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Organizational Dischronization: On Meaning and Meaninglessness, Sensemaking and Nonsensemaking

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ABSTRACT This paper contributes to close up studies of how members in organizations experience and act in relationship to what is broadly and vaguely referred to as institutionalized structures and practices. Based on a case study about scorecards, a quality control system, it is illustrated that this practice works poorly, because of inconsistent ideas of purpose and functioning. We introduce the concept of organizational dischronization (OD) to illuminate this. OD indicates a deviation from the ideal of shared or synchronized meanings, and the existence of diverging understandings and lack of clarification of this, in an organization. The paper challenges some core ideas of institutional theory (logics) and sensemaking, suggesting the use of counter concepts such is organizational illogics and nonsensemaking, thus opening up for a broader and less 'smooth' understanding of how institutions and sensemaking work than assumed in the literature.

Keywords: organizational dischronization, institutional theory, institutional logics, meaning, organization, sensemaking, nonsensemaking

INTRODUCTION

It is often claimed that organizations and organizing are constituted on a reasonably high level of shared meanings and understandings – of practices, objectives, technologies. A broad cluster of theories are based on this assumption, for example organizational culture (Alvesson, 2013a; Ashkanasy et al., 2011; Smircich, 1983) and organizational identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Pratt et al., 2016). Others address shared understandings using alternative words, such as 'communities of practice' where people think together (Pyrko et al., 2017), or engage in 'shared sensemaking' (Brown et al., 2008). Institutional theorists emphasize institutional myths providing legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977)

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and 'the role of shared meanings, institutional processes [...] and institutional conformity' (Clegg, 2010, p. 6) in shaping organizational activity.

Two assumptions underlie these theoretical positions. The first relates to meaning understood as a creation of a rather clear sense of how to interpret something. People are supposed to (actively) make sense of what they encounter, or there is a cognitive structure providing meaning or supporting/directing sensemaking. The second relates to the idea about sharedness – understood as a common way of relating in organizations. Within institutional theory this is discussed in terms of, for example, 'cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior' (Scott, 1995, p. 33) and 'institutions as structures that constrain sensemaking by making some actions unimaginable and others self-evident' (Weber and Glynn, 2006, p. 1641). Institutions are understood as consisting of a high level of shared meanings, through sources and acts of sensemaking. However, this may be questioned.

The interest in shared meanings is often addressed when discussing occupational groups and communities, subcultures, institutional logics, organizational units, functions or social groups (e.g., Parker, 2000; Prasad et al., 2011; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Young, 1989). Less attention has been given to variations *within* an institutional logic or group, at least in dominant approaches such as (most versions of) institutional theory, organizational culture, identity and sensemaking. In this paper, we argue that the idea about shared meanings is often taken for granted across schools, theories and domains in organization studies. This is framed as a definitional issue, but can be opened up for empirical inquiry. We follow Davis' (1971) idea of assumption-challenging as a key element in interesting research (see also Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). Two questions that guide this inquiry are: 1) Are institutions necessarily sensemaking devices leading to shared meaning? 2) Does the idea of shared meanings as a key characteristic of organizations/organizing regulated by institutions generally hold water if we relax some theoretical commitments and go into an organizational setting and try to find out what goes on here?

The paper is a critical exploration of notions of shared meanings and sensemaking, their boundaries and limitations in (some) dominant schools. The *aim* is to point at some possible limits to shared meanings and institutional theory as well as sensemaking thinking, without moving into postmodernist theorizing, which tend to assume and highlight the instability of meaning, disorganization or fragmentation (Cooper and Burrell, 1988), although views on this vary significantly between postmodernist authors (Alvesson, 2002; Rosenau, 1992). Besides the theoretical interest of this paper we are also empirically interested in, and explore in some depth, how professionals relate to a formal quality control system. We study a university setting where course leaders are required to fill in 'score cards', a quality control device, triggering and documenting feedback, learning and quality improvement in education. We then study how people make sense of these, or relate to the question of meaning, as well as the possible sharedness of possible meanings.

In our case, faculty members attribute different meanings and logics to make (or fail to make) sense of purpose, value and effects of scorecards (SC), a routine for documentating experiences, feedback and improvement of courses. We introduce the concept '*organizational dischronization*' (OD) to illustrate how different local 'logics' and meanings, sensemaking and lack of sensemaking, characterize the organization. We contribute with insights about a case of bureaucracy/quality control in organizational practice, but

mainly see the case as an empirical site to contribute to our understanding of the shared/diverse/contradictory meanings associated with the organizing/disorganizing around meanings and sensemaking of institutional myths and logics. This is a fundamental aspect of organization and deserves continued attention.

The paper is structured accordingly: In the following section we will outline (some of) the literature on institutional theory and sensemaking focusing on shared meaning. We then present our case and methodological considerations, before reporting our study, where lack of meaning and sensemaking as well as non-sharing of meaning is highlighted. We conclude by suggesting a new theoretical idea – organizational dischronization – as a way of accounting for how institutional myths and logic may not involve or lead to shared meaning or sensemaking.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORY AND THE SENSEMAKING PERSPECTIVE

To understand the concept of shared meanings we draw on institutional theory, in particular institutional logic (IL), and the sensemaking perspective, but with – as we will see – unexpected twists and with suggestions for rethinking some basic assumptions. Institutional theory offers an alternative view (or perhaps a variety of alternative views) of the organization as a rational tool (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), and research on sensemaking adds to our understanding of how individuals and groups search for a meaning when events, structures and practices seem confusing (Hultin and Mähring, 2017; Weick, 1995). The perspectives may seem diverse, but institutional theory is often defined as cultural rules or shared beliefs and thus a key source of meaning or sensemaking (Weber and Glynn, 2006). Our twist find support in recent critique of institutional theorists having been ignorant of how actors translate logics into action in everyday life (Currie and Spyridonidis, 2016), arguing for a need to 'inhabit institutions', i.e., to connect what otherwise is addressed as abstract categories to the experiences and practices of people (Hallett, 2010). Similarly, some institutional theorist argues that 'It is in microlevel practices that field-level logics are enacted, and that it is in their collision that institutional contradictions are experienced and problematized' (Smets et al., 2012, p. 898). This means that the macro levels are seen as background, while the emphasis is more on the local level, i.e., inside an organization.

Thus, we do not use the institutional theory and sensemaking approaches strictly, but see theory as something to engage in with critical dialogue and problematization – not as something to merely apply or add to. Pointing at limitations of theories – also at the level of basic assumptions – is important for advancing our knowledge.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is almost impossible to define or specify and the literature is full of texts referring to 'institutions' without clarifying what they address (Alvesson et al., 2019, p. 120). Critics have complained that 'institution' has become an umbrella term, which means everything and nothing (David and Bitektine, 2009). An illustration of this is that there are different versions of sub-schools in a messy field (Lok, 2019; Ocasio and Gai, 2020). Authors sometimes fluctuate between claiming institutional

theory being one approach, having variations or just being a label for plurality of rather separate perspectives (Lok, 2020). As institutional theory is all over the place in terms of focus on structure/ agency, homogeneity/ variation, stability/ change, macro/ micro, conformism/ entrepreneurship, cultural ideas/ social and material practices etc., we cannot cover all options. Here we focus on some core ideas associated with our interest in shared meanings and mainly address institutional myths and logics.

Key for institutional theory – across most of its many versions – is organizations responding to environmental pressures for conformism and legitimacy. Much of the implementation of rationalizing activities, even those that are claimed to be for internal purposes, seem to relate more to showing the outside world, i.e., others than those practicing the organizational routines, that the organization lives up to standards (Brunsson and Olsen, 1990). Formal organizations will contribute to legitimacy by imitating other organizations as a sign of rationality and being modern (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2017; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This means that there may be 'intra-organizational' meanings of a new structure as a pure symbolic act, mainly fulfilling a ceremonial purpose and being de-coupled from practice. This may in turn explain why 'recipes' are seldom successful as they are not fully implemented (Røvik, 2000). The meaning is then a response to expectations and symbolism aiming for legitimation, rather than guiding practice. As noted by several researchers focusing on higher education (HE), the context in which we have chosen to study this topic, the logic of university ranking systems and being part of systems like EQUIS exemplifies this (Hedmo et al., 2005; Wedlin, 2004). However, efforts to de-couple structure and practice sometimes give way for a coupling or re-coupling (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2017; Bromley and Powell, 2012; Sauder and Espeland, 2009), where the legitimation-meanings may contrast with practice-meanings, creating some ambiguity and variation at the local, organizational level. This is also the level that we find interesting and will explore in this paper.

Some institutional theory moves closer to practice and claims that an institution 'provides order and meaning to a set of otherwise banal activities' (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007, p. 995) and see an institution, among other things, as an ordered belief systems. An influential version of institutional theory is institutional logic (IL) that is sometimes defined 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. 3). Here meaning making in local practice is emphasized. The definition does not exclude much. This implies a, within the logic, closed system, where sources and outcomes are connected. It starts and ends with meanings. This perspective is different from Meyer and Rowan (1977) where de-coupling between formal structure and actual production makes meaning rather loose and more directed to legitimacy than actual work experiences. One could even say that Meyer and Rowan emphasize form and appearance, and thereby downplay meaning in any more specific sense and that their focus on 'form' can be contrasted with IL-researchers' interest in 'meaning'.

We see it as important to open up the '*logic*' of institutional logic (and to some extent institutional theory in general) and ask whether institutions are necessarily the source of sensemaking and shared meanings, beyond exhibiting the right form? Perhaps the meaning

'outcomes' are not, as in Thornton et al, cited above, smooth, or automatically occur, following the cultural symbols and material practices? Perhaps the route from patterns of symbols and practices to reproduced experiences includes some frictions and detours, leading to 'odd' meanings – and even lack of meaning? In order to consider this – and open up understandings of the move from an institutional to a local or organizational level – we talk about organizational logic (OL). This is then the emphasis on the local or micro level compared to the overall institutional one. The OL marks the possible transfer, direct continuation or the 'break' in how the logic operates, when considering "the natives" point of view', i.e., in the context of meaning and experiences in daily activities. In other words, how does the first (macro) and the last (micro) parts of Thornton et al.'s definition relate?

Most work within institutional theory is broad-brushed, macro focused and looks at fairly homogenous tendencies, even though logics consider alternative, perhaps competing logics, leading to 'institutional complexity' (Greenwood et al., 2011). There is some work with a multi-level view (e.g., Smets et al., 2012) or, as said, a more strict local focus (e.g., Hallett, 2010). In order to understand organizations, we need to go beyond the use of more or less standardized structures, techniques, procedures and the focus on overall, homogenous tendencies to explore what happens when something institutional (logic, myth) is actually processed in organizations (Purdy et al., 2019). Close up studies of organizations often demonstrate that local dynamics cannot easily be read off from field-level or other macro dynamics (Hallett, 2010; Smets et al., 2012). The fate of the institution may vary enormously on local levels. How do organizational practitioners relate to certain practices and initiatives that stem from an urge for legitimacy and aim to standardize and stabilize activity? Does the logic appear logical – make sense, provide meaning – also for those supposed to receive these shared meanings being as part of the IL? Is the institutional myth legitimate also for people expected to enact it?

Sensemaking; Local Meanings

Moving further than noting the presence of a formal structure and investigating how shared meanings function, calls for attention to local understandings and sensemaking, 'where people not only engage with, differentially interpret, and creatively leverage meanings to guide their actions, but also construct or re-mold these meanings' (Purdy et al., 2019, p. 415). Karl Weick in his seminal work on organizing and sensemaking (Weick, 1988, 1995) shifted the focus from studying entities (such as organizations) to studying cognitions, actions and people's interactions with each other, and how consequential these are for what organizations become. Sensemaking research thus concerns the individual's 'need and capacity for turning complex and confusing circumstances into situations that can be comprehended, enabling purposeful action to be taken' (Hultin and Mähring, 2017, p. 567).

Sensemaking is the process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2020) refer to this as the episodic-deliberate view. Sensemaking is then based on the sensemaker's identity and leads to enactment, i.e., the meaning will guide further meaning making and action, sometimes leading to the accomplishment of

what is being made sense of, producing a self-fulfilling prophecy. Some sensemaking researchers connect it with the crafting or reproduction of a positive self-view. For example, Degn (2015) argues that 'individuals or groups faced with too many (ambiguous) or too few (uncertain) inputs, and possible interpretations of circumstances, create a plausible story, which helps them maintain a positive sense of self' (p. 1182).

As noted by Brown et al., (2008, p. 1038) 'much work on sensemaking is premised on the assumption that work teams are characterized by an emergent consensus in thinking'. Some authors, e.g., Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) understand sensegiving as the process of influencing the 'sensemaking and meaning constructions of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality' (p. 442). Sensegiving is about a senior person 'supplying a workable interpretation to those who would be affected by his action' (p. 443). Institutions are assumed to be central as they limit options leading to shared meanings (Weber and Glynn, 2006). However, these works may overestimate the sharedness of meaning making. We find it important to consider the alternative assumption of emergent variation and ambiguity. In this study, we consider sensemaking as a process enabling – or disenabling – the accomplishment of shared meanings of organizational practices – in our case the use of a formal quality control system (scorecards) in HE.

Sensemaking is thus a core aspect and a way to explore and understand how this system is processed, i.e., what is happening with the institutionalized myths (of formal quality control) and IL leading to a specific structure and practice when it is made sense of and enacted. However, it makes sense (!) also to consider the limits to sensemaking, to avoid that the concept is stretched very far. Most authors on sensemaking use the idea broadly and do not consider ways of relating to events as outside or beyond sensemaking. It is more the 'how' and not the 'if' of sensemaking that is being studied. With increasing popularity, we find, as in institutional theory, tendencies to enlarging the use of the concept. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2020, p. 8) for example argue that sensemaking in organizations does not consist of one but of several types, expanding the idea from addressing the episodic-deliberate type, to also include 'action that is habitual, ongoing, and non-deliberate' and refer to 'absorbed coping, involved-thematic deliberation, abstract detachment, and theoretical detachment'.

We suggest the avoidance of the use of sensemaking to capture 'everything'. People sometimes do not think about issues and instead work 'mindlessly', as part of routinized behaviour (Ashforth and Fried, 1988). Here actors dutifully follow a script they have been handed, which tells them what to do. No (or not much) sensemaking is involved. Meaning is minimalistic, as in stimuli response situations. Of course, mindlessness and sensemaking may sometimes in practice come close, as sensemaking may lead to minimalistic effort to make sense of the trigger. However, mindlessness typically works where things are seen as expected or of no (cognitive) concern, while in sensemaking there is something novel, ambiguous or in other ways calling for some effort, and not just following the cognitive autopilot and engage in mindless, routinized behaviour.

Relating Institutions and Sensemaking

We are interested in if and how an institutionalized myth or logic leads to sensemaking – i.e., when Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Thornton et al. (2012), representing different

versions of institutional theory, meet Weick (1995). Most institutional theorists, in particular IL people, argue that institutional frameworks (the myth or alternative logics) inform local sensemaking (Jensen et al., 2009; Thornton et al., 2012; Weber and Glynn, 2006), while a few point at the significance of local meaning production for processes of institutionalization (Purdy et al., 2019; Smets et al., 2012), i.e., less of a 'top-down' understanding. Weber and Glynn (2006) suggest that 'institutions function to contextualize sensemaking by imposing cognitive constraints on the actors who do the sensemaking' (p. 1642). They see institutions as a key source of meaning structures. Institutionalized roles and templates for action involve taken for granted assumptions that lead to sensemaking being less varied and more homogenous. In fact, the function and the source of institutions as a trigger of sensemaking make for an intimate marriage between institution and sensemaking.

However, this can be problematized and we see this tightness or fit as an open question. The local level of actual sensemaking efforts (or lack thereof) may develop its own dynamics, being less strongly fuelled and determined by institutions than defined and claimed. One may here raise the question 'When is an IL really an IL?'. And furthermore, 'What is left of an institution if it is not made sense of as "intended" or providing meaning to daily experiences?'. This is a relevant theme to study in relationship to formal structures responding to institutional myths (as reflected in formal structures) as well as institutional logics. An important aspect is the possible inclination or 'outcome' to *not* make sense of something, i.e., either 'engage' in mindlessness or failure in sensemaking, as the logic or meaning is not understood or sympathized with. We suggest, partly triggered by our case study, the opening up for some wider spectrum of thinking than 'only' sensemaking.

Both IL (and other versions of institutionalism) and sensemaking tend to be used as grand concepts, privileging understanding through promising broad application and giving little space for anything *not* being about institutional logic or sensemaking. This means a risk for a closure in relationship to alternative ways of seeing, unless the analyst moves over to another, clearly different, perspective. With Geertz (1973) one can argue that concepts should be cut down in size so that they cover less and reveal more. We will use our case study to (re)think for considering alternative concepts in order to resist colonialization of concepts easily used to cover 'everything', but without moving over to something completely different than the perspectives one is interested in exploring the boundaries of. Counter-concepts may aid the reflexive use of concepts and perspectives (Alvesson and Blom, 2022). Confronting extremely different positions, e.g., positivism and poststructuralism, is sometimes fine, but does often not lead far and this is outside what this paper tries to do. Reflexivity then calls for access to some alternative ways of thinking that can facilitate the establishment of a critical dialogue and work in tandem (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018).

METHOD

The context for the case study is higher education (HE) and the research object academics in a business school at a 'traditional' university in Sweden, manifested through public funding

of students and faculty electing heads and deans. The university, including the business school, has implemented changes, following international trends in HE focusing on 'quality' and standards (Hedmo et al., 2005). Our study addresses a quality assurance system, referred to as scorecards (SC). We see it as a typical illustration of the institutional logic of formal quality assurance, demonstrating compliance with the institutional environment.

Quality assurance systems in HE can be connected to an increased emphasis on formal practices and management principles (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Some of these, balanced scorecards included, are associated with the corporate world (Ax and Björnenak, 2005; Parker and Jary, 1995), encouraging management control through systems, structures and procedures. The shift towards external accountability is within the HE context also linked with trends such as globalization and neo-liberal political ideologies (Khurana, 2010; Power, 2003; Shore, 2010). With massification of HE follows increased bureaucracy and control. One element in all this is the governmental demands on and accreditation of HE institutions, calling for the exhibition of clear structures and procedures easy to audit.

At the specific business school, the SC had to be filled out by course leaders after the conclusion of each course and submitted to the faculty office within two months after the completion of the course. The required information included formalities such as the 'Course code', 'Course title', 'ECTS', 'Course leader' and 'Number of enrolled students' as well as the more text based 'Summary of changes carried out since the last course was given', 'Students' points of view', 'Teaching faculty's and course director's points of view', 'Conclusions and actions points' and 'Summary (to be reported in English regardless of teaching language)'. Finally, 'Learning outcomes for the course are met' and 'Revision of learning outcomes in order to assure alignment with curricula has been carried out' conclude the SC. These final points were simply answered with a 'Yes' in the SCs we have observed. We will come back to the issue of what happened – if anything – with all this information.

Our study focused on how faculty members saw and used the SC. Interviews were made with 14 academics (marked 'A') with responsibilities for larger courses. Interviewees, who were randomly chosen, typically senior lecturers/associate professors or above at three different departments. All of the interviewees were teachers acting as course leaders, with responsibilities for a team of teachers, and as such were more involved in doing the course assessment documentation work that we study. We also interviewed one director at faculty level and three directors of undergraduate studies at department level (marked 'DS'). A DS is an academic, often a senior lecturer, planning, coordinating and overseeing undergraduate education, typically holding the role for a three year period. Thus, we refer to two categories: Academics (A) and Directors of Studies (DS), and the reader may trace individual interviews via numbers, e.g., A10 and DS3, to facilitate the reading and trace different persons' statements.

We also made observations, where we could listen to conversations about SCs in daily working life. We also spontaneously brought up SC in some interactions. The observations offered us a pre-understanding of the 'daily talk' about the SC. Here people often referred to SC with disinterest or a cynical attitude, and as something to fill in with minimal effort. As these informal observations are hard to document and use formally, we only refer to this as a modest backup for the credibility of our report. We believe that the interviews in combination with informal observations and conversations, serving mostly

as facilitating the understanding of context and as a base for assessing the credibility of interviews, were an appropriate choice for our purpose.

The number of interviews are relatively small, but we had a clear sense of saturation as later interviews confirmed what was found in earlier interviews. Our view is also that interviews were rich and informative. We carefully considered the issue of closeness/distance to the object of study and found the paper to demonstrate sufficient critical distance (see Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007), facilitated by the variation in interview statements, making it easier for – or even forces – the researcher to consider a range of aspects and interpretations. We tried to resist any inclination to search for and thus find a pattern, being open for both (different) patterns and non-patterns (fragmentations, inconsistencies) in the case. As there was broad alignment between interviews and what we noticed in observations, we find the interview responses trustworthy.

The interviews lasted between 45–90 minutes and can be described as conversations, adopting an open interview structure. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interview questions, or rather introduced themes, addressed experiences with the SC, views on the logic of using SC, and whether or not the SC was understood as meaningful or, the opposite, absurd. From the interviews we extracted a number of key themes; 1) the general understanding of SC, 2) the SC purpose or lack thereof, 3) the issue of an external audience (students) reading the SC, 4) the accreditation, 5) the administrative burden and nagging about filling in the SC. We also noted a variation of different attitudes to SC, ranging from positive to neutral to more skeptical, and in some cases even hostile. Based on these attitudes and overall reasoning we grouped our respondents into four groups; 1)'*trust-in-the-system*', 2) '*stoics*', 3)'*reluctant box tickers*' and 4)'*frustrated absurdists*'. We also looked at interviews for the specific meanings they attached to SC, e.g., was it seen as about internal quality improvement or external communication, about teachers' own learning or for management overview? We noted and subsequently analysed the many respondents not articulating a clear meaning or sense of purpose. Some indicated failure to do sensemaking. The interpretive tactic then followed three steps: A) overall positive/skeptical view or attitude to the theme (SC); B) the more precise ideas of meaning and, in some cases no clear or 'successful' sensemaking; and C) how to conceptualize the lack or failure of sensemaking. Table I indicates how we categorized data in the first two steps. Step C.), referring more to the research contributions than 'data management', will be addressed later in the paper and is therefore not exemplified in the table.

Rather than adopting a strict coding procedure, we chose to work with text chunks seen as representative for the ways of thinking and relating to the subject matters of various individuals. Although we acknowledge the rigor codification may offer as suggested by Gioia (2004) (see Gioia et al., 2013) we agree with Harley and Cornelissen (2021) that rigor emanates from the way in which researchers engage in a deliberate reasoning process of inferring theoretical claims from their data. We believe that coding leads to a context-insensitive and chopped up way of relating to empirical material. Instead we favour broader interpretation, where you look at the details in the context of the entire interview and thus get a richer, more holistic understanding (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Cornelissen, 2017). Rigor is in the text better demonstrated through the showing of empirical material to some length and the quality of interpretation and argumentation, offering 'good stories' (Dyer and Wilkins, 1994;

Table I. Categories used for interview material on orientations and meanings of SC

A). Category used to represent account, respectively example of interview accounts	*Faith in the system.* 'We have continually been able to develop our portfolio. We have discontinued programs that have not worked, we have developed new programs. A part of this is that we have systems through the SC that does that we have a dialogue.' (A7)	*Stoic*. 'there was a new course leader and when we had the teacher team meeting she talked about how to fill in the SC and then I thought (laughter) "this is what you do when you are new [in the position]"'. (A6)	*Reluctant box ticker*. 'It's always the same answer. And you don't take it so seriously. And if you don't have time then it will be a bit short, you express yourself in short: "Ah, I just have to get this done', type of thing."' (A1)	*Frustrated absurdists*. 'You do not use it for anything apparently and you assume that no one else uses it for anything other than making it public. […] They are absolutely absurd.' (A4)
B). Meaning or purpose of SC, illustrative examples from data	*Quality improvement.* 'After the course you gather the teachers and discuss what went well as well as less well and you document this in the scorecard. I think it works quite ok'. (A12)	*Image/communication*. 'Now I believe that most have understood that SC is not about filling in a lot of complaints, but it is about showing the image, and then if you have opinions about one thing or another then you communicate that in other ways'. (A2)	*Accodomation to external demands.* 'SC appeared and then they did not really know why, but it soon became a truth then without them communicating that: "This is what we have to do for EQUIS", so.'(A5)	*No obvious meaning or purpose*. 'In principle I'm copying the previous year, or semester. And then I'm thinking like this: "but what did it contribute to?" (*Laughter*) And I think many do this, and in that case it is completely meaningless'. (A6)

Harley and Cornelissen, 2021). Text space is here used to show data rather than to provide a detailed account of data management practices. However, we provide some guidance for reading our case by indicating our data handling operations. In Table I, examples are given of how we located interviewees' positions in various broad categories.

Rather than interpretations being based on a framework ordering and largely predetermining findings – applying to or adding to theory – an open view is embraced, where a variety of theoretical ideas being part of a broader interpretive repertoire guide research, as suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). Our repertoire includes, as discussed above, sensemaking, institutional theory (logic as well as myth focused versions) and to a minor extent mindlessness and organizational culture – perspectives broadly aligned or at least suitable to use in a critical dialogue. Before we present the empirical material, we first explain the SC and particularly how and why it came into being in our case.

ORGANIZING SCORECARDS

The rationale behind the SCs at the school, introduced about ten years before our study, was unclear, but many of the interviewees believed it was a result of the 'accreditation game', when EQUIS ('European Quality Improvement System') was introduced. Some interviewees also referred to beliefs about future governmental requirements for a new quality system. They saw it as a response to 'institutionalized myths', expectations from the environment that certain structures and practices are necessary in order to demonstrate organizational rationality (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Interviewees thus generally, although sometimes vaguely, referred to the environmental/institutional level origins of the formal quality assurance system.

The SC procedure was described by the one of the DS as following four steps: 1) an ongoing quality dialogue between students and teacher, 2) course development, evaluation and assessment of whether learning outcomes have been reached plus a single overview to be used for external evaluations, 3) programme development, and finally, 4) an evaluation of the school's teaching portfolio. Each step served a different purpose and follows a particular time plan. What is specific about the SC was the documentation and filling in forms. We were curious to understand how academics relate to the quality procedure/documentation and its focus on reporting. In the next sections we bring forward views and perceptions of SC. We then move to how faculty members, who are supposed to fill in the SC, make sense (or not) of it and their strategies for how to work (or avoid working) with SC.

The Managerial Logic of SC

For management the SC was directly connected to accreditations and comply with the institutional environment.

> Yes, I mean we need some systems just for accreditations to show that there is a systematic approach to managing these issues. And that is what is so great for the individual teacher to think in that perspective. For the individual teacher, she or he thinks about her/his own course and, in most cases, she or he wants to improve the quality and think that is enough. […] the faculty's purpose is to show that in an international

> perspective we actually have a system where we document changes we make. That's really what it's all about. (DS1)

The reasoning here suggests SC as a part of a specific institutional logic, narrow compared to many of the very broad institutional logics addressed in the literature (profession, state, market). Quality assurance systems stand for symbolism and material practices signal rationality and quality that informs a local practice (Thornton et al., 2012). This is at least the faculty management's view, where a meaningful, quality-promoting work is facilitated and demonstrated through the SC.

As we will see below, the purpose of the documentation was not, however, entirely clear for others – beyond being able to show the documentation. The logic then runs into bumps on its – as assumed by institutional logics theory – route to the people supposed to experience meaning and reproduce their experiences. We have witnessed this before; academic professionalism often clashes with a managerial logic (Winter, 2009), and often it appears as if the latter has taken over, at the level of structure and practice, but not of meaning (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016). One could expect different forms of active resistance by academics to counter managerialism, but we did not find much of this, although one person said that 'I think I will show my protest through not filling in [the SC]' (A6). Nor did we find a homogenous professional logic being put up against the managerial one, a close to standard story of institutional logics studies (e.g., Reay and Hinings, 2009). Though the actual practice of SC and the managerial control was reluctantly accepted by many as a 'need to do' task, we found people to be generally passive, but in a variety of ways.

Overall View of the Scorecard Amongst Faculty Members

As we are interested in how the institutional logic (IL) – emerging from macro sources – is received within the organization, we move from an institutional to an organizational logic (OL) to mark the possible transfer and the 'break' in how the logic operates. OL is then the appearance of the IL when leaving its 'roots' and general logic and become more local and specific. It is then how the offsprings or specific practices of the 'logic' is viewed by groups of people within the organization. In some cases the IL may be transformed into an OL without any 'breaks' or radical transitions, here the term OL is redundant, but sometimes there is less of smooth or predictable trajectory from an institutional field or macro level discourse into a local reception and sensemaking process at the organizational level of e.g., a quality assurance system.

Views of the meaning and value of the SC varied. Some of the faculty members – the *trust-in-the-system* advocates – assumed that there is a rationale behind it, linking it to a discussion about quality and good education and thus accepting the IL.

> If you look at what's important, that is that we're doing course evaluations. What's important is that we have quality in our courses. That's the starting point, that there are good courses. Satisfied teachers, satisfied students, […] satisfied everyone. (A2)

> After the course you gather the teachers and discuss what went well as well as less well and you document this in the scorecard. I think it works quite ok. (A12)

Interestingly, the interviewees did not directly link SC to improvement, but presented the SC as broadly being about 'quality'. There is an associative link when A2 says that course evaluations are important and this is related to quality in courses, leading to good outcomes in terms of satisfied teachers and students. Another interviewee said that the SC supports reflection and improvements.

> And I think that's a pretty good way … We get some kind of picture of the course. And we can, as well as formally, reflect on the course. And I also think that you see: 'Yes, but what did we do last year?'. And then we can see: 'How do we change it? Did it work?'. (A 15)

The SC was, according to these respondents, a conversation facilitating device and memory support that aims to clarify and increase quality. Here the IL of formal quality documentation and the OL are in alignment, the former is reproduced on the workplace level. However, the majority of interviewees did not think of the SC in this way, suggesting a more or less radical break or clash with the IL version. We identify three positions: '*stoics'*, *'reluctant box tickers'* and *'frustrated absurdists'*.

The *stoics* is a group finding SC unproblematic, and without being irritated or upset they 'barely fill them in', believing that 'the scorecard is not really a big problem but it's also not very useful' (C8). This group is willing to endure what they see little meaning in but also find fairly neutral. One person thinks that same people have the goal 'to be frustrated'.

> … and if that is your goal you will find many things to get upset about here. But if your goal is just to avoid getting upset and frustrated, you could actually handle most of these objects of frustration fairly quickly. […] I only get upset about a very few things that are wrong that I can actually do something about, and thankfully most things are either not for me to influence or actually quite nice and not really upsetting. I probably sighed the first times but now I've sort of gotten used to the idea it's there. (A9)

The interviewee was familiar with the negative attitudes to the SC of other colleagues, but viewed the potential problem of SC work in a laidback manner. Being a person not inclined to 'get upset about a a very few things that are wrong' – suggested an ability to put things in a perspective, not shared by others who are indicated to want to find things to complain about. With distance and a broad perspective on organizations there is no call for frustrations or other immature responses.

Others – perhaps having the goal of finding things to be upset about – are more skeptical and irritated. Some were moderately frustrated and can be referred to as *reluctant box tickers*:

> …It just becomes a fill-in exercise. And that is what I think this is… (A5)
>
> I have never thought that filling in the forms has anything to do with quality (A13)

> ‘It’s always the same answer. And you don’t take it so seriously. And if you don’t have time then it will be a bit short, you express yourself in short: “Ah, I just have to get this done”, type of thing’. (A1)

Here SC was seen as not being meaningful. It was something that people have to do, having no clear meaning or purpose beyond being a ritual. Several faculty members, that could be referred to as *frustrated absurdists*, expressed strong negative feelings:

> … In principle I’m copying the previous year, or semester. And then I’m thinking like this: ‘but what did it contribute to?’ (*Laughter*) And I think many do this, and in that case it is completely meaningless. (A6)

> … people sit and swear about this and think: ‘Why do I spend time filling this out? There’s never anyone who cares about it’… No, everyone must have their own course evaluations. And then they ‘don’t give a damn’ about giving feedback in some cases. And if I had been the course leader and had done it I would have been angry, rightly so angry, and thought that: ‘what is this?’ (A7)

> […] forcing people to do documentation that no one cares about and that no one follows up on. You lose your pride in your workplace and you lose, you know, respect for the leadership. So, I think that’s the cost to this. And that’s serious. (A14)

Here, interviewees expressed a clear view of SC being part of an almost Kafkaesque bureaucracy (Clegg et al., 2016; McCabe, 2014). We can trace the identity of academics valuing autonomy and disliking bureaucracy guiding as well as being reproduced in the sensemaking. The SC is viewed as something that lacks purpose and is there for some unknown reason and is a part of organizational irrationality. Through displaying emotions, the *frustrated absurdist* show disidentification – this is alien to their way of being.

We thus see a range of sensemakings (or attitudes not including so much of sensemakings), with a few modestly positive or neutral exceptions, some view SC as meaningless but harmless, some are modestly frustrated while others are feeling their blood pressure rise while angrily filling in the forms after receiving email reminders, without making (positive) sense of the activity. Negative reactions to SCs are related to expanding administration affecting universities and faculty.

> I don’t think that it is just the scorecards as such, but I think some people find frustration with what they perceive, rightly or wrongly, as a general trend towards being forced to do more administrative things. […] So if you add all the administrative things on top of one another …, they feel that this amounts to quite a significant chunk of their time, if they had been allowed to use all of that time to actually make the course better, instead of documenting what they had done with the course, then that would improve higher education more. (A11)

One of the DS also acknowledged, and sympathized with the negative views of SCs:

> Here are far too many individualists who have far too much research money. Who love to teach, but hate the administrative. But there are also some teachers here like …, when they get the evaluation, they write the scorecard, and it's located there. And then we have all the others. And I can really feel that if I was not a director of studies, I would belong to all the others. (DS8)

An interesting alternative was expressed by A9 above, when making sense of the experienced problem as a character trait of fellow academics (outside the stoic category) rather than something to be seriously bothered about. Having showed the overall responses, we turn to how the interviews related to our question what the SC is really all about, i.e., going more closely into sensemaking and the institutional aspects of the SC.

In Search for a Meaning: What are SCs all About?

There is a high degree of variation in sensemaking of the SC, going beyond the overall meanings (or lack thereof) we addressed above. The rationale (or lack thereof) is viewed in very different ways, sometimes expressed by the same individual shifting between available modes of relating to the phenomenon. One meaning is about quality improvement. A second is that it is about communication about good education, mainly to students. Faith in the system people express both views. A third meaning is about following some coercive, possibly legitimate external force, where the key is to demonstrate there being a system in place. This understanding is embraced by *stoics*. A fourth, most common, view – expressed by *frustrated absurdists* – suggests that SC is substantially meaningless or is there because an external, negative source (an accreditation body) requires it. *Reluctant box-tic*kers relate to the third and the fourth meanings. A few emphasized the first meaning:

> One has also started to actively look at courses where the teacher gives rather high grades and followed up why. (A7)

> Overall the important thing is that the scorecard should help us to become better in our education, to have a good quality education. That's its basic purpose. That's where we should start. (A2)

However, the same interviewee also said that the SC is all about communicating high quality.

> But then we have to communicate it, and then the scorecard is a great way to communicate to different stakeholders: 'Look here. This is how our courses look'. In that way it becomes a good communication tool. (A2)

Thus, there are two different types of motives, reflecting standard discourses (or institutionalized logics) behind the use of SC. A2 emphasizes quality in education but then mentions how 'the communicative is very important'. These two purposes could be integrated or at least related: improving quality is followed by communicating the

improved and high quality. This is how e.g., A2 makes sense of SC. However, using SC to document and promote the image of the education and the department is different from using it as an internal work document, and some believed that it was about expressing a favourable or at least polished image:

> Yes. It should be on the website to allow students who want to see what former students have thought earlier. It is not an internal working document, no.
>
> *Interviewer:* And it's not for us to learn something and improve?
>
> No, I have definitely not understood that. No. Then, it should have been an internal document where you could write what you wanted […] I have understood that it needs to be a politically correct document that the students can read. (A4)

Quality development calls for addressing problems and needs for modifications while communicating a favourable image motivates highlighting the positive and marginalizing problems that call for improvement. A4 saw the document as not allowing internal documentation for the sake of quality improvement, but written to give a favourable and 'safe' impression ('politically correct'). At the same time, A4 believed that SC is something that is externally imposed and adapted without fulfilling some useful function, apart from demonstrating compliance:

> I think the purpose is that we had to do it and therefore we have done it. I do not even think that there has been such a purpose. I just think that it has been caused by this EQUIS thing… I think it's initiated completely from external pressure. (A4)

Here the meaning of SC is to comply with environmental demands and demonstrate legitimacy (a cynical version of Meyer and Rowan, 1977). It is part of a coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The requirement is to have a system, there was no purpose behind that according to many participants. Some struggled to find a rationale for SC and didn't see this link to the institutional environment, but being open for a possible internal productive function:

> No, I do not think I know. I think that they will become a base that managers can retrieve if they want to know, if they want some numbers. […] They can try to look for those scorecards for different reasons. (A3)

The interviewee reasoned that the way that SC was used, there must be a reason or purpose. S/he had not thought much about this, but when asked s/he tried to account for SC. S/he assumed that some form of rationality informs the practice, e.g., if someone asks for specific information. The rationale is not clear and the interviewee did not seem to have any experience of such a use, but does her/his best to find a logic behind the SC and make sense of it, reflecting functionalist assumptions: if there is a practice, it must fulfil some purpose, a view reflecting faith in the system.

To another interviewee SC was a rather innocent organizational ritual, allowing for the de-coupling of hierarchy and work.

> I happily fill them in and it's no problem. But I have no idea where it goes. I have no idea about the faculty management. To me, it is an abstract world. I trust they are doing something, and it's certainly good, but I do not know what they are doing. […] As long as no one is bothering me, I'm happy as well. (A16)

Here the interviewee had no problems filling in the cards without having any idea of purpose and finds this not relevant to consider, thus expressing mindlessness in relationship to the purpose of SC. If a modest effort is enough to avoid further interference this is fine and then an agnostic or *laissez faire* attitude is reasonable. Also others said that they have no idea of what may be the purpose of SC:

> If that's the idea, then it should be possible for everyone to go in and – maybe – look at each other's scorecards. But who has time for that? No, but if there is such a goal with it, I do not think it has reached us anyway. (A15)

> If we are to do these scorecards now, I think that the first question we should ask is: What should we use them for? Because you also need to know that in order to fill them out. (A4)

Both interviewees indicate failed sensemaking. There is no sense that have reached them or they have come up with. However, far from all people seemed to have asked themselves (or their colleagues) this question and even fewer had an answer (or were interested in finding an answer). This indicates the lack of sensemaking and the failure of the IL or sensegiving by faculty management to inform local meanings of the OL and guide positive or at least neutral experiences. There is instead mindlessness or failed sensemaking ('have no idea'). Most people filled in the forms 'because of the reminders we get if we don't'. Many motivated the filling activity with 'it does not take much time, you do it very quickly' (A8), having little to do with learning and quality improvements. As reminders were sent some assumed there must be a purpose or a coercive force somewhere, people reason.

> And the fact that we do get reminders, leads me to conclude that we will probably be required by law to do this, otherwise we would not get these reminders. (A9)

The sensemaking appears to be: as we are asked to do this, there must be a rationale somewhere and therefore it makes sense to do this without complaining, being a responsible, law-abiding employee. This fits well into Alvesson and Spicer's (2012) idea about functional stupidity: you do not ask for a good reason for doing something, you just do what you are told to do, assuming that this fulfils some purpose or do not consider if there is one. There is no asking for justification. Irritation and a critical view are compartmentalized and not followed through in sensemaking, becoming interrupted and followed by the shutting off thinking (Paulsen, 2017). The assumption is that the organization is, perhaps and somehow, fairly rational, and based on this, even arrangements that do not appear rational, still may be so.

The Purpose of SCs: Disconnected and Ambiguous

As stressed, organizing often implies some coupling and consistency between purpose, acts and outcomes. In this case we see several de-couplings and struggles to find a rationale for making sense of SC. There is little of shared beliefs and a common order seen as typical for institutions and institutional logics. Apart from a diversity of meanings, as opposed to shared meanings, there is also a tension between *sense-* and *no sense making*. The latter suggests that the actors fail to understand what the issue is about and do not arrive at a specific meaning that seems reasonable – there is no meaning that actors grasp, i.e., sensemaking 'fails'. The subjects make some efforts, but give up and end with being confused, uncertain and refrain from (further) sensemaking. For example, A13 said: 'I have never thought that filling in the forms has anything to do with quality'. Somewhat different is *nonsensemaking*. Here the individual or group arrives at a negative meaning. Meaning is grasped as an outcome of sensemaking process, ending with the view that this is (clearly) nonsense.[1] The meaning entirely lacks meaningfulness, e.g., people may see something just as a tick off exercise. An illustration is A4, cited above, who says: 'I do not even think that there has been such a purpose. I just think that it has been caused by this EQUIS thing'. As the 'thing' is not viewed as a positive project, the SC being caused by it does not add to something that makes much sense. *Mindlessness*, by contrast, means routinized behaviour bypassing the experiences/responses of no sense or nonsense. One participant for example, as quoted above, said: 'I happily fill them in and it's no problem. But I have no idea where it goes' (A 16). We thus find four options: *sensemaking*, *no sense-making*, *nonsensemaking* and *mindlessness*. Sometimes there are thin lines between these, and actors may not be consistent in the sensemaking or lack thereof, but we think the frame of concepts are analytically valuable.

Rather than shared sensemaking processes, we witness multiple views of the purpose and one DS strongly emphasized that: 'Overall the important thing is that the scorecard should help us to become better in our education, to have good quality education. That is its basic purpose'. But later in the interview s/he also expressed how negative statements in SC should be avoided:

> I think that's a lot about learning. […] If you look at when we started with this then there was very much like … yes, what to say, complaints – also from the teachers. But now I think most people have understood that scorecard is not something that you should fill in a lot of complaints, but it's about displaying the image and then you have comments on one or the other so you can communicate it differently. (DS2)

Here the SC is about image and not at all about 'learning'. Pointing at problems was addressed as 'complaints' – a term indicating inappropriateness in a quality improving context. The 'tick-off-the-box-in-the-right-way' is something else than learning from experiences and improving quality.

> As an example, we have one of my colleagues… In the beginning of his teaching, a few years ago, when he taught a lot and after having previously mostly done research,

> he thought it was important to state what needs to be said. So, he wrote [a lot]. And then he gets it back from the director of studies, saying, 'Yes, but you cannot write this. This should be public'. […] and now, he writes just like me. I'm writing the same every semester. It's copy paste. But it's like some sort of 'PC' [political correctness]. (A4)

At the same time the idea of providing a positive image to outsiders – including students – by potentially repressing critical aspects makes little sense as no outsider is likely to find or read the SC:

> And then I thought it was good for the students to see. But now that I have asked a bit, I have never heard that any student has found it. I hardly find it myself. I do not know where to look. And every time I get it I will fill it in, so I have to carefully review the instruction again. (A6)

Still, it seems unclear what the SCs are for, despite endless discussions, which is even the case for one of the DS, supposed to be a central person in the use of SC, experiencing a no sense type of sensemaking:

> […] as long as I have been director of studies, we have discussed what this should be about. Among other things, it's like never actually reaching the students. And so, many people experience it as something: 'Yes, why should we do it?' […] And it's the same here that I do not know how long we've discussed evaluations, if we want some common form of evaluation. So, these are such long legs, so it's something completely senseless. (DS8)

Any simple sensegiving or management framing that would lead to shared meanings seem problematic – or lost in translation. No common sense is accomplished. While some see a level of sense – or assume there is a sense somewhere, even though they cannot see it – some do not. We can here connect to institutional logics and talk about it being transformed into organizational 'illogics', i.e., what appears to be something reasonable, creating order and meaning on a general level is interpreted locally, within the organization, as difficult to understand or nonsensical, lacking not only meaningfulness but also meaning. Perhaps it would be an impossible task to create shared meaning, as clarification of SC being an openly communicated 'tick box activity' would undermine morale, and emphasizing this to be key for learning and development appears, at least to most employees, difficult to make credible. Taking SC seriously in the context of quality development would involve pressure on lecturers to fill in everything dutifully and director of studies to do time-consuming feedback work – by many viewed as an unwelcome additional administrative burden.

DISCUSSION

The notion of SC as a tool for management to control and/ or for teachers to improve education or as a simple legitimation device exemplifies an 'institutional logic' of making

performance subject to formal quality control, focused much on documentation and demonstrating rationality and compliance with environmental expectations.

From our interviews four organization-based logics (OL) or possible *illogics* (perceived lack of logic) or modes of (non-)sensemaking efforts emerge; 1) SC is part of lecturers' quality improvement work. 2) SC should communicate a positive image for students and others. 3) SC is reasonable as there is an external demand for it. 4) SC is basically meaningless, apart from possibly being part of accreditation (that many have a low opinion about) and is solely about compliance. The logics – or illogics – are related to assumptions about what the SC is about and what it is primarily meant to accomplish. Signalling openness on the organizational level meaning making we use the term (il)logics. (OL can thus be read as logic or illogic). See Figure 1.

Key in our study are the local meanings that emerge when the institutional logic leads to a specific practice that affects people. Here an institutional (macro) level idea – formal quality assurance clearly documented – affects HE broadly. In business schools accreditation institutions play a role in this, affects people in organizations in different and sometimes heterogenous ways, often badly, or at least insufficiently, understood by broad concepts like institutional myth or logic. The 'outcome' of downstream effects of an institutional logic, i.e., a specific organizational arrangement or practice, may be weakly connected or even unrelated to its upstream or origin (often described as a macro phenomenon). If we return to Thornton et al. (2012, p. 3), who refer to institutional logics as: 'the socially constructed, historical patterns … that provide meaning … etc.' what may be defined as the institutional logic of formal quality assurance (or image signalling) through documentation as a material practice, hardly provides meaning or reproduces experiences for most people in the case. For a few people it vaguely works like as a meaning provider – here IL directly leads to OL – but for many it does not. SC provides a sense of lack of meaning or meaninglessness and disrupts experiences at work. It is a kind of halted or crippled institutional logic where – at the point of local sensemaking – it makes a radical twist, leading to an organizational 'illogic'. Elements in organizational

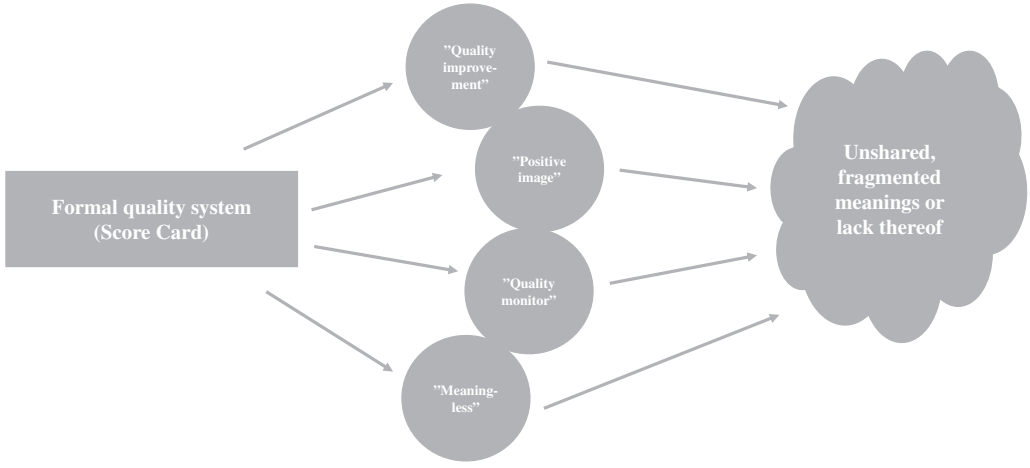

Figure 1. From institutional logic to organizational (il)logics

life are often – as in our case – less connected than indicated by the idea of institutional logics. There are good reasons to assume broadly similar cases of disruptions or ~~a~~ clashes between IL and OL in areas like strategic plans, policies, visions, HRM procedures, CSR or corporate values in at least some organizations (e.g., Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2015; McCabe et al., 2020). We therefore suggest the concept of *organizational (il)logic* indicating the downstream effect of institutional logic at the level of organizational practice.

Organizations are sometimes characterized by internal de-coupling, fragmentation, complexities, a variety of patterns, disconnections and contradictions between different cognitions, values etc. (Brunsson, 2003; Hallett, 2010; Jackall, 1988; Martin, 2002). Often this is viewed as a matter of different IL's or clear subcultures. For some, using institutionalist vocabulary (e.g., Greenwood et al., 2011; Smetz and Jarzabkowski, 2013), this may be a matter of 'institutional complexity' (which easily, in line with the tradition of institutional theory, covers almost everything – few organizations exhibit onedimensionality and simplicity). However, in our case this does not necessarily explain much, i.e., it is not only through combinations of 'institutions' that there may be inconsistencies and fragmentations. The latter may emerge based on local experiences and sensemaking that are triggered but not predictably framed by an institutional logic. All our subjects were academics being part of the same community.

The interviewees suggest different reasons for why they obey and fill in SCs. A fairly common overall guiding principle seems to be something like: 'we have SCs for some unknown purpose, initiated by someone, leading to some unknown (or no real) consequence'. Some fill this emptiness of meaning with a specific notion of it probably being good for image and/or quality improvement. Understandings are for many quite fleeting. Still, few interviewees report any initiatives to change or clarify the situation. While there may be several reasons for this, it is interesting (and worrying) to note how these academics more or less accept the situation and adjust, ignoring their critical thinking beyond temporary irritation (see Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Klintman, 2019).

One way to understand this is to look at the underlying (il)logics or modes of (non) sensemaking efforts and how they are related and contradict each other. Logic 1 (internal quality improvement) is contradicted by logic 2 (image management, avoiding negative material). And logic 3 (management quality control/intervening and/or giving feedback), associated with external demands for management quality control, does not work in practice. Except for one person, none of the interviewed academics seem to have received any feedback based on the SC. (This person said that s/he got the comment: 'I hope the problems now have been resolved'). Logic 3 is also counteracted by (il)logic 4 that suggests that SC is met by resistance/minimalism and that more work/intervention is unwelcome. Management is happy if enough people fill in the SC, but do not have the time or interest to intervene with course leaders (unless there are significant complaints from students, but these are communicated through other channels than SC). Things are best left unaddressed. Scrutiny of and interventions counteracting tick box practices would likely lead to conflict. 'After the latest accreditations when we managed to get the scorecards gathered I have not cared. It is a hopeless enterprise'. (DS8). So not much signs on Logic 3 being in operation.

Organizational Dischronization

The confusion of partly contradictory logics and inconsistent meanings might be referred to as *organizational dischronization* (OD). (See Figure 1 for overview of how various elements are related). OD indicates that understandings and beliefs are in friction, divergent but not obviously so as there is a strong element of ambiguity. There is no strong tendency to accomplish shared meanings as the absence of such is not clear. Dischronization is different from broadly shared pure confusion (as many have some idea of what goes on and as there is little interest people are not directly confused either), as well as conflict or recognized variety of meanings associated with subcultures. It points at unacknowledged ambiguity and combinations of un-resolved varied and inconsistent sensemaking and nonsense-making.

OD indicates a key aspect of practically tolerable, mildly failed organizing, including no smooth de-coupling, that has not yet been well captured by organization studies. OD is thus different from multiple institutional logics, institutional complexity, subcultures, ambiguity, paradox and other well-known phenomena. Dischronization is understood as moderate frictions and minor bumps in organized work – which could be an opportunity for what Deetz (1992) refers to as productive dissensus, but in OD there is more laissez-faire and much goes on under the radar. Actors and acts do not connect as meanings float around and are not confronted and clarified. There is some frustration but no explicit conflict or manifested group building around the topic, such as SC advocates or enemies, DS with a clear agenda and others holding a different view.

Dischronization is *not* here seen as a temporal phenomenon (bad timing), as the term synchronized may indicate, but connects better to other synonyms to synchrony like harmony, integration, organization, coordination (Thesaurus, 2020). (Disjointedness or disconnectness are also similar, but tend to lead to associations of a stronger break or cut than we intend to indicate with our concept). These all may be employed as counter-concepts to dischronization, but tend to be a bit strong and too distinct. Dischronization refers more to a vague, ambiguous lack of or mild opposition to the harmony, integration and shared meaning suggested by popular concepts such as IL and culture or, within the group, subculture. Perhaps the best counter-concept is shared or *alignment of meaning*. In OD meaning tend to be scattered and ambiguous, but without conflict or group differentiation.

OD then means a clear deviation from organization based shared meanings creating social order without this being explained by boundaries, multiple institutional logics or conflicts. OD can be understood as a social phenomenon as the individual variation is matched with social variations, as there are interactions and meanings circling around in the organization being picked up and expressed by people, but in heterogenous ways. For at least some people, e.g., the director of studies cited above (DS8), thinking that the creation of shared meanings 'is a hopeless enterprise' this is an organizational characteristic, not only an issue with specific individuals. These interactions are informal and scattered and means that many people probably encounter various meanings but no dominant one emerges and things are not being scaled up to an integrated whole, like a coherent system or organizational culture with broadly shared meanings or collective sensemaking leading to wide consensus.

Dischronization is an effect of compilation, where discontinuity and variability among people 'add up' to represent differing conceptualizations with respect to the nature and combination of the constituent higher-level, i.e., organizational, phenomenon. Sometimes compilation is a matter of team members possessing different but supplementary compatible mental models (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000), but in our case sensemakings and meanings tend to diverge in more tension-filled and non-compatible ways.

Most researchers on institutional logics and inhabited institutionalism have focused on two opposing orientations, forces or interest groups (e.g., Hallett, 2010; McCabe et al., 2020; Olie, 1994; Reay and Hinings, 2009) while some organizational culture research has addressed general ideas on ambiguity (e.g., Alvesson, 2013; Meyerson and Martin, 1987). Our case indicates the phenomenon of OD also *within* a seemingly homogenous group, in which sensemaking may vary and also be mixed with no sensemaking, nonsensemaking and mindlessness. People may circle around and between these orientations, not necessarily being very consistent on the individual level, as seen above.

We assume that there are parts of most organizations where OD can be found. It is likely that OD is most common when it comes to issues or themes that are fairly malleable and there is no strong material reference or a 'moment of truth' in terms of something measurable, tangible, with clear consequences or distinct feedback. Working with a specific product or something else assessed by or having effects on someone may give less space for OD, as there are stronger demands for meaning clarification. Imperatives for integrated action may also promote shared meanings and sensemaking. More complex and ambiguous issues may fuel and/or be fuelled by OD. For example, corporate visions, value declarations, leadership, HRM practices, diversity management and many strategies may well be characterized by OD. Much of the 'business bullshit' circulating in contemporary organizations is likely to be seen by some as profound insights, by others as difficult to understand, again by others as just bullshit or nonsense while many may hardly notice and exercise mindlessness and not consider meaning in relationship to the talk and the text (Spicer, 2018).

There are indication that OD is far from uncommon. In a study of failed efforts to create successful innovations in a pharmaceutical firm people involved attributed the cause for this to totally different circumstances, from bad management, failed strategy, recruitment of too many experienced people to retaining too many old-timers and to a culture centred on comfort and fringe benefits ('eating cake') (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2011). In a study of a health care information system, intended to lead to learning and quality improvement through comparisons between different health care regions, no one could point at anybody actually using the information. Loose ideas about value in the future, of potential use if someone would be interested, legitimation etc. were used. The variation of scattered and vague views – and the absence of clear sensemaking effort – was part of the case (Essén et al., 2021). Here the dispersed understandings and failed efforts to create shared meanings of the situation may be seen as OD.

Of course, as with all theoretical ideas the concept of OD is sometimes helpful and sometimes not. OD may not be an immediate or obvious problem in terms of basic functioning and for efforts to improve quality, as all interviewed in the case stressed that they were working with quality improvement irrespective of the SC: 'Many teachers do much more than what comes out in SC and course evaluations' (A2). The specific IL of formal

quality assurance through documentation did not significantly prevent the broader interest in improving education. On the positive note, some legitimation effect may have been accomplished and social conflict may have been avoided, while on the negative side SC meant some confusion, irritation and a sense of wasteful work, and thus possibly also marginally reduced organizational learning and increased cynicism.

Our findings are illustrated in Figure 2, providing an overview of how various elements in the somewhat complicated case study broadly hang together. The intentions (1) refer to how actors see the overall logics of the SC. These then (2) lead to or involve various (no/n)sensemakings in terms of making sense/nonsense/ no sense or people refraining from sense- or nonsense making, i.e., they seemed to have never really thought about the matter. This can be related to the identities of people involved (3), e.g., being trustful, loyal or sceptical, a laid-back person or a resistant-minded academic. On the overall, organizational level (4) we find a mix of various logics or illogics and (no/n)sensemakings, fuelled by a variety of identities, leading to organizational dischronization.

A central theme in sensemaking is 'that people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back to the world to make that world more orderly' (Colville et al., 2013, p. 1302). Institutions are said to trigger sensemaking. Institutionally defined roles and scripts connect the structures at the field level to the subjective meaning of individuals enacting these structures at the local level, many argue (Weick, 1995; Weber and Glynn, 2006). An institution 'provides order and meaning to a set of otherwise banal activities' (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007, p. 995). Order, shared meaning, clarity, institutions as leading to sensemaking and things actually making sense form a cocktail that seems credible but includes tautologies and indicates a closed system. Institutional logics is both input and output, starting with a something general and ending with order and local meaning, forming a tight pipeline between the start and the end. It is important to challenge such closed reasoning and allow a

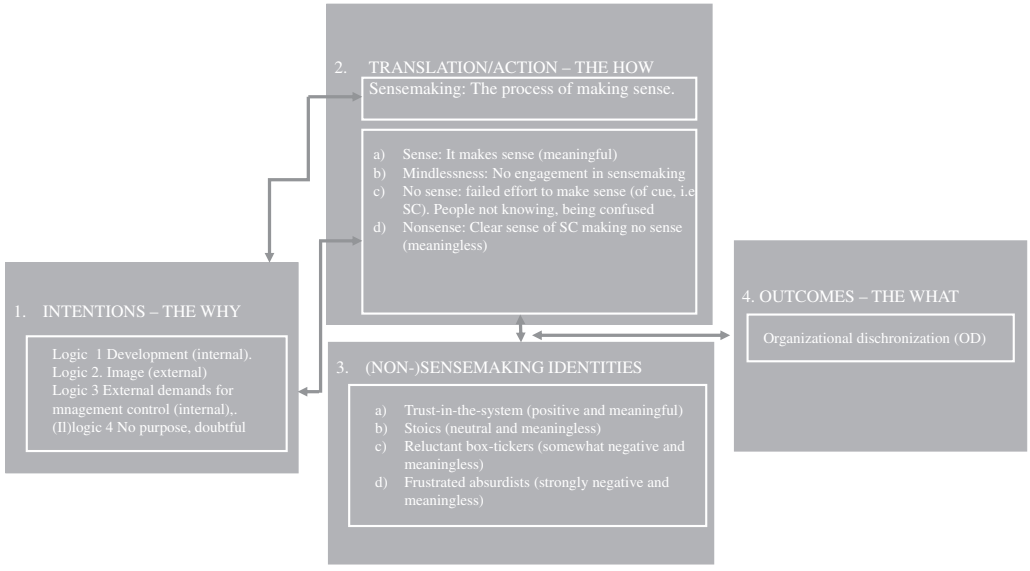

Figure 2. The (no/n) sensemaking-dischronization process

more open approach. The order creating capacity of an institution (or logic) is limited and can be a trigger of disorder, i.e., organizational illogics. Thus, sensemaking may be more 'wild', pluralistic and lacking than institutionally defined and domesticated and may involve nonsense-making and absence of sensemaking (no sensemaking) as well.

What remains of an 'institution' when sensemaking does not follow the 'tight pipeline' and shared meanings are not accomplished? Perhaps the IL erodes and what appears to be an IL is in fact not one? Given the IL definition we proceed from, one may say that it only partially reflects what goes on and that, in this case, SC is not really an IL. An important research task for IL researchers is to seriously examine if the claimed phenomenon holds water and more specifically when and how an IL is an IL and when and how it is not. It may often not or only partially be one, as when IL turns into an *organizational illogic*, as in the present case. But if we relate our findings to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) idea, where institution is a structure (form), the 'institution' is still there. The SCs are being produced and can be exhibited to external groups, if they should be interested. In our case the meaning and experiences of people involved in work does not matter much, as long as the formal arrangement in being reproduced the institutional structure is there. So, in our case there is a 'form-institution' while the 'institution as meaning-provider' (fused with meaning) is fairly constrained and crippled, even non-existing.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to close-up studies of how members in an organization experience and (dis)engage in sensemaking of institutional myths and logics. Rather than understanding organizations (or institutions or their logics) as shared meanings or assuming that institutions (whether as myths or logics) create a common understanding through informing shared sensemaking, our case study indicates that meanings do vary or even do not 'exist' at all. A 'cascade' of mindlessness, no sensemaking and nonsense making need to be included in theory and on the interpretive repertoire. When an institutional logic (IL) moves from its origin – a macro-level broadly shared material and symbolic practice driving a specific mode of ordering – and becomes located in an organization, the logic may be interrupted and turned into something different. There is, our case suggests, sometimes a radical break between up- and downstream parts of an IL, between the external and internal view of a formal structure supposed to signal legitimacy. Organizational *illogics* is then a counter-position to ideas such as institutional logics or institutional myths (Alvesson and Spicer, 2019; Lok, 2019). This means that what starts as a logic appears as an illogic at the 'receiving end', i.e., local practice. Legitimacy may be experienced as illegitimacy. Sensemaking here may not follow the institutional templates and may be quite varied within an organization, even a homogenous one. So, the idea that, for example, a management IL clashes with a professional IL sometimes may be simplistic, assuming within group consensus.

The different, inconsistent meanings involved in efforts to make sense or no(n)-sense of the quality control practice, could in our case be seen as management failure, weak

leadership or lack of sensegiving, poor professionalism, weak/fragmented organizational culture, part of 'business as usual' or potentially as the management and cultivation of 'functional stupidity': people doing what they are required to do without thinking of purpose or taking initiative to make it work better (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Ashforth and Fried, 1988; Paulsen, 2017). All this is worth considering, but *'organizational dischronization'* (OD), the assembly of diverse and contradictory meanings as well as the 'no-meanings', may also be an emergent property of many organizations, difficult to avoid.

Further, OD may indicate a key aspect of archetypical contemporary organizational life. As stressed, the OD concept indicates a variety of poorly understood and/or badly articulated meanings that create un-recognized confusion. This clearly goes beyond ambiguity, being part of complexity as well as a multitude of diverse groups, subcultures or different institutional logics. The institutionalized myth (or logic) in our case involve some internal backup for legitimation structures but mainly the opposite. It contributes to accreditations' bad reputation among many: 'Everything you do not understand spell EQUIS, AACSB or AMBA. It is like isomorphism in its worst form', as one interviewee (A5) stressed. Formal, standardised documentation of quality improvement as part of externally imposed accreditation or governmental regulation may thus fuel OD, with a mix of legitimation and illegitimating elements.

The paper makes three contributions. Firstly, it points at the limitations of institutional theory, through showing the 'inside' of myths and logics in operation. Here it broadly supports inhabited institutionalism (Hallett, 2010; Leibel et al., 2018), focusing on the aspect of actors involved in or dealing with an institution. For many researchers, institutions are married with shared meanings. Based on our case, we argue that an institutional logic (and myth) may provide meaninglessness, disorganize time and space and makes the reproduction of lives and experiences more frictional. Rather than being integrative it works as a divergence-creating force – a form of experienced *illogic* rather than logic; when the overall institution hits the local setting and becomes a topic of (non or failed) sensemaking. Institutional logics theory needs to consider carefully various elements and 'steps' and not assume their connectedness.

Secondly, our study illustrates that sensemaking cannot be predicted from an institutional level, as assumed by many (e.g., Jensen et al., 2009; Weber and Glynn, 2006). Institutional myths may mean external legitimation – as they can be part of a tick box logic – but also a legitimation-undermining internal effect, leading to limited trust in management and some degree of institutional (organizational) erosion (Hallett, 2010). Thus, when organizations adopt institutionalized myths, like systems and practices promising organizational rationality (as the SCs in our case), they actually may create all types of unexpected outcomes, including variation, confusion and contradiction. In order to say something valuable about organizations, institutional theory – and in particular IL as it aims to go beyond formal structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) – needs to follow what is seen as institutionalized or an IL beyond the adaptation of superficial structures, not just addressing standard clashes between e.g., management and professions.

Our study shows that the span of ways of relating – from *trust in the system people* and *stoics* to *reluctant box tickers* and *frustrated absurdists* in our case – need to be considered in some depth. 'Institutions' such as 'professions' – in our case social science lecturers – may

be quite diverse in how they relate to IL. Weber and Glynn (2006) suggest that 'a useful starting point for a more fine-grained examination of institutions in sensemaking might be the fundamental question about what types of institutions become prominent or salient in sensemaking processes' (p. 1655). We suggest a softening of the institution/sensemaking link by focusing on the twist, or bump, that the ~~meeting offers~~. Sensemaking may be less orderly or institution/ template-driven than assumed. A useful counter-starting point then would be to study the tension between institutions and sensemaking and how the former may trigger a set of sensemaking but also other ways of working with, or failures in arriving at, meanings and understandings. Institutions may be accompanied by dischronization as much as order. If so is the case, institutions may evaporate – what appears to be an institution (with a strong element of shared meanings) may in fact *not* be an institution. Perhaps better is to say that an institution as a formal structure may remain in place – surface manifestation of formal quality (SC) is still accomplished – but the meaning part of the institution (IL) is not there. The IL is thus crippled or marked by OD. More carefully, in depth research would probably reveal this to be common, but this is for future research to study more systematically.

A third contribution is about sensemaking. In a sense (!), sensemaking is part of human nature and a sort of evergreen and thus unavoidable. Often it is viewed as shared (Brown et al., 2008). Maitlis and Christianson (2014, p. 67) refer to it as 'creating intersubjective meaning through cycles of interpretation and action, and thereby enacting a more ordered environment from which further cues can be drawn'. The sensemaking literature takes this activity and its well-ordered outcomes as given, central and gives no space to something 'outside' sensemaking in how actors relate to and enact their worlds (e.g., Purdy et al., 2019; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020). This paper supplements and partly problematizes sensemaking theory pointing at *mindlessness, the absence of sense (no sense)* and *nonsensemaking* as part of how people relate to phenomena like episodes or activities. Organizations, even in many ways homogenous (e.g., dominated by one profession), may then be seen as less about shared meanings and more about a circulating mix of sense-, no-sense and nonsensemaking as well as mindlessness.

Our take on institutional logics as well as sensemaking suggests the use of counter-concepts – *organizational (il)logics* respectively *no (failed, inconclusive) sensemaking*, *nonsensemaking* and *mindlessness* – to see the limitations and thus increase the precision and value of the conventional concept and perspectives. At present they are overused and tend to obscure alternative theoretical possibilities. An overall contribution of this paper is therefore the theoretical idea of *organizational dischronization* (OD), leading to crippled institutional logics and, sometimes better seen as organizational (il)logics, i.e., a combination of perceived logics and illogics.

The theory offered here can briefly be summarized as follows: Overall institutional logics, e.g., on formal quality control, guiding specific organizational practices of debatable value for production and results, are likely to meet a variety of local responses, from people mobilizing their sensemaking – or failing or refraining from doing so. Responses may in some cases reflect acceptance or general compliance, in other cases scepticism and again in others indifference without any thoughtfulness. This leads to processes of organizational dischronization, different from organizations as shared meanings or open (group or institutional) differentiation and conflict. The dominant

assumption of organizations as shared meanings, locally emerging (Smircich, 1983) or based on institutional logic (IL) guiding and synchronizing shared meanings may then be contrasted and supplemented with organizations as assemblies of shared and diverse meanings, meaninglessness and mindlessness and limits to sensemaking as effort or result. On the surface things may look as if accepted, and a level of legitimation is externally communicated, but underneath there is confusion, lack of collective action, waste of time and resources, reduced commitment and faith. Arguably, this is probably common in today's organizations, but this still needs to be studied further. Opening up the research agenda where dominant ideas about institutions, sensemaking and shared meanings are challenged and quite different aspects are seriously considered may rejuvenate organization studies.

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NOTE

[1] Vaara and Whittle (2021, p. 17) use the term non-sense, but in a slightly different way from how we use it. They conceptualize non-sense as a state of senselessness and relate it to power-laden processes in an organization. They write that non-sense 'captures those things "bracketed out" of attention' (p. 19).

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