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Subjective concepts: an institutional logic approach

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Purpose

The literature on institutional logics acknowledges the importance of subjective concepts, such as values and beliefs, alongside material practices, while often overlooking how these concepts distinctly influence the process of logic instantiation. This study aims to explore this gap, and thus, the roles of subjective concepts in the constitution of logics will be further explored.

Design/methodology/approach

This conceptual paper develops theoretical propositions that distinguish instances of subjective concepts participating in logic instantiation. A comprehensive review of the institutional logics literature allowed us to induce these propositions regarding their involvement. The study identifies distinct concepts in logic instantiation, drawing on empirical examples from the literature.

Findings

The study argues that actors initially draw from a group of concepts to initiate, support, and implement material practices, such as decisions, often legitimized by a justification discourse. Distinct context participants interpret or manipulate this logic and attempt to adjust it to their views. In addition to their objective character, material practices are expressed through tangible cultural manifestations that use symbols, declarations, and theories.

Research limitations/implications

The article analyzed the participation of subjective concepts in the instantiations of logics, and other studies might explore whether these conclusions are verified. Much still needs to be examined from the institutional logics perspective to better understand the subjective concepts that constitute logics (e.g. self-assertion, self-esteem, perception of benefits, negotiation around power, prestige or approval). In addition to these notions, the various concepts that trigger activities, those that produce justifications and the symbolic manifestations of logics deserve to be further discerned to permit better recognition of the functioning of each in logic building. The joint presence of subjective elements (values, beliefs, awareness, understanding and others) in logic constitution and how to distinguish them remains to be explored. Further analysis will help to better understand these concepts and their influence on the constitution and modification of logics. Hence, this research suggests that more attention needs to be paid to making explicit subjective and material practices in the social construction of reality.

Practical implications

The prescription for practices, such as decisions, is idealized from concepts like assumptions and beliefs. Other subjective concepts follow, which make it an important issue. Awareness and recognition of the need to justify the implementation of proposals or practices are essential for managers who may otherwise experience failure in their efforts. Additionally, managers should understand that directives presented to staff or workers are subject to interpretation, leading to unwanted conduct.

Originality/value

This study contributes to institutional theory by clarifying the different roles that subjective concepts play in logic building and instantiation, either as triggers, justifications, interpretations or manifestations. This advances our understanding of how subjective concepts and material practices interact in instances such as decision-making processes. By identifying the character and function of these concepts, this study helps clarify the constitution of logic and the development of directives.

Keywords: Institutional logics, Concepts, Practices, Symbols, Decision

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