince (2016) discuss the idea of ‘theory as fantasy’ – that inductive approaches that look at how patterns emerge from the data, depend on ‘imaginative interpretations’ (Charmaz, 2008: 157). They suggest that there can be a parallel relationship between theory building and fantasy building in inductive methods; that processes of theory building can be improved by engaging directly with fantasies that are defensively and creatively generated by the researcher. They highlight three distinctive researcher fantasies of containment, coherence and purity associated with the experience of applying the grounded theory method to a study of disappointment (Clancy and Vince, 2016). One final reflection I have on methods is that psychoanalytic approaches to research generate their own tensions in practice. They not only reveal contradictions, they come with contradictions, for example that attempts to research emotions and unconscious dynamics may be anxiety provoking or frightening both for organizational participants in research and for researchers (Vince, 2016).

Potential research themes and questions

Institutional illogics provides a framework through which to engage with research themes and questions associated with emotions and institutions. First, being explicit about the *unconscious* dynamics that are integral to institutions encourages deliberate connection with collective emotions that link behaviour and structure, as well as how these dynamics shape selves and others, people and systems. Institutional illogics offers a construct to pursue that aspect of Voronov and Vince’s (2012) theoretical paper on emotions and institutions that

pointed towards the role of the unconscious in institutional order and disruption. A more explicit engagement with unconscious dynamics encourages us to ask, for example, about the anxieties, defenses and contradictions that are integral to ‘living institutions’ (Lok *et al*, 2017).

Second, illogics connects to a social view of emotions in institutions. In addition to inquiries into discrete emotions, like shame (Creed *et al*, 2014), illogics can help to further our understanding of the social and organizational dynamics of *mixed emotions*. One problem with the study of emotions has been the way in which positive and negative emotions have been separated, to emphasize positive affect on one side and emotional toxicity on the other. Using the notion of illogics we can consider, for example, how and why negative consequences are embedded in seemingly positive emotions; and explore positive responses to hatred and other negative emotions.

Finally, the notion of illogics can help to create a distinctive perspective on how *values* become experienced as necessary, fundamental, and non-coerced aspect of self (Hitlin 2003). It has been seen as important to understand the complexities of internal morality that flow from the purposive point of an institution, as well as ‘what it means to mentally inhabit a world endowed with institutional values’ (Hecl, 2008: 84). Values are understood as ‘emotion-laden *conceptions of the desirable* that underlie value-identities, which themselves are developed around affective meanings appropriated to self’ (Gecas, 2008 *my emphasis*). However, values are also *connections* to the desirable through complicated and, at times, unconscious self-other relations. They can also be *concoctions* of the desirable, linked to fabricated stories involving fantasy or coercion. Studying the interplay between values and emotions will help us, for example, to understand more about tensions between persons’ passionate identification with values and the habits of defensiveness or processes of disavowal that promote ‘moral muteness’ (Bird and Waters, 1989).

Implications for practice

Our research in organizations and institutions has practical benefits. It reveals patterns, emotions, beliefs, practices and processes that elaborate structures, that inform and support change, that have predictive qualities, produce insights, or that tell important stories of persons lived experience. In this regard, it is interesting to speculate on how the idea of

illogics might help? I would like to suggest three potential benefits. First, through increased attention to the unconscious dynamics that surround and shape their everyday work, persons can start to legitimize multiple interpretations of lived experience and institutional order and thereby support improvements in ‘public reflection’ (Raelin, 2001). Sharing our reflections and interpretations in public unsettles entrenched authority relations, broadens systems of accountability, and reduces (but does not eliminate) fears of getting things wrong. Our capacity to interpret freely together out loud, and in doing so to reveal differences that challenge (e.g.) the ‘fantasy of a peaceable kingdom’, is at the heart of improving our abilities to work with actual differences, and thereby to create sustainable processes of learning and change.

Second, fantasy shows us how desire and control are linked in institutions, it highlights the implications of our impossible desire for unity. It is problematic when we strive for positive feeling and purposeful action without acknowledgement of the damage an over-emphasis on the positive can inflict on self and other; and when we avoid or ignore the tensions that might otherwise help us to hold together seemingly contradictory aspects of our working lives. My view is that efforts to hold ongoing, paradoxical tensions together are ultimately more likely to unsettle ‘the rules of the game’ than our attempts to resolve tensions (see Jarrett and Vince, 2017). Finally, illogics can help us to understand better the extent to which a logics perspective might normalize or suppress certain emotional experiences (Hudson *et al.*, 2016). If we can analyze more effectively how unconscious dynamics contribute to the shaping of the political environment within which individual and collective emotions are active and hidden from awareness, then we can begin to include these in our attempts to change.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this essay I noted that contemporary institutional theories have ‘come to terms with one or another version of the idea that society is made up of interested, purposive, and often rational actors’ (Meyer, 2008: 792). I particularly like this articulation, because it rightly suggests that we are only ‘often’, not always, rational actors. This then begs the question, what are we the rest of the time? In this essay, I have made one contribution to answering this question. I highlight how unconscious dynamics influence institutional structures and organizational practices; as well as how such dynamics are connected to self-

reproducing social order. I have suggested that the unconscious is an important underlying idea for the development of our comprehension of ‘living institutions’ (Lok *et al*, 2017).

Along with other scholars, it has not escaped my notice that there has been ‘a veritable flood of articles’ in the organization studies literature on institutional logics (Reay and Jones, 2016: 441). I have tried to set boundaries to this flood with a new construct, institutional illogics. I coined this term to suggest that there are unconscious dynamics that unsettle our frames of reference at the same time as being connected to the everyday challenges of life in institutions. I argue that illogics operate in the interface between social defenses against emotion, and the imagined stability (Vince, 2002) institutions generate through politically expedient or structuring fantasies. This unconscious contribution to the reproduction of social order means that illogics are likely to be just as powerful as the prescriptive frames that support and inform peoples’ choices, language and sense of self within organizational and institutional contexts. My aim in this essay has been to create an argument for the unconscious to be accepted as an important dimension in the theory we need to understand and to analyze emotions and institutions. My hope is that scholars within this field will be intrigued by the concept of illogics, and the challenges and opportunities it presents.

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Table 1: Institutional Logics and Illogics

| | <i>Definition</i> | <i>Identification</i> | <i>Methods</i> |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Logics (A framework for reasoning)</p> | <p>The ‘rules of the game’ (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012) that both regularise/normalise behaviour and provide opportunities for agency and change.</p> | <p>Logics are revealed through language, practices, and manifested in symbols and materials (Reay and Jones, 2016). Studies have tended to focus on field level logics (e.g. medical professionalism) to elaborate a set of meanings and practices that apply to specific institutional fields (Fan and Zietsma, 2017). Different logics can have different ‘emotional registers’ (Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017).</p> | <p>Logics can be captured using approaches for ‘pattern deducing, pattern matching and pattern inducing’. Insights and abstractions are grounded to the context through quotes, observation and thick description (Reay and Jones, 2016).</p> |
| <p>Illogics (The defensive, illusory or irrational aspects of frameworks)</p> | <p>Unconscious dynamics that have both structuring and unsettling effects on the rules of the game. Underlying assumptions can be defensive, illusory or irrational despite also feeling natural or normal.</p> | <p>Illogics are never fully revealed, but can emerge through language slips, projective relations and irrational practices. They are manifested in social defenses, disavowed assumptions, and shared fantasies, that can become persistent aspects of ‘living institutions’ (Lok et al, 2017).</p> | <p>Illogics can be captured using visual methods (Sievers, 2014; Warren, 2012), through storytelling methods (Gabriel, 2014), and through embracing affective engagement with organizational members as part of the research, e.g. in the form of transference/projection (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015) or researcher fantasies (Clancy and Vince, 2016). As is usual with inductive approaches, insights arise through ‘imaginative interpretation’ (Charmaz, 2008) of emerging categories to pinpoint key themes.</p> |