

Institutional logics analysis in higher education research

CGHE Seminar 261, 18 January 2022

Yuzhuo Cai, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

Nicola Mountford, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland

STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION


<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1946032>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

 OPEN ACCESS

 Check for updates

Institutional logics analysis in higher education research

Yuzhuo Cai ^a and Nicola Mountford ^b

^aFaculty of Management and Business, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland; ^bSchool of Business, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland

ABSTRACT

While institutional logics theory has increasingly been applied in higher education research, especially in the past five years, agreement is lacking on how to approach institutional logics analysis. This results in proliferating institutional logics in higher education studies and often

KEYWORDS

Institutional logics;
institutional theory;
organisation studies;
university; literature review

Cai, Y., & Mountford, N. (2021). Institutional logics analysis in higher education research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-25, doi:10.1080/03075079.2021.1946032.

Research Gap:

While institutional logics theory has increasingly been applied in higher education research, especially in the past five years, agreement is lacking on how to approach institutional logics analysis. This results in proliferating institutional logics in higher education studies and often confuses newcomers to the field as to how to use institutional logics in their empirical research.

Answering the following research questions through a systematic literature analysis (59 articles):

1. What approaches to institutional logics analysis are used in higher education studies?
2. What institutional logics are identified/applied in higher education studies?
3. What challenges are evident in applying institutional logics in higher education studies?
4. How does the use of institutional logics in higher education research contribute to institutional logics theory?

Main topics



Institutional logics theory (Nicola Mountford)



Institutional logics in higher education: Outcomes and challenges (Yuzhuo Cai)



Suggested approach to institutional logics analysis (Nicola Mountford)

Institutional logics and institutional logics analysis

Nicola Mountford

Institutional logics theory



One of the strands of institutional theory: Old institutionalism, New institutionalism, Institutional entrepreneurship, Institutional work, Institutional logics (Cai and Mehari, 2015).



Definition: Institutional logic is defined as ‘a set of material practices and symbolic constructions’ that constitute an institutional order’s ‘organising principle’ and are ‘available to organisations and individuals to elaborate’ (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248).



Originators: Alford and Friedland (1985), (Friedland and Alford 1991), Thornton and Ocasio (1999), Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012)

Classic formulation of institutional logics (Societal-level logics)

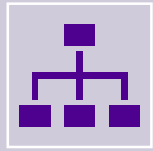
1. State
2. Market
3. Family
4. Profession
5. Corporation
6. Community
7. Religion
8. Democracy

Five logics identified by Alford and Friedland (1985, 1991): the bureaucratic **state**, the capitalist **market**, the nuclear **family**, **democracy**, and **religion** (in the form of Christianity).

Six logics identified by Thornton (2004): the state, the market, the family, religion, the profession, and the corporation (Adding **profession** and **corporation** logics but dropping out the democracy logic from Alford and Friedland).

Seven logics by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012): adding **community** logic

Core value of institutional logics perspective



It concretizes the abstract concept of the institution by identifying a set of supra-organisational patterns that provide meaning to actions and conflicts (Thornton and Ocasio 1999, 4).



It provides a very useful lens to observe complex institutional environment; Multiple and contending logics provide the dynamic for potential change/innovation in both organisations and societies (Thornton et al., 2012).

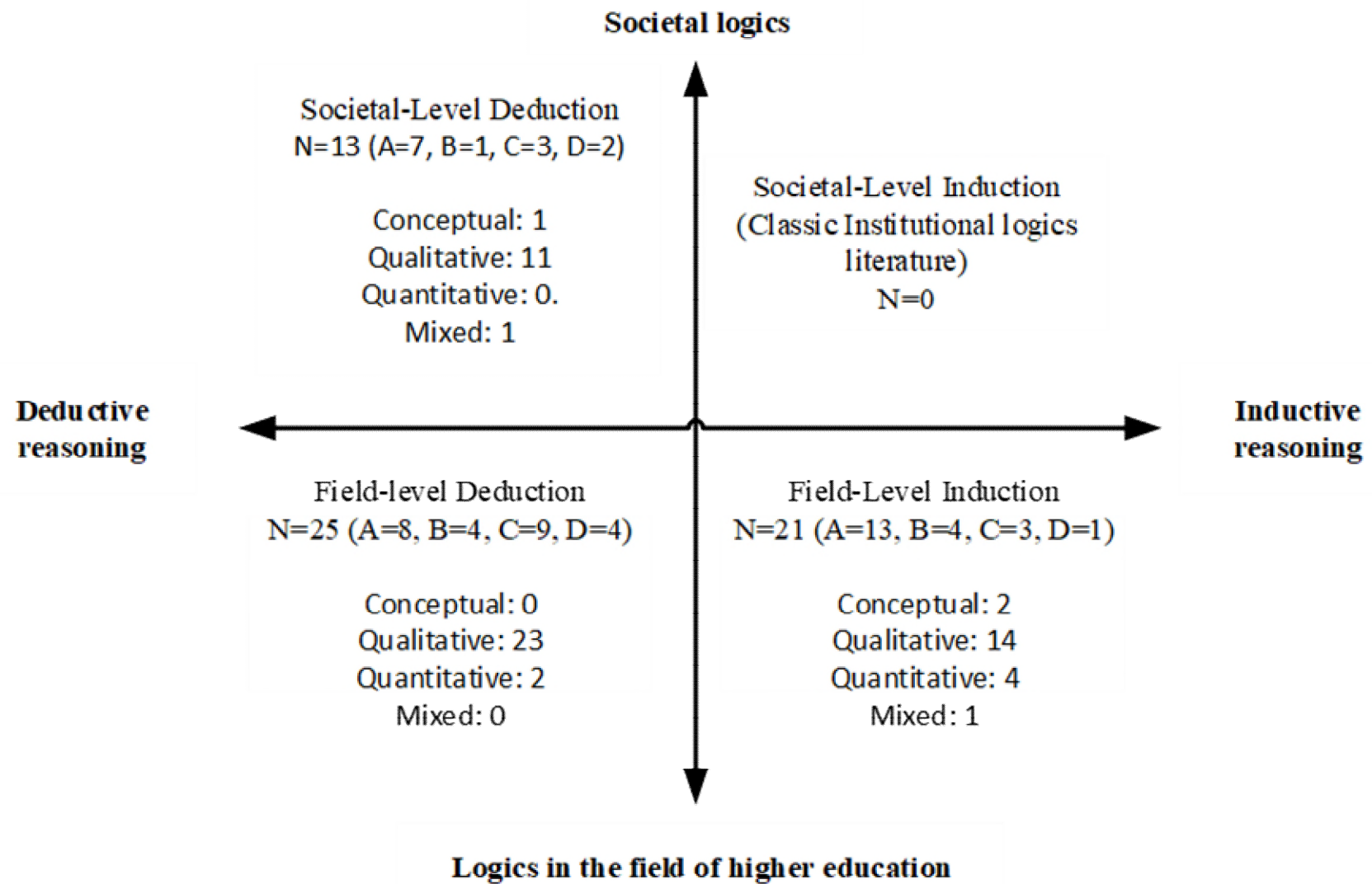


It helps better understand the “paradox of embedded agency” (Seo and Creed 2002): if the actions of organisational actors are constrained by taken-for-granted institutions, how and why can the actors induce institutional changes?

Institutional logics in higher education research

Yuzhuo Cai

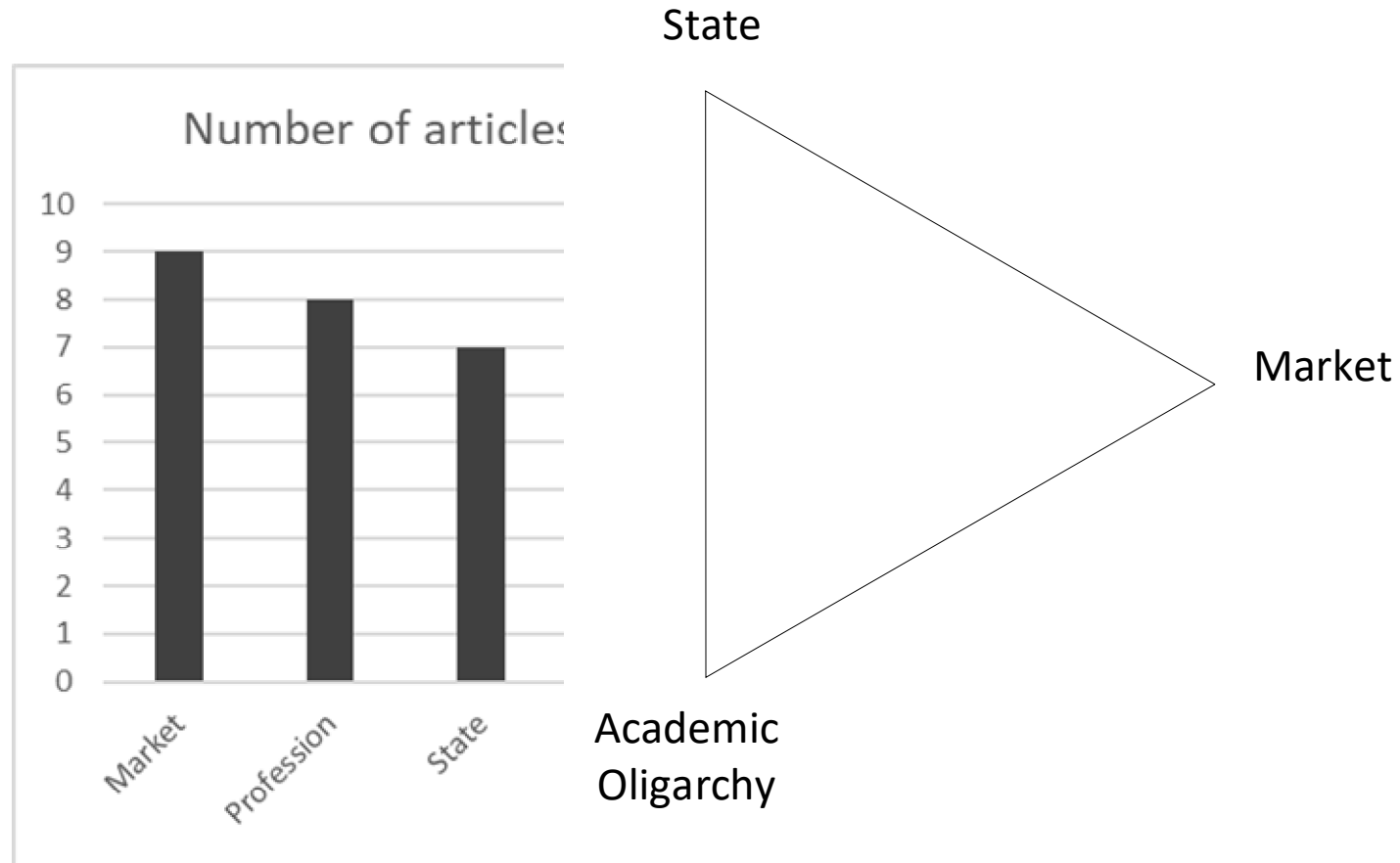
Typology of institutional logics analysis



N: Number of articles of higher education research
 Conceptual: Number of conceptual papers
 Qualitative: Number of qualitative papers
 Quantitative: Number of quantitative papers
 Mixed: Number of mixed methods papers

A: Higher education journals
 B: Journals including higher education research as a sub-field
 C: Management and business journals
 D: Other social science journals

Logics applied in the societal-level deduction

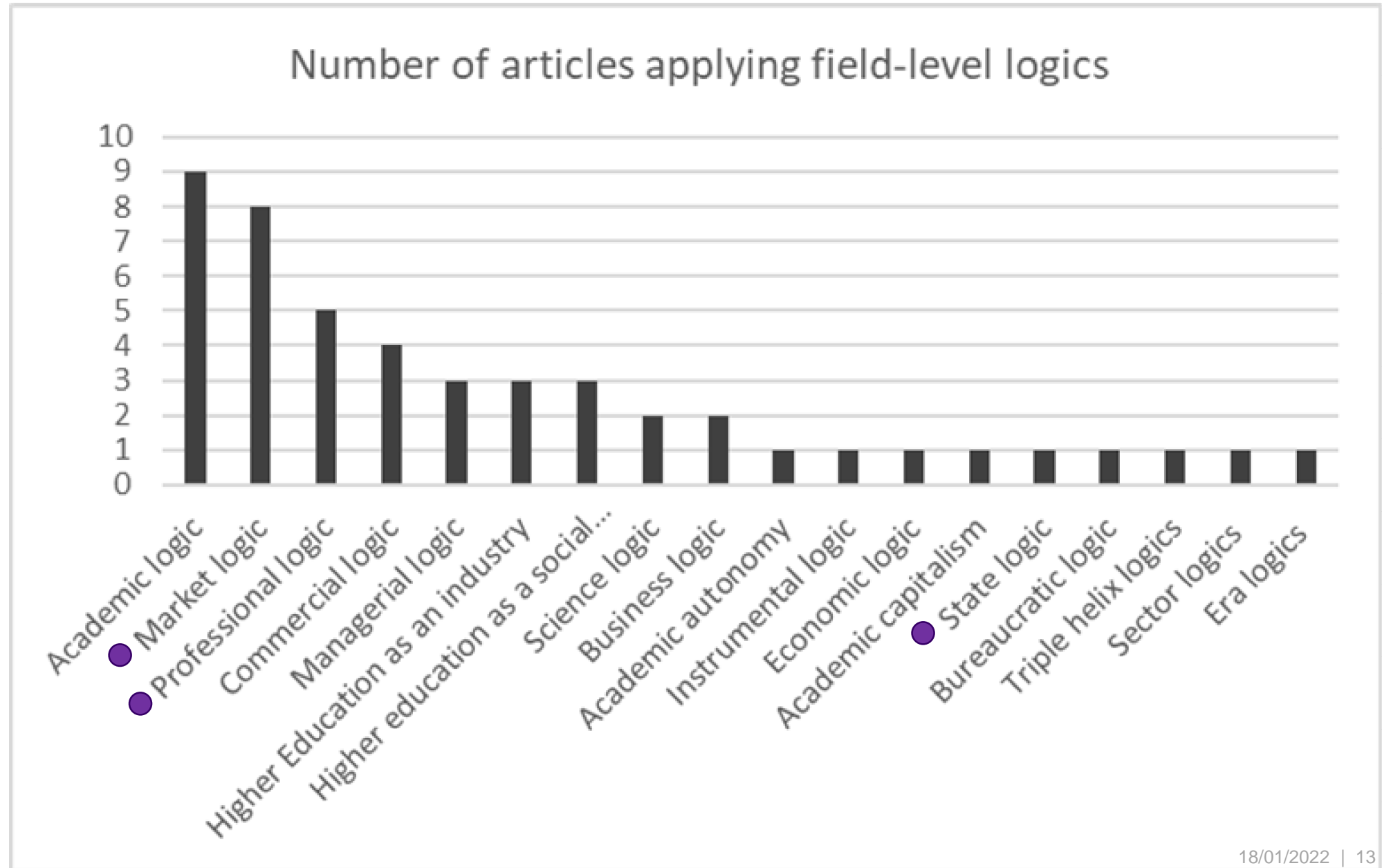


Burton Clark's Triangle of HE coordination

Challenges in societal-deduction approach

- In general, studies applying such approach more strictly follow institutional logics theory and show methodological rigour.
- However, there are two challenges:
 - The ideal-type societal logics, originally identified in the Western context, may be limited in institutional analysis in non-Western context.
 - Even in higher education studies in western countries, researchers expand the framework of ideal type societal logics by add new ones (e.g. managerial logic and logic of organisation), which are often freely defined or not the logics at the societal level.

Logics applied in the field-level deduction approach



Challenges in Field-level deduction approach

- Compared to more well-defined ideal-type logics at the societal level, agreement is lacking on what ideal-type logics are at the field-level.
- With only a few exceptions, the formation of most ideal-type field-level logics in higher education research is difficult to trace.
- Researchers have different interpretation of logics with the same name.
- Some logics, though with different names, share similar assumptions.

Logics identified in field-level induction approach

- Managerialism vs traditional colloquialism; Collegial, efficient-collegial, managerial archetypes;
- Profiles of research groups in the lens of institutional logics;
- Service-oriented logic vs. German specific classical logic
- Logics economic sustainability vs. market endowment vs. education
- Academic identities in the lens of institutional logics
- Logics of universities' adaptation to economic recessions: Consumer service, market search, growing and greening, the complete arsenal
- Logics of academic disciplines
- Logics in higher education policymaking: Mission differentiation, student opportunity, system development and managerialism
- Indigenous vs. Western social scientific logics; Autonomy, utilitarianism, managerialism
- Logics as four distinctive stakeholder beliefs
- Five logics of research excellence (Research centres)
- Academic logic of high school vs. academic of higher education
- Logic of science advancement vs. logic of coercive pressures to publish
- Research excellence logics (among ERC recipients)
- Scientific autonomous vs market logics
- State logic, Business Logic

Challenges in field-level induction approach

- This approach is the most promising but, at the same time, the most problematic.
 - It is promising because it could provide a solid basis for identifying ideal type logics in the higher education field.
 - The approach is problematic because many of these new logics are rather freely defined and in some cases the logics identified do not strictly follow the definitions of institutional logics in the classic literature.

Concept misformation: Concept straining vs. Concept stretching

Concept straining

- The problem of too few logics.

If eight institutional logics, as societal-level ideal types, have been identified, then there is no room for further discovery of how particular logics of specific institutions are at work.

Concept stretching

- The problem of an excessive proliferation of logics.

If logics become simply a particular organisation's engrained practices, sense of identity or sense of purpose, detached from a tight coupling with societal institutions, then an institutional logic becomes an empty concept.

Authors applying institutional logics should have a broad understanding of institutional theory

- Institutional logics is only one of several interrelated strands of institutional theory (Cai and Mehari 2015).
 - To understand how various forms of institutional logics emerge, evolve, and become displaced in competing, hybrid or blended logics, other strands of institutional theory such as institutional work (e.g., Lawrence and Suddaby 2006) or institutional entrepreneurship (e.g., Battilana, Leca, and Boxenbaum 2009) can be useful.
- Be aware of the co-existence of phenomena of contesting logics and isomorphism.

Going forward: Suggestions for institutional logics analysis in HE

Nicola Mountford

A tighter focus

- Differentiating societal level and field level analysis
- Re-thinking field level logics
- Theory-methodology fit
- Key components in institutional logics analysis (field-level)
 - Institutional systems and boundaries
 - Actors and actions
 - Template of institutional logics
- Ideology and institutional logics

Thank you!

**You are welcome
with questions
and comments.**

