



The Institutional Logics Perspective: A Critical Theoretical-Analytical Reading in the Sociology of Organization and Work

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Abstract :

This article develops a critical theoretical-analytical reading of the Institutional Logics Perspective (ILP) within contemporary organizational and work sociology. Its point of departure is a core epistemological problem: how institutional structure and organizational action interact under conditions of competing and coexisting logics. Tracing ILP's roots in neo-institutional theory, the analysis revisits the foundational formulations of Friedland and Alford (1991) and Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012), exposing the assumptions each makes about rationality, agency, institutional order, and legitimacy. Institutional logic is then conceptualized as a dual structure of meaning and practice, with the principal institutional orders—market, state, profession, corporation, and community—examined alongside the mechanisms through which institutional pluralism shapes organizational identity, power, knowledge, and legitimation, particularly amid conflict, negotiation, and institutional work. The discussion extends to institutional complexity, hybrid organizations, and the pressures of digitalization as drivers of contemporary change. Beyond exposition, the article advances a sustained epistemological critique of ILP's conceptual ambiguity, weak empirical grounding, and limited engagement with power and inequality, proposing integration with Actor-Network Theory, critical sociology, and Foucauldian analysis, illustrated through cases from healthcare, higher education, the public sector, and multinational corporations. It concludes with a theoretical synthesis reconceptualizing institutional logic and its implications for organizational sociology.

Article info

Received

June 06;2026

Accepted

August 03;2026

Keyword:

- ✓ Institutional Logics;
- ✓ Institutional Pluralism;
- ✓ Sociology of Organization;
- ✓ Institutional Complexity;

1-Introduction: Constructing the Theoretical Problematic

1.1 The Theoretical Problematic

The field of sociology of organization and work has witnessed profound theoretical transformations over recent decades, reshaping its conceptual tools and interpretive approaches. Perhaps the most prominent of these transformations emerged from the new institutional turn (Neo-Institutionalism), which shifted the scholarly conversation from studying organizational isomorphism and institutional mimicry (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) toward a more complex level concerned with the multiplicity of institutional logics, their conflicts, and their intertwinement within a single organizational field. At the heart of this transformation stands the Institutional Logics Perspective (ILP) as an ambitious theoretical framework seeking to transcend the classic binary oppositions of institutional tradition: structure versus agency, institution versus practice, and stability versus change. Yet this very theoretical ambition raises a fundamental epistemological problem: to what extent does ILP succeed in providing a coherent sociological explanation of the mechanisms shaping organizational action amid institutional multiplicity, without descending into conceptual nihilism or semantic overextension that strips concepts of their explanatory content?

The gravity of this problem lies in the fact that, as ILP attempts to accommodate the complexity of contemporary institutional reality, it confronts a genuine epistemological paradox. On the one hand, it offers a flexible theoretical framework that enables understanding of multiplicity, conflict, and hybridity within institutions; on the other hand, this very flexibility may become a weakness when the concept becomes susceptible to interpretive deployment in virtually any context, thereby undermining its differentiating and explanatory power. This paradox is not merely a technical problem

within social theory but rather an expression of a deeper crisis in contemporary organizational sociology, one that concerns the relationship between theory and empiricism, and the extent to which institutional approaches can offer robust causal explanations of organizational phenomena rather than merely interpretive descriptions of them (Kheiri, 2023).

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the theoretical richness generated by ILP over the past two decades, a survey of the literature reveals fundamental knowledge gaps that still demand critical treatment. First, a descriptive-classificatory tendency prevails across many studies employing the ILP framework: they identify the institutional logics present in a given organizational field and describe their interactions, yet without offering a deep sociological explanation of the mechanisms of formation and change (Greenwood et al., 2011). Second, ambiguity continues to surround the relationship between the macro-institutional level and the micro-organizational level—that is, between institutional logics as overarching cultural-symbolic structures and the daily practices of organizational actors (Thornton et al., 2012). Third, there is a clear shortcoming in addressing dimensions of power and inequality within the ILP framework, as the perspective tends to treat institutional logics as neutral structures amenable to negotiation, ignoring that the conflict between them invariably involves relations of domination, dependency, and exclusion (Friedland, 2012). Fourth, ILP is rarely compared theoretically and evaluatively with competing sociological approaches such as Actor-Network Theory, Critical Sociology, and Foucauldian analysis, thereby depriving researchers of the possibility of fertile theoretical integration.

1.3 Research Questions

departing from this problematic and these gaps, this article seeks to answer a central research question: How does the Institutional Logics Perspective contribute to

understanding the dynamics of organizational action and institutional change in the context of contemporary institutional multiplicity, and what are its epistemological and explanatory limits? From this central question, several subsidiary questions branch out. First, what are the underlying epistemological assumptions of ILP, and how do they affect its explanatory power? Second, how do multiple institutional logics interact in shaping organizational decision-making, power, and legitimacy? Third, how does the perspective address the dynamics of organizational change and institutional complexity? Fourth, what are the most prominent blind spots in ILP, and how might they be overcome through integration with other sociological approaches?

1.4 Significance of the Topic

These questions acquire particular significance in the sociology of contemporary work for several reasons. On the one hand, contemporary institutions are undergoing radical transformations that reshape the system of institutional logics governing them: digitalization, which imposes the logic of algorithms and data; the platform economy, which redefines the logic of the market and labor; and organizational flexibility, which dismantles the logic of professional bureaucracy (Zuboff, 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020). On the other hand, the field of institutional studies requires periodic critical review of its conceptual tools to ensure its capacity to contribute to understanding these transformations rather than merely accumulating terminology. This article aims to make a cognitive contribution in this direction by presenting a critical analytical reading that does not merely summarize ILP but works to deconstruct its assumptions, evaluate its limits, and propose pathways for its development.

2. Theoretical and Epistemological Grounding

2.1 Defining the Institutional Logics Perspective

The Institutional Logics Perspective rests on a central idea: that major societal institutions—the market, the state, the profession, the family, religion, and the corporation—each possesses a distinctive institutional logic that determines the principles of organization, action, and practice within its domain. This logic is not merely a set of formal rules; rather, it is an integrated system of meaning that encompasses core beliefs and values, patterns of legitimacy and authority, rules of justification and critique, and prevailing practices of action (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 2). Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury define an institutional logic as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 2). This definition highlights the dual dimension of institutional logic: it is simultaneously a cultural-symbolic structure that frames thinking and action, and a social practice materialized in recurring behavioral patterns. Yet this very definition raises a semantic problem: if institutional logic simultaneously encompasses beliefs, practices, rules, and justifications, what distinguishes it from other concepts such as organizational culture, cognitive framework, or ideology? This semantic ambiguity is not incidental; it is an expression of the underlying tension within the perspective between the cultural-symbolic dimension and the material-practical dimension of institutional logic.

2.2 Emergence within Neo-Institutionalism

ILP emerged within the transformations experienced by neo-institutionalism during the 1980s and 1990s.

After the dominance of institutional isomorphism theory, as advanced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977)—a tradition that focused on the institutional pressures driving organizations toward similarity—the need arose for a theoretical framework capable of explaining diversity, conflict, and change within organizational fields. The foundational contribution of Friedland and Alford (1991), in their seminal chapter "Bringing Society Back In," constituted the pivotal turning point: they critiqued the prevailing tendency to treat institutions as constraining forces while overlooking the role of institutional conflict and contradiction in shaping social action. They proposed instead a vision of society as an institutional system comprising multiple and sometimes contradictory central logics, and that social action arises from the interaction and conflict among these logics rather than from blind submission to unidirectional institutional pressures (Friedland & Alford, 1991, pp. 232–263). This transition from viewing the institution as a unidirectional constraining force to conceptualizing it as a space of conflict among multiple logics represented a decisive epistemological shift that fractured classical neo-institutionalism.

2.3 Foundational Theoretical Contributions

Two foundational theoretical contributions can be distinguished as having shaped the ILP: the inaugural contribution of Friedland and Alford (1991) and the synthesizing-expansive contribution of Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012). Friedland and Alford advanced a bold theoretical framework predicated on three essential assumptions: first, that contemporary Western society is composed of several central institutions—capitalism, the state, democracy, the family, religion, and science—each possessing its own institutional logic; second, that institutional logics involve a tension between material and symbolic practice, such that each logic simultaneously establishes practical practices and a symbolic

vision of reality; third, that the conflict among institutional logics opens the possibility for social change (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 249). However, their framework remained at a high level of abstraction and did not provide sufficient operational analytical tools, prompting Thornton and her colleagues (2012) to attempt a synthesis and expansion of the perspective through a more detailed framework specifying five founding principles: the centrality of institutional culture embedded in practice, the mutual influence between institutional logics and individuals and organizations, the historical dynamism of logics, the multiplicity and competition among logics, and the change of institutional logics over time (Thornton et al., 2012, pp. 6–14). They also identified seven core institutional logics: family, community, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation, each endowed with its own conceptual attributes in terms of governing principles, sources of legitimacy, sources of authority, bases of justification, and attention systems (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 74).

2.4 Underlying Epistemological Assumptions

An epistemological analysis of ILP reveals several underlying assumptions deserving of critical scrutiny. First, the perspective presupposes a form of bounded institutional rationality: actors are not rational in the narrow economic sense, but their rationality is conditioned by the institutional logic within which they operate, thereby reproducing the rationality/irrationality binary in a new form. Second, the perspective presupposes a form of permissive structurism: institutional logics constitute constraining structures for action but do not determine it entirely, leaving a margin for agency within institutional constraints; yet this margin remains more theoretical than empirical, as the perspective does not offer a clear explanation of the mechanisms through which actors transition from submission to institutional logic to resistance or transformation of it. Third, the perspective treats the institution primarily as a cultural-

symbolic structure rather than a material-relational one, which tends to intellectualize social conflicts that are fundamentally material and political struggles over resources and power. Fourth, the perspective assumes a concept of legitimacy that remains close to classical institutionalism: legitimacy is fundamentally conformity to the dominant institutional logic, which means that the problem of legitimacy is resolved at the cultural-symbolic level without sufficient interrogation of the material and political foundations that produce this very legitimacy.

3. The Conceptual Architecture of Institutional Logics

3.1 The Concept of Institutional Logic: A Logic of Meaning and Practice

The concept of institutional logic is founded on the premise that institutions do not merely provide formal rules for organization but rather offer comprehensive systems of meaning that determine what is possible and impossible, what is legitimate and illegitimate, what is worthy of attention and what is marginal. Friedland (2012) proposes a precise distinction between the symbolic dimension and the material dimension of institutional logic: institutional logic is simultaneously a "rite" that performs a material practice and a "myth" that provides symbolic justification for this practice. This distinction merits deep analysis because it reveals the structural tension within each institutional logic: the market, for instance, operates simultaneously as a rite of economic exchange and as a myth of individualism and free competition; the state functions simultaneously as a material embodiment of bureaucratic authority and as a symbolic establishment of the public interest and justice. When the symbolic dimension separates from the material dimension—that is, when practices lose their symbolic legitimacy or when symbolic justifications become emptied of practice—moments of institutional crisis emerge that may lead to change or to the distorted reproduction of the

existing institutional system. Yet this analysis itself remains captive to the symbolic/material binary that is insufficient for understanding contemporary institutional complexity, where logics intertwine and generate hybrid forms of meaning and practice that do not clearly belong to any pure institutional logic.

3.2 Core Institutional Logics

Thornton and colleagues (2012, pp. 72–78) present a seven-fold classification of central institutional logics in contemporary Western societies. The first is the family logic, founded on principles of unconditional loyalty and kinship belonging, with love as a core value, paternal authority, and legitimacy derived from family traditions. The second is the community logic, built on principles of mutual trust, shared belonging, and collective identity, with authority grounded in group membership and legitimacy derived from communal consensus. The third is the religion logic, predicated on faith in transcendent truth and submission to the sacred, with charismatic-spiritual authority and legitimacy derived from religious text and tradition. The fourth is the state logic, founded on principles of the rule of law, the public interest, and citizenship, with bureaucratic-rational authority and legitimacy derived from law and democratic institutions. The fifth is the market logic, grounded in competition, capital accumulation, and economic individualism, with authority built on market success and legitimacy derived from supply-and-demand mechanisms. The sixth is the profession logic, founded on specialized expertise, professional standards, and public service, with authority grounded in professional credentialing and legitimacy derived from codes of professional conduct. The seventh is the corporation logic, built on efficiency, hierarchy, and functional stratification, with authority based on positions and legitimacy derived from organizational performance and profitability. However, this classification itself raises questions: Are these logics universal, or are they historically and culturally specific? And how should we engage with emerging institutional logics such as the logic of digitalization or the logic of the platform

economy, which find no clear place in this classification?

3.3 Institutional Pluralism

The concept of institutional pluralism represents one of the most stimulating contributions of ILP, as it moves the analysis from the level of a single institutional logic to the level of interaction among multiple institutional logics within an organizational field. Kraatz and Block (2008) argue that institutional pluralism creates a qualitatively distinct organizational situation in which the organization exists at the intersection of several institutional logics with multiple and sometimes contradictory demands, thereby imposing complex negotiation strategies upon it. Yet institutional pluralism is not merely a descriptive organizational reality; it is a theoretical concept carrying profound political and sociological dimensions. Pluralism necessarily entails conflict over the definition of what is legitimate and what is marginal within the organizational field, and this conflict is not neutral—it involves relations of power, dependency, and cultural domination. Here the limitation of ILP becomes apparent, as it tends to treat institutional pluralism as a neutral space of interaction among equal logics, ignoring that some logics enjoy hegemonic legitimacy while others are marginalized. Institutional pluralism in the contemporary neoliberal context, for example, does not mean that the market logic, the state logic, and the profession logic stand on equal footing; rather, it typically means that the market logic has acquired a hegemonic position that reshapes other logics according to its requirements—a phenomenon researchers have termed "institutional commodification," whereby domains of healthcare, education, and social welfare are subordinated to the logic of the market (Dunn & Jones, 2010).

3.4 The Concept of Organizational Identity

The concept of organizational identity plays a pivotal role within ILP as the link between institutional logics and organizational action. Organizational identity

is not a fixed entity but rather a dynamic product of the interaction among the multiple institutional logics shaping the organizational field. In the context of institutional pluralism, organizations face a dual challenge: they are called upon to respond to the demands of multiple and contradictory institutional logics, while simultaneously maintaining a cohesive identity that ensures their legitimacy and continuity. This challenge produces what Greenwood and colleagues (2011) term "institutional complexity," which compels organizations to adopt various strategies for managing it: from selective coupling, which involves partial alignment with each logic (Pache & Santos, 2013), to hybridization, which involves merging elements from different logics into a new organizational model (Battilana & Lee, 2014), to decoupling, which involves separating actual practices from institutional discourse (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, the concept of organizational identity within ILP remains governed by an implicit functionalist tendency: identity is often understood as an adaptive instrument serving organizational survival and legitimacy, without sufficient interrogation of its authoritarian and exclusionary dimensions. Organizational identity is not merely an adaptive response but also a tool of power that excludes certain actors and practices and marginalizes particular voices in the name of identity cohesion.

4. Deep Sociological Analysis

4.1 Shaping Organizational Decision-Making

ILP offers a distinctive interpretive framework for understanding organizational decision-making that transcends both classical rational choice approaches and bounded behavioral models. Within ILP, organizational decision-making is neither the product of pure rational calculation nor a mechanical response to environmental pressures; rather, it is the outcome of complex interaction among multiple institutional logics that define attentional frames, issues

warranting action, and legitimate decision procedures. Ocasio (1997) advances the concept of the "attention-based view of the firm," linking institutional logics to the distribution of organizational attention: the dominant institutional logic determines what decision-makers attend to and what they overlook, thereby delineating the range of possible and visible choices. When multiple institutional logics coexist, organizational decision-making becomes the product of negotiation among competing and divergent attentional frames, explaining why organizations may make decisions that appear irrational from the standpoint of a single logic yet acquire meaning when institutional multiplicity is taken into account. However, this analysis requires sociological deepening beyond the level of perception and attention: organizational decision-making is not merely a cognitive matter but also a political one involving alliances and competitions among interest groups that draw upon different institutional logics to justify their positions and impose their preferences.

4.2 Power and Knowledge

An analysis of the relationship between institutional logics and power and knowledge reveals a pivotal sociological dimension within ILP, yet it also highlights the perspective's limitations in addressing this dimension. On the one hand, ILP offers an important insight into the sources of power as conditioned by institutional logic: power within the professional logic derives from expertise and professional credentialing; within the market logic, from ownership and economic success; and within the state logic, from legal office. This multiplicity of power sources explains the conflicts among actors who draw upon different institutional logics to justify their legitimacy and demands. However, ILP tends to treat power as a consequence of institutional logic rather than as a generative force of it: power is understood as a source of legitimacy granted by the institutional logic, not as a force exercising constitutive influence upon the logics themselves. This neglect of the constitutive dimension of power weakens the

perspective's capacity to explain how certain institutional logics produce their hegemony and how others are marginalized. As Kheiri (2022) demonstrates in his analysis of entrepreneurship as a sociological phenomenon, power relations shape which institutional logics become dominant in fields such as local development and economic innovation, a dynamic that ILP's neutral framework fails to adequately capture.

With respect to knowledge, ILP offers a significant insight into the connection between knowledge and institutional logic: each logic establishes a distinctive epistemic system that determines what is known, how it is known, and who possesses the authority of legitimate knowledge. This linkage between knowledge and institutional legitimacy evokes Foucault's (1977) analyses of discourse systems and power-knowledge, yet ILP does not reach the depth of the Foucauldian analysis, which reveals how truth itself is produced as an effect of power relations; instead, it remains at the level of describing the multiplicity of knowledge systems without deconstructing the mechanisms of their production and domination. The institutional logics perspective would benefit substantially from engaging with Foucauldian analytics to understand how regimes of truth are constituted within institutional fields and how they shape the boundaries of legitimate knowledge.

4.3 Organizational Culture and Institutional Legitimacy

Organizational culture intersects with institutional logics at numerous points without coinciding with them. Organizational culture represents the symbolic and material embodiment of the dominant or hegemonic institutional logic within the organization, yet it is simultaneously a space of conflict among competing institutional logics, each seeking to impose its definition of what is legitimate and acceptable. Here the concept of institutional legitimacy emerges as central: within ILP, legitimacy is not a fixed attribute but a

dynamic social product formed and transformed through conflict and negotiation among institutional logics. When the balance of power shifts among logics—whether as a consequence of macro-social changes or new organizational alliances—the very standards of legitimacy change, opening space for institutional transformation. However, this conception of legitimacy remains tethered to the level of symbolic representation: legitimacy is understood as a response to institutional standards more than as an actual production of power relations. Understanding legitimacy as a product of cultural hegemony—as Gramsci does—provides a deeper explanation for why certain institutional logics are accepted as naturally legitimate while others are rejected as illegitimate or marginal, even when they express the interests and practices of broad categories of actors.

4.4 The Structure–Agency Interaction

The interaction between structure and agency constitutes one of the most provocative and problematic issues within ILP. On the one hand, institutional logics as cultural-symbolic structures define the framework of possible action and delimit the range of choices available to actors; on the other hand, actors possess the capacity to influence and reshape, or even create, institutional logics. The concept of "institutional work," developed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), makes an important contribution in this regard: institutional work is understood as the purposeful practices through which actors create new institutions, maintain existing ones, or undermine them. This concept restores the actor to the heart of institutional analysis after classical neo-institutionalism had subordinated agency to the primacy of objective institutional structures. However, the concept of institutional work itself poses problems: it tends to presuppose conscious, purposeful agency that may not always be available in actual practices, and it lacks sufficient analysis of the structural constraints limiting actors' capacity for change. The actor who performs "institutional work" sometimes

appears as a relatively free agent capable of choosing among creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions—a conception that ignores the fact that the actor is institutionally constituted and that their capacity for action is conditioned by their position within the institutional structure and the power relations governing it. As Kheiri (2023) argues in his analysis of sociological approaches to change across different theoretical traditions, the tension between structure and agency is not a problem that can be resolved within ILP alone but requires theoretical dialogue with other sociological traditions that have addressed this problematic at greater depth—Bourdieu's constructive structurism, Habermas's theory of communicative action, and Giddens's structuration theory.

5. Institutional Dynamics and Organizational Change

5.1 Institutional Complexity

The concept of institutional complexity provides an analytical framework for understanding situations in which organizations find themselves at the intersection of multiple institutional logics with competing and contradictory demands. Greenwood and colleagues (2011) argue that institutional complexity increases under the influence of several factors: the growing number of active institutional logics in the organizational field, the divergence of these logics' demands, and the rapid change in the balance of power among them. Yet institutional complexity is not merely a quantitative matter pertaining to the number of institutional logics present; it is a qualitative matter concerning the depth of contradiction among these logics and the relational structure connecting them. Complexity is deeper when competing logics offer contradictory definitions of legitimacy, value, and purpose, rather than merely differences in means and instruments. Similarly, institutional complexity varies according to the organization's position within the organizational field: central organizations confront a qualitatively different kind of

institutional complexity from that faced by peripheral organizations, because centrality grants greater capacity to influence the definition of what is legitimate within the field. From this vantage point, the concept of institutional complexity requires development that transcends quantitative description to include an analysis of the relational structure among institutional logics and the dynamics of hegemony and dependency governing them.

5.2 Hybrid Organizations

Hybrid organizations represent one of the most provocative organizational phenomena in the context of contemporary institutional complexity. They are defined as organizations that combine elements from different institutional logics—typically the market logic and the social care or professional logic—within a single organizational model (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Examples of hybrid organizations include social economy and solidarity institutions, social enterprises, and university hospitals that combine healthcare logic, scientific research logic, and economic efficiency logic. Pache and Santos (2013) offer a detailed analysis of the strategies used by hybrid organizations to manage institutional pluralism, distinguishing between compromising responses that seek to satisfy multiple demands through middle-ground solutions, selective coupling responses that align with some institutional elements while ignoring others, and innovative compromising responses that create new practices combining logics in unexpected ways. However, the analysis of hybrid organizations within ILP faces two limitations: first, it tends to treat hybridity as a specific organizational phenomenon rather than seeing it as an expression of a deeper structural transformation in the nature of contemporary institutions; second, it does not sufficiently reveal the costs of hybridity, which is not merely a creative solution to institutional pluralism but also a source of persistent tensions, fragile identities, and institutional risks that may lead to profound legitimacy crises (Jay, 2013).

5.3 Institutional Work

The concept of institutional work, advanced by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), offers a theoretically significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of institutional change from the standpoint of ILP. The researchers distinguish among three types of institutional work: the work of creation, which seeks to establish new institutions or institutional logics; the work of maintenance, which seeks to preserve existing institutions and enhance their legitimacy; and the work of disruption, which seeks to weaken or dismantle institutions. The work of creation includes practices such as advocacy, defining issues, constructing rule systems, and building identities; the work of maintenance includes practices such as enabling institutional work, justification, and ritual reproduction; and the work of disruption includes practices such as disassociating, changing rules, and disconnecting practice from meaning. However, the concept of institutional work requires development in several directions. First, it requires a deeper analysis of the relationship between institutional work and power, as institutional work is not a neutral practice but a political one involving alliances and confrontations among actors with unequal interests and resources. Second, it requires a closer linkage between micro-level institutional work and macro-institutional transformations: how do individual institutional works accumulate to produce fundamental institutional change? Third, it requires accounting for the emotional and affective dimension of institutional work, which is not a purely rational practice but one imbued with feelings of belonging, commitment, anger, and hope that motivate or hinder actors.

5.4 The Impact of Contemporary Transformations

Contemporary transformations pose new challenges for ILP concerning how to understand institutional logics in the context of digital transformation, the platform economy, and organizational flexibility. First,

digitalization imposes a new institutional logic founded on algorithms, big data, and automation, thereby redefining the standards of legitimacy, efficiency, and authority within organizations. Algorithms do not merely automate processes; they reshape the frames of attention and organizational decision-making, determining what is visible and what is hidden, what is measurable and what is excluded from calculation (Zuboff, 2019). Second, the platform economy reshapes the classical institutional logics: digital platforms do not clearly belong to the market logic, the profession logic, or the corporation logic but represent a new organizational model that merges elements from multiple logics and redefines the relationships of work, production, and exchange (Vallas & Schor, 2020). Third, organizational flexibility challenges the professional bureaucratic logic that once guaranteed the stability of career paths and professional identities, creating an institutional vacuum that actors seek to fill with new institutional logics that have not yet stabilized. These transformations reveal ILP's need to develop its concepts to accommodate emerging and hybrid institutional logics that do not belong to the classical seven-fold classification, and to analyze the dynamics through which new institutional logics are formed and the struggles surrounding their consolidation or failure. As Kheiri (2023) has argued in his examination of digital transformation's sociological implications, the emergence of algorithmic governance and platform-based labor relations represents a fundamental challenge to existing institutional logics, demanding conceptual innovation that goes beyond established frameworks.

6. Rigorous Theoretical and Epistemological Critique

6.1 Conceptual Ambiguity and Multiple Definitions

Conceptual ambiguity represents one of the most salient weaknesses of ILP, manifesting at two levels: the level of defining institutional logic itself, and the level of specifying the core institutional logics. At

the first level, the definition of institutional logic vacillates between broad definitions that encompass nearly all aspects of social life and narrow definitions restricted to institutional beliefs and values. While Friedland and Alford (1991) define it as "material and symbolic practice," Thornton and colleagues (2012) emphasize the cultural-symbolic dimension, and Lounsbury (2007) extends the concept to include the material-structural dimension. This conceptual stretching weakens the differentiating capacity of the concept and renders it susceptible to interpretive deployment in virtually any context, thereby draining it of its explanatory content. If everything can be understood as an "institutional logic," what does this concept actually add to our understanding of social phenomena? At the second level, the seven-fold classification of institutional logics proposed by Thornton and colleagues (2012) raises further questions: Is this classification universal, or is it historically and culturally specific to Western capitalist societies? Where is the logic of science, for example, in this classification? Where is the logic of civil society? Where are the institutional logics specific to non-Western societies? Conceptual ambiguity is not merely a technical problem but an expression of a deeper epistemological tension between the perspective's universalist aspiration and its historical-cultural rootedness in the context of Western capitalism.

6.2 Limitations of Empirical Measurement

ILP suffers from a notable gap between theoretical richness and empirical limitations, manifesting at several levels. First, the absence of unified measurement instruments for institutional logics means that each study tends to develop its own measures based on its specific research context, making comparison and generalization difficult. Second, the difficulty of empirically distinguishing among different institutional logics arises because, in actual practice, institutional logics intertwine and intermesh in ways that make their isolation and precise identification extremely difficult. Third, the problem of circular causality arises: many

empirical studies employing the ILP framework fall into the trap of circular explanation, where the institutional logic is inferred from organizational practices and then used to explain those very practices, without providing independent empirical evidence of the institutional logic as an independent causal force. Fourth, there is a near-total absence of innovative methodological approaches appropriate to the complexity of ILP: most empirical studies rely on qualitative-interpretive methods (case studies, interviews, documentary analysis), with a conspicuous lack of advanced quantitative approaches that could test ILP hypotheses on a broader scale. These empirical limitations are not an incidental flaw but an expression of a deeper epistemological problem concerning the relationship between theory and empiricism in institutional approaches: how can cultural-symbolic structures, which are by nature resistant to quantification, be measured without reducing them to measurable variables that lose their original complexity?

6.3 Weakness of Causal Explanation

ILP faces a fundamental critique concerning the weakness of its causal explanation: the perspective offers richer interpretive explanations than robust causal ones. When a researcher states that "the professional logic dominated the market logic in this organizational decision," this statement describes a condition but does not explain why this logic dominated over others, nor does it specify the causal mechanisms that produced this dominance. Institutional logic as a cultural-symbolic structure does not do anything by itself—it does not directly cause anything—but operates through mediators and mechanisms that require precise specification. This problem is not unique to ILP but afflicts institutional approaches more broadly; however, it is exacerbated in ILP by conceptual ambiguity itself: the broader and more flexible the concept, the harder it becomes to link it to specific, testable causal relationships. The need to develop a "middle-range mechanism theory" within ILP has become pressing: we need to identify the

precise mechanisms through which institutional logics influence organizational action—mechanisms of attention, justification, discipline, and convention—rather than contenting ourselves with saying that institutional logic "shapes" or "determines" or "influences" organizational action. Such a theory of mechanisms would enable ILP to move beyond interpretive richness toward causal precision, thereby strengthening its explanatory power in the highly competitive landscape of organizational theory.

6.4 Neglect of Power and Inequality

The neglect of power and inequality dimensions constitutes one of the deepest blind spots in ILP. The perspective tends to treat institutional logics as neutral structures that can "coexist," "compete," or "hybridize" within the organizational field, ignoring that the conflict among logics is always an unequal one involving relations of domination, dependency, and exclusion. When the market logic dominates the healthcare system, for example, this does not mean merely a "competition" between two institutional logics; it means the subordination of individuals' health to the logic of profit and the redefinition of patients as "customers" and physicians as "service providers"—a process of redefinition that is not neutral but serves specific interests and harms others (Friedland, 2012). The perspective also overlooks how social inequality is reproduced through institutional logics: institutional logics are not equally distributed across all actors. Some actors possess greater resources to influence the prevailing logics and define the standards of legitimacy, while others are excluded from this influence. As Kheiri and Herairia (2021) have shown in their study of social engineering and the feminization of entrepreneurial action, the relationship between social structures and women's practice of entrepreneurship reveals how institutional logics operate as mechanisms of gendered exclusion, reproducing patterns of inequality that ILP's neutral framework systematically overlooks.

6.5 Toward Theoretical Integration

This article does not propose abandoning ILP but rather developing it through integration with other sociological approaches that address its blind spots. First, integration with Actor-Network Theory (ANT) can enrich ILP's analysis at two levels: the level of mechanisms through which institutional logics are formed as "actor-networks" comprising both human and non-human actors (technologies, documents, buildings) that combine to produce and stabilize institutional logic; and the level of translation mechanisms through which institutional logic moves from one context to another and transforms in the process. The process of consolidating a new institutional logic is not merely "adoption" or "endorsement" but a complex translation process involving redefinition, adaptation, and resistance (Latour, 2005). In this regard, Kheiri (2025a) has explored the possibilities of epistemological integration between Actor-Network Theory and Critical Realism in organizational sociology, arguing that such integration can address the mechanism-level gaps in both traditions while preserving their respective strengths. Similarly, Kheiri (2025b) has critically examined the limits of Actor-Network Theory itself, demonstrating that while ANT offers powerful tools for tracing the composition of institutional networks, it requires supplementation by critical perspectives that can address the power asymmetries inherent in institutional processes.

Second, integration with Critical Sociology can enrich ILP's analysis by incorporating dimensions of hegemony, class conflict, and social reproduction. The critical approach enables viewing institutional logics not as neutral structures but as instruments of cultural hegemony serving the interests of the dominant and reproducing inequality. It also enables understanding "institutional work" not as a neutral practice but as a political practice involving struggle over resources, opportunities, and recognition. Third, Foucauldian analysis provides powerful conceptual tools for analyzing the relationship

between institutional logics and power-knowledge systems. Foucault's analyses of discourse, discipline, and governmentality enable deeper understanding of how institutional logics produce "legitimate truth" and operate as disciplinary systems shaping actors' bodies, subjectivities, and relationships (Foucault, 1977, 2008). Integration between ILP and Foucauldian analysis enables answering a fundamental question that ILP overlooks: how do institutional logics transform into regimes of governance that exercise their power not through direct coercion but through shaping what actors think, desire, and do?

7. Empirical Case Studies

7.1 The Healthcare Sector

The healthcare sector offers a fertile empirical laboratory for the operation of institutional logic multiplicity. In their seminal study of medical education in the United States between 1967 and 2005, Dunn and Jones (2010) reveal how the care logic and the science logic competed to shape medical education, and how the ascent of the science logic, grounded in evidence-based medicine, led to the restructuring of medical education curricula and practices. However, this competition was not neutral: the balance of power tilted in favor of the science logic, supported by research, funding, and accreditation institutions, thereby marginalizing the care logic traditionally associated with nursing and women's medicine. This case reveals a dimension of power in institutional pluralism that ILP frequently overlooks: institutional logics do not compete on equal footing but differ in their resources and capacity to impose their legitimacy. The analysis also demonstrates how change in the dominant institutional logic does not occur at a single stroke but through a series of gradual transformations involving the redefinition of professional beliefs, the restructuring of attention systems, and the redistribution of power among actors. Furthermore, the concept of hospitals as learning organizations, as explored by Kheiri

and Koriga (2025), demonstrates how healthcare institutions face competing institutional logics—between professional care standards and managerial efficiency demands—and how knowledge management strategies represent institutional work through which actors negotiate these competing logics in the pursuit of organizational learning and improvement.

In a different context, Reay and Hinings's (2009) study of the healthcare sector in Alberta, Canada, illustrates how professional healthcare logics and business-like bureaucratic logics interacted through practices of continuous negotiation rather than direct conflict, revealing the possibility of "competitive coexistence" among institutional logics when actors are not capable of imposing a single logic as dominant. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the relationship among institutional logics is not always zero-sum but can take the form of pragmatic accommodation, where actors strategically draw upon multiple logics without fully committing to any single one. The strategic dimension of logic use reveals the importance of actor agency within institutional fields, a dimension that pure structuralist readings of ILP tend to undertheorize.

7.2 Higher Education

Higher education constitutes an organizational field in which multiple institutional logics intersect intensively: the logic of the academic profession, grounded in professional independence, academic freedom, and peer evaluation; the market logic, grounded in competition, rankings, and responsiveness to student demand; and the state logic, grounded in accountability, public funding, and national educational policy. Thornton (2004), in her study of higher education publishing, demonstrates how the dominant institutional logic in this field shifted from editorial logic to market logic, and how this shift produced radical changes in publishing practices, evaluation criteria, and the identities of academic editors. Yet this shift was not unidirectional: some institutions

and actors preserved elements of the professional academic logic through strategies of resistance and negotiation, revealing that institutional change does not necessarily entail the complete replacement of one logic by another but may involve complex forms of coexistence and hybridization. In the contemporary context, global university rankings reveal a powerful institutional mechanism reshaping the dominant institutional logic in higher education according to the logic of market competition and quantitative measurement, thereby marginalizing traditional academic values such as critical education and independent intellectual formation while amplifying quantifiable values such as publication counts and employment rates.

7.3 The Public Sector

The public sector offers a unique terrain for studying institutional logic multiplicity, particularly in the context of governance reforms that have reshaped the relationship between the state logic and the market logic. McPherson and Sauder (2013), in their analysis of drug courts, reveal how multiple institutional logics—the logic of criminal justice, the logic of treatment, and the logic of judicial administration—interact in the daily practice of judges, lawyers, and treatment providers. The researchers demonstrate that actors use institutional logics as "resources" that can be manipulated and invested to achieve diverse objectives, not as rigid constraints that exclusively determine action. A judge may invoke the treatment logic to justify a decision reducing a sentence, then invoke the criminal justice logic to justify another decision increasing it, depending on context and opportunity. This strategic use of institutional logics reveals a deep sociological dimension that transcends the classical structuralist vision: actors are not merely carriers of institutional logics but strategic users who intelligently deploy them across different contexts. However, this strategic use is not equally available to all: actors who possess greater institutional capital—judges compared to defendants, for example—also possess greater capacity to

select the institutional logic that justifies their decisions, thereby reproducing inequality within the institutional system itself.

7.4 Multinational Corporations

Multinational corporations face a unique institutional challenge involving the interaction among diverse institutional logics across different national and cultural contexts. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), in their analysis of rhetorical strategies of legitimacy in the Canadian professional accounting sector, demonstrate how actors deployed different rhetorical strategies to justify institutional change—from the professional logic to the market logic—and how these strategies relied on redefining what was legitimate and acceptable within the professional field. However, this analysis overlooks the fact that this transformation was not the product of pure rhetoric but was undergirded by material transformations in the structure of the accounting market and the interests of dominant actors. Smets and colleagues (2015), in their study of reinsurance trading at Lloyd's of London, offer a detailed analysis of how two contradictory logics—the personal relationship logic and the competitive market logic—coexisted through daily negotiation practices enabling actors to navigate between logics according to contextual demands. This case reveals that institutional multiplicity in multinational corporations is not necessarily resolved through conflict or hybridization but may be managed through practical coexistence through what researchers term "pragmatic practice," allowing actors to respond to the demands of different institutional logics without theoretically resolving the tension between them.

8. Contributions to the Sociology of Work and Organization

8.1 Explaining the Reproduction of Power within Institutions

ILP contributes to the sociology of work by offering a framework for explaining the mechanisms of power reproduction within institutions that transcends both traditional functionalist and classical Marxist approaches. The perspective demonstrates that power reproduction occurs not only through material coercion or ideological domination but through the institutional logics that determine what is legitimate and what is marginal, who possesses decision-making authority and who is excluded, and which practices are rewarded and which are punished. However, ILP needs to develop this analysis in two directions. First, it must link institutional power reproduction to broader social inequality reproduction—for power within the institution is not isolated from the structures of class, gender, and ethnicity that determine who enters the institution, who advances within it, and who remains at its base. Second, it must analyze resistance to institutional power as an integral part of reproduction dynamics—institutions do not reproduce unidirectional power but reproduce unequal power relations permeated by conflict, resistance, and continuous negotiation. This development enables deeper understanding of why certain forms of inequality remain stable within institutions despite repeated demands for change: because the dominant institutional logics confer legitimacy on particular forms of unequal distribution of power and resources while styling others as deviations from the accepted institutional norm.

8.2 Analyzing the Formation of Professional Identity

ILP offers an important contribution to understanding the formation of professional identity as a dynamic product of the interaction among institutional logics.

Professional identity is not a pre-given entity but a social product that is formed and transformed through a continuous process of negotiation among the institutional logics defining the professional field. Goodrick and Reay's (2011) study of the pharmacy profession in the United States demonstrates how professional identity was transformed through the interaction between the healthcare logic and the business logic: from an identity centered on the "independent professional" and the direct relationship with the patient to an identity centered on the "healthcare service provider" and economic efficiency and regulatory compliance. Yet this transformation was neither complete nor final: many pharmacists preserved elements of the traditional professional identity through practices of resistance and everyday negotiation, revealing that professional identity is not determined by a single institutional logic but is a space of conflict and negotiation among multiple logics. This understanding enables deeper analysis of contemporary crises of professional identity: physicians confronting the market logic in medical practice, teachers confronting the logic of standardized accountability in education, and academics confronting the logic of ranking in research—all experience profound identity tensions that are not merely transient inconveniences but expressions of a structural institutional transformation redefining the very meaning of the profession.

8.3 Understanding Contemporary Organizational Change

ILP contributes to understanding contemporary organizational change by offering an interpretive framework linking macro-institutional transformations with micro-organizational shifts. Organizational change, within ILP, is neither the product of conscious decision nor a technical response to environmental challenges but rather the outcome of shifts in the balance of power among the institutional logics prevailing in the organizational field. When one institutional logic recedes and another ascends—as in the shift from the professional

logic to the market logic across many sectors—organizational change extends beyond structural or procedural adjustments to encompass the redefinition of the very meaning of work, the values governing it, and the identities it shapes. However, ILP needs to deepen its analysis of organizational change in two directions. First, it must take marginal and resistant actors into account: many studies focus on dominant actors who lead institutional change while marginalizing the voices of those who suffer its consequences. Second, it must analyze the "costs" of institutional change, which always involves gains and losses distributed unequally among different actors—and these costs are not limited to economic dimensions but also include the loss of meaning, identity, and recognition.

8.4 Connecting ILP to Major Transformations in Modern Work

Connecting ILP to the major transformations in modern work requires developing concepts and analytical tools to accommodate the radical transformations experienced by the contemporary world of work. The first of these transformations is the spread of platform work, which reshapes the relationship between the profession logic and the market logic: the platform worker belongs neither to the profession logic, which guarantees independence and professional protection, nor to the classical market logic based on the bilateral relationship between seller and buyer, but exists in a hybrid institutional space lacking stable legitimacy standards (Vallas & Schor, 2020). The second is the comprehensive digitalization of work, which imposes the logic of algorithms and digital surveillance upon traditional professional practices—algorithmic monitoring of workers, algorithmic wage determination, and big data performance evaluation are all practices that reshape the institutional logics governing work (Zuboff, 2019). The third is labor flexibilization, which dismantles the professional bureaucratic logic based on stable career paths and cohesive professional identities, imposing a new

institutional logic founded on flexibility, adaptation, and professional precarity. These transformations demand that ILP move beyond the classical seven-fold classification of institutional logics and develop new concepts to accommodate the emerging institutional logics produced by digital, platform, and flexibility transformations, as well as analyze the institutional struggles surrounding the consolidation or resistance to these new logics.

9. Analytical Conclusion: A Critical Theoretical Synthesis

This article has presented a critical theoretical-analytical reading of the Institutional Logics Perspective that seeks to move beyond summative exposition toward deconstruction, synthesis, and constructive critique. Through this analytical trajectory, it has become clear that ILP represents a distinctive theoretical contribution to the sociology of organization for several fundamental reasons. First, it shifts the analysis from the level of a single institution to the level of institutional multiplicity and conflict among logics, enabling deeper understanding of the complexity of contemporary organizational reality. Second, it provides a conceptual linkage between the macro-institutional and micro-organizational levels through concepts of identity, attention, and institutional work. Third, it opens space for analyzing institutional change as a product of conflict and negotiation rather than merely a response to environmental pressures. However, these contributions are coupled with epistemological and explanatory limits that demand serious engagement.

Rethinking the concept of institution within ILP reveals a structural tension between the cultural-symbolic dimension and the material-practical dimension. The institution in ILP is often understood as a system of meaning and legitimacy rather than as a structure of material relations and politics. This cultural bias weakens the perspective's capacity to explain how institutions produce relations of power and

hegemony and how they reproduce social inequality. The institution is not merely a "logic of meaning" but also a "structure of power," a "system of governance," and a "mechanism of exclusion"—dimensions that cannot be reduced to the cultural-symbolic dimension alone. The concept of institutional logic itself requires rethinking: if it encompasses everything from beliefs to practices to rules to justifications, it loses its differentiating capacity and becomes a boundaryless interpretive tool. Friedland's (2012) distinction between the symbolic and material dimensions remains a first step that requires deepening through linking each dimension to specific, testable causal mechanisms.

At the explanatory level, this article has identified three principal limits of ILP. The first is the weakness of causal explanation, resulting from the absence of a middle-range mechanism theory specifying how institutional logics influence organizational action through specific, observable pathways. The second is the limitation of empirical measurement, arising from the absence of unified measurement instruments, the difficulty of empirically distinguishing among overlapping logics, and the problem of circular causality. The third is the neglect of power and inequality dimensions, which transforms institutional analysis from an analysis of hegemonic conflict into an analysis of neutral interaction. These limits are not final but serve as points of departure for developing the perspective. This development requires theoretical dialogue with other sociological traditions: Actor-Network Theory offers tools for analyzing the mechanisms through which institutional logics are formed and stabilized through networks of human and non-human actors; Critical Sociology offers a vision for linking institutional logics to the reproduction of hegemony and inequality; and Foucauldian analysis offers concepts for understanding how institutional logics operate as power-knowledge systems shaping subjectivities and practices.

Regarding the implications of ILP for the future of organizational sociology, several analytical observations can be offered. First, ILP's capacity to endure as a viable theoretical framework depends on developing its conceptual and methodological tools to accommodate contemporary transformations—digitalization, platform economies, and organizational flexibility—that impose new institutional logics not belonging to the classical classification. Second, the future of ILP is contingent upon its capacity to transcend the prevailing descriptive-classificatory tendency toward a coherent causal explanation that specifies the precise mechanisms linking institutional logics to organizational phenomena. Third, integration with critical sociological approaches is not an intellectual luxury but an epistemological necessity: without analyzing the dimensions of power, hegemony, and inequality, ILP remains a descriptive tool for an institutional world presumed to be one in which logics compete on a level playing field, when in reality the field is tilted, with certain logics occupying privileged positions and commanding greater resources and broader influence.

Finally, this article opens new theoretical questions warranting future research: How might a "middle-range mechanism theory" be constructed within ILP to specify the precise causal pathways between institutional logics and organizational action? How might the classification of institutional logics be developed to accommodate emerging logics associated with digital and platform transformations? How might the analysis of power and hegemony be integrated within ILP without losing its specificity as an institutional approach? How might innovative empirical methodologies be developed to test ILP hypotheses without reducing the complexity of institutional logics to measurable variables? How do institutional logics interact with structures of class, gender, and ethnicity in producing organizational inequality? These questions do not weaken ILP but rather propel it toward greater theoretical maturity, enabling it to contribute

meaningfully to understanding the profound institutional transformations experienced by the contemporary world of work and organization.

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