



## Special issue of *Strategic Organization*: “Strategic Responses to Institutional Complexity”

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The distinctive mission of *Strategic Organization* is to bridge the fields of strategic management and organization theory. This first Special Issue Call for Papers on “Strategic responses to institutional complexity” reflects the journal’s mission as well as the potential for convergence and mutual enrichment it represents (Durand, 2012; Oliver, 1991, 1997; Suddaby et al., 2013).

When Oliver (1991) published her seminal article on strategic responses to institutional pressures, institutional pressures were generally considered to be pressures for isomorphism with a dominant template for organizing. Since that time, we have seen a substantial growth in the focus on institutional change as organizations face unprecedented levels of environmental turbulence, and boundaries between firms, industries, and public and private lives are fading. In consequence, organizations are confronted with multiple influences arising from divergent institutional logics (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008). Navigating these institutionally complex waters requires tradeoffs, negotiations (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), distinctive capabilities (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013), and the careful balancing of resources, stakeholder interests, and strategic responses in order to secure legitimacy from different sources while ensuring organizational performance and survival.

Recent studies have offered several ideas concerning potential responses to institutional complexity. For example, in fragmented fields, actors have more choice about which pressures they select for conformity (Quirke, 2013), and they may even be able to undermine dominant logics by drawing on alternative minority logics (Durand and Jourdan, 2012). Normative pressures may also be more easily ignored when the target of pressure is powerful and otherwise legitimate (Dhallal and Oliver, 2013). When complexity results from interactions among diverse fields, responses may be focused on solving immediate problems in the moment, and actors may have more flexibility (McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Smets et al., 2012). Organizations may also explore multiple pathways of accommodation under institutional complexity (Raaijmakers, Vermeulen, Meeus & Zietsma, forthcoming). Yet, our knowledge of how firms and organizations respond to multiple institutional constituents with conflicting demands is limited, and few studies have examined the conflicts and struggles that result (Zilber, 2011). While institutional complexity may sometimes procure strategic advantages, it clearly poses strategic challenges as well. This special issue, there-

fore, seeks to advance our understanding of how organizations experience and respond to institutional complexity.

There are several possible avenues of exploration. One line of thought seeks to describe or predict the strategies employed by organizations when faced with a multiplicity of logics and/or to examine their consequences for performance (Kraatz and Block, 2008; Pache and Santos, 2010). Another avenue focuses on the strategic management practices of “hybrid” organizations (e.g. Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Jay, 2013) that are traversed by multiple logics, considering, for example, how these emerge, and what happens when hybrids face “moments of test” when logics directly conflict and actors work to resolve tensions and legitimacy struggles (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Dansou and Langley, 2012; Jay, 2013; Reay and Hinings, 2009). A third focuses on cognitive and emotional aspects of institutional complexity—how decision makers notice, conceptualize, feel about, and decide to respond to mixed institutional pressures and prescriptions (Friedland, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012). Fourth, complexity can be explored at the level of the field to determine, for example, how competing logics interact and how different logics are shaped by collective agencies such as associations, social movements, and the media (e.g. Hoffman, 2011).

Despite some progress in the study of institutional complexity, significant questions remain and offer opportunities for contribution. These include, but are not limited to the following:

### *Organizational strategies:*

- How do organizations respond to multiple institutional logics?
- Do different degrees and sources of institutional complexity lead to specific organizational responses? Under what conditions do organizations deploy multiple responses simultaneously?
- How do complexity response strategies affect economic and social performance, and organizational survival?
- How does institutional complexity affect either the pace of institutionalization or decision makers’ responses before compliance?
- What resources, knowledge, and capabilities are associated with the successful navigation of institutional complexity?

### *Multiple logics in hybrid organizations:*

- How are multiple logics reflected in the organizational structures and strategic practices of “hybrid” organizations? How do leaders of hybrids balance competing logics within the organization and resolve legitimacy struggles when logics conflict?
- What micro-practices do organizational actors use in their attempts to create, sustain, or resist the hybridization of organizations to deal with complexity?
- Can elements of different logics be flexibly combined as tools in a toolkit, or do logic adherents resist their combination?

### *Cognitive and emotional aspects of complexity:*

- How does managers’ attention to different institutional demands vary?
- How is institutional complexity experienced and accommodated, resolved, managed, and challenged by organizational actors?
- How do members of top management teams cope with the cognitive and emotional demands of institutional complexity in making strategic decisions?

### Field level complexity:

- How is complexity maintained or resolved at the field level?
- Under what conditions does institutional complexity lead to conflict vs co-existence within the field?
- What is the role of collective actors, such as associations and the media, in shaping the form and experience of complexity?
- How do field actors work to avoid the ill effects of conflicting pressures?

We welcome empirical papers using a variety of methods to address these and related topics. We are also open to conceptual papers that make a strong contribution to the understanding of strategic responses to institutional complexity

### Timeline and submission instructions

All submissions should be uploaded to the Manuscript Central/Scholar One website: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/so> between 1 October and 31 October 2014. Once you have created your account (if you do not already have one) and you are ready to submit your paper, you will need to choose this particular Special Issue from the drop down menu that is provided for the type of submission. Contributions should follow the directions for manuscript submission described on the SO webpage: <http://soq.sagepub.com>. For queries about submissions, contact SO!'s editorial office at [strategic.organization@hec.ca](mailto:strategic.organization@hec.ca). For questions regarding the content of this special issue, contact one of the guest editors.

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