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Performing multiple logics in practice



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Summary The concept of institutional logics has taken on a central role in institutional theory highlighting the importance of the social context in shaping the behavior of social actors. However, such studies have so far not given much attention to how logics are translated and enacted in practice. They also tend to overlook the role of materiality and objects. In the study reported on here, we focus on what happens when established grocery stores start to sell non-prescription pharmaceuticals. Drawing on a performative perspective on institutional logics we show how the process of translating logics into another practice is dependent on and conditioned by material arrangements and objects and the performance of multiple logics in practice created a patchwork of established and new procedures and objects. We conclude that it is only when the logics are “enacted” that they become part of practice. This means that logics do not exist *per se*, but must be performed into being.

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Introduction

The concept of institutional logics has taken on a central role in institutional theory (Goodrick & Reay, 2011), highlighting the importance of the social context in shaping the behavior of social actors (e.g. Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, Reuf, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Institutional logics “refer to the belief systems and related practices that predominate in an organizational field” (Scott, 2001, p. 139), thus providing the rules of appropriateness making certain actions or solutions legitimate within a field (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005). Studies of institutional logics have focused on identifying the logics underpinning field-level institutions and showing how these logics are historically contingent (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). Such studies have provided strong accounts

of the processes through which institutional logics govern action, but also useful insights into institutional change; that is, what happens upon the mobilization of a new logic that competes with, and gradually replaces, beliefs and practices associated with the previously dominant logic (e.g. Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Recent studies have emphasized the co-existing and co-mingling of logics within a field during the same period of time (e.g. Dunn & Jones, 2010; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lounsbury, 2007; Purdy & Gray, 2009; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Swan, Bresnen, Robertson, Newell, & Dopson, 2010). Some of these scholars argue that there is a “conflict-of-logics” in the same field (Purdy & Gray, 2009) or a struggle between logics (Dunn & Jones, 2010). Other studies show that the organizations within a field can hold several logics at the same time without competing or coming into conflict with each other (Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Lounsbury, 2007; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Thus, the concept of institutional logic has clearly been proven fruitful in enhancing our understandings of what guides actions, providing opportunities but also constraints,

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within a field, and of the fact that practice may be influenced by several logics. However, it also has some shortcomings.

Institutional logic is a field-level concept and, even though research has traditionally focused on the relationships between organizations and the fields in which they operate, relatively few studies have taken organizations as a level of analysis (for an overview, see Greenwood et al., 2011). This means that they tend to neglect the importance of the micro-level dynamics of meanings (Zilber, 2008) and fail to engage in the day-to-day work of people in organizations (Lounsbury, 2008). As a consequence, they do not contribute to our understanding of how logics work in practice; in what ways logics compete or co-mingle, how people act upon them, and what consequences this has in practice.

Furthermore, taking the field-level as a point of departure, studies of institutional logics promotes a one-way perspective – the institutional logics are what precede the actions – whereby organizations become the recipients of, and respond to, stable logics. Thus, few studies address questions of how practice affects institutions (one important exception being studies of institutional work, e.g. Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2010) and, consequently, how logics are constructed and re-constructed in practice. Practices are most often referred to as recurrent, materially mediated and situated patterns of actions (Nicolini, 2013; Schatzki, 2005). However, studies of institutional logics have so far not paid much attention to the situated aspect of practices; how logics are translated and enacted in practice. There is also a tendency to overlook the role of materiality and objects (Czarniawska, 2008; Tryggestad and Georg, 2011).

In this paper, we look into the field of the pharmacy which has been undergoing major change, and still is. Based on a historical case study of US pharmacists, Goodrick and Reay (2011) argued that “Perhaps one of the most extreme cases of transformation in professional work is visible in the case of pharmacists” (p. 373). These scholars have shown how the professional work of pharmacists is guided by a constellation of institutional logics deriving from broader society: the professional, corporate, market, and state logics. Pharmacists, compared to other professional groups, have a long history of association with business and the market. However, it is not only the work of the professionals that has changed over time; the products have also changed, e.g. from being compounded to being pre-packed and mass produced. Stores where medication is sold are also taking on a different form, e.g. retail pharmacies as independent stores or as major chains.

The backdrop to the study presented in this paper is the transformation of Sweden’s pharmacy market. The Swedish government has had a monopoly on owning and distributing pharmaceuticals; however, pushed by European Union (EU) anti-competition concerns, the Swedish pharmacy market has now been de-regulated. The main argument for deregulating the pharmacy market was that this is expected to lead to the increased availability of pharmaceuticals and to prices being squeezed (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2008, p. 4). As of 1 January 2010, other actors than the state-owned Apoteket AB are now able to retail pharmaceuticals directly to the consumer. Furthermore, for the first time in Swedish history non-prescription pharmaceuticals are now sold outside pharmacies.

In the study reported on here, we focus on what happens when established grocery stores start to sell non-prescription pharmaceuticals. We examine the process of introducing pharmaceuticals into the field of retailing; how the professional logic of pharmacy (and medicine) travels, with the support of a state/bureaucratic logic, to a local practice where the market logic is more influential. The aim of the study is thus to describe and analyze how logics move between fields, and are translated and enacted in a practice where other logics are ‘in residence’. This includes taking a performative perspective (Czarniawska, 2002; Latour, 1986) on institutional logics, meaning that logics are continuously constructed and performed into being. The value of such an approach is, according to Lounsbury (2008, p. 357), “to probe the relation of practice to logics and to track the dynamics that result in the creation of new practices and logics.” In understanding practice in this context, we use a qualitative and ethnographically-inspired methodology.

Drawing upon the sociology of translation (Czarniawska, 1997; Latour, 1986) this study illustrates how the process of translating logics into another practice is dependent on and conditioned by material arrangements and objects. The objects carry logics, concerning examples of how to act, and make it possible for the logics to travel to other local practices. Moreover, in line with the performative perspective, it is only when the logics are “enacted” that they become part of practice. This means that logics do not exist per se, but must be performed into being. Furthermore, we also argue that, in practices, there are multiple logics at play and how these relate to each other, and are acted upon, varies from situation to situation. Thus, responding to Hining’s (2012) call for a better understanding of the ways in which logics are subtly changed as they move from one jurisdiction to another, we seek to contribute toward the institutional literature by enhancing our understanding of how logics move between fields, are translated, enacted and continuously re-constructed in practice.

The paper is organized as follows: First, we present our points of departure for the study; multiple institutional logics and logics in practice. Next, the process of collecting and analyzing the field material is described. In the section that follows, we describe and discuss the chain of actions taken when non-prescription pharmaceuticals went on sale at a grocery store, how the Medical Products Agency issues recommendations and regulations regarding how to handle goods, reflecting a professional logic which is supported by a state/bureaucratic logic, and how the logics are translated and enacted in local practice primarily guided by a market logic. Finally, we discuss the role of materiality during such processes and how the performance of multiple logics created a patchwork of established but also new procedures and objects.

Multiple institutional logics

In their day-to-day work, people continually face situations which call for various actions to be taken, not always consistent with each other, which are guided by some abstract resources such as beliefs, norms, and institutions. In institutional theory, this is explained by the concept of institutional logics. An institutional logic is socially constructed and

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