



# Handling Resistance to Change When Societal and Workplace Logics Conflict

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## Abstract

Changes in societal logics often leave firms' policies and practices out of step. Yet when firms introduce a change that brings in a new societal logic, employees may resist, even though they personally value the change, because the incoming logic conflicts with existing organizational logics. How can change agents handle logic-based resistance to an organizational initiative that introduces a new logic? We studied elite law firms that introduced a new role into their traditional up-or-out career path in response to associates' anonymously expressed desire for better work–life balance, which associates resisted because expressing family concerns was illegitimate within the firms. Change agents responded to three forms of resisters' logic-based concerns—irreconcilability, ambiguity, and contradiction—with three tailored responses—redirecting, reinforcing, and reassuring—using contextually legitimate logic elements. Over time logic elements of each concern–response pair harmonized to enable individuals to enact their logics seamlessly and organizations to update the existing logic settlement to assimilate the societal change. We demonstrate that the way available logics are accessed and activated between pluralistic change agents and resisters can enable logic settlements to be updated in response to societal change. We draw insights about how logics do or do not constrain agency.

**Keywords:** intra-individual plurality, resistance to change, logic settlements, work–family and careers, professions

Societal norms, beliefs, and values change over time, yet there is often a significant delay before such changes are reflected in organizations and fields. For example, social acceptance of gay marriage took time to translate into domestic partner benefits in organizations (Briscoe and Safford, 2008), societal

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concerns about environmental protection took time to permeate industry practices (Hoffman, 1999; Lounsbury, 2001; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), and social abhorrence of sexual harassment in the #MeToo era is taking time to be reflected in organizational practices.

One explanation for the delayed acceptance of societal change by organizations and fields comes from research on institutional logics. Individuals and organizations are guided by field-specific institutionalized norms, values, and practices that cohere in institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). These field-specific logics are distilled from higher order societal-level logics, such as market, corporate, state, professional, and family logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Fields and organizations are guided by one or more logics that become settled over time. Professional organizations such as law or accounting firms, for example, are guided by settled combinations of professional and corporate logics. Individuals become carriers of logics through socialization experiences, past or present, from work or their personal lives (Pache and Santos, 2013a; Almandoz, 2014). They fantasize their futures in accordance with the norms and values (Voronov and Vince, 2012) of the logics they carry, and they enact them with pride (Friedland, 2018). At the same time, individuals' embeddedness within particular institutional logics can trigger virulent resistance to changes that contradict or threaten their logics (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007; Wright, Zammuto, and Liesch, 2017)—what we call logic-based resistance.

Since individuals live in society and straddle a variety of professional and personal social domains, they are also likely to be affected by changes in societal logics, which could make them more open to organizational change initiatives that try to accommodate these societal changes. Yet even when organizations try to introduce a change initiative that is consistent with a societal change that employees already value, employees may resist (Kellogg, 2012; Perrigino, Dunford, and Wilson, 2018) because the change contradicts the firm's existing logics and may still be considered illegitimate at work. Studies show how uncomfortable it can be for people to freely express personal identities, values, and beliefs at work, particularly those that are seen as illegitimate under prevailing logics (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; DeJordy, 2008; Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010). To use Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's (2012) terms, individuals may have several logics *available* to them by virtue of their personal and professional socialization, but they may not *access* personal logics at work because only their professional or work logic will spring to mind or be considered appropriate to *activate* in interactions at work. When an organizational change initiative designed to accommodate changing societal logics contradicts or threatens a prevailing logic at work, employees may resist the change, even if they personally value the change in the societal logic. In this way, organizational and field logics may become out of step with societal logics.

How then can organizational change agents handle logic-based resistance to a change based in a societal logic that individuals may carry and enact in their personal lives but that is not legitimate in their workplace? The wider organizational change literature recognizes that issue sellers must "package" issues to resonate with the norms and values of their targets (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Sonenshein, 2006; Howard-Grenville, 2007), which underpin resistance (e.g., Piderit, 2000). Yet we lack granularity on how change agents can successfully

do the “packaging.” Studies of institutional change suggest the importance of logics and professional identities in this process (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007; Heinze and Weber, 2016), yet most consider resisters to carry only a single logic, missing the impact of logics from other domains of resisters’ lives. What is not yet well understood is the impact on handling resistance of knowing not only *all* the logics that resisters carry—availability—but also the constraints and freedom they experience in accessing and activating those logics.

While some studies suggest that agency is less constrained in the context of institutional contradictions from competing logics (Seo and Creed, 2002) and that people may use different logics strategically (McPherson and Sauder, 2013), other studies have shown that individuals experience significant angst (Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010) and conflict in their interactions with others (Battilana and Dorado, 2010) when they experience institutional contradictions, and they are likely to defend logics they value highly (Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017; Wright, Zammuto, and Liesch, 2017). However, we know little about when individuals are constrained by logics and when they can use them more freely, limiting our understanding of how logic-based resistance manifests and how it is handled. Put another way, would the fact that individuals walk in the door every day embodying logics from their personal lives, and also carry logics from their work domain, open opportunities for change agents, putting extra tools in their toolkit (Swidler, 1986; McPherson and Sauder, 2013), or would it pose a challenge for change efforts by increasing constraints and surfacing contradictions? This issue goes to the heart of institutional agency, highlighting the need for deeper theorizing.

The internal tussle individuals experience among the logics they carry comes into sharp focus in light of societal shifts such as a growing emphasis on work–life balance, prompting firms to initiate changes that introduce the family logic. Even though as family members employees carry the family logic in addition to logics from the work domain, as employees they have been steeped in career structures, underpinned by beliefs that *dichotomize* work and family. Employees in professional organizations in particular have been entrenched in beliefs that have traditionally linked high achievement with the “iron man” surgeon or the “eat what you kill” lawyer, tough enough to withstand grueling work hours (Cooper et al., 1996; Wallace, 1997; Kellogg, 2009). Family concerns have traditionally been perceived as not permissible in these firms, making it difficult for employees to openly support work–life balance initiatives that introduce a new logic (family logic) that is stigmatized.

We examine how change agents handled logic-based resistance to a challenge to the up-or-out career structure, which has been highly institutionalized in the legal professional field. Lawyers’ careers require long hours and complete commitment to work, particularly in early career stages that coincide with when many people start families. The field has thus been out of step with the intensifying societal discourse urging greater work–life balance. In the early 2000s, a growing war for talent brought the career structure into sharp and urgent focus for London’s elite law firms. We focus on how these firms implemented the role of “counsel” as an alternative to partnership to alleviate junior staff’s work–life balance concerns, identified through anonymous surveys. Yet junior lawyers and the more senior partners resisted the role,

ironically *because* of the perception that it addressed family concerns—a stigmatized issue (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Our guiding research question asked: How do change agents handle logic-based resistance to an organizational initiative that introduces a new logic? We studied interactions among partners, associates, managing partners, and human resources directors in UK law firms immediately after the introduction of the counsel role when resistance was vocal. The professional–corporate logic settlement of the elite firms we studied provided a vivid context to examine logic-based resistance and how it was handled. We captured the micro dynamics of the way pluralistic resisters and change agents accessed and activated their available logics—professional and corporate from work and family from their personal lives—when the new role introduced the family logic, traditionally stigmatized in the profession. Our context sheds light on the effects of logics on institutional agency, how logic-based resistance can be handled, and how logic settlements can be updated when a societal change creates new pressures that challenge existing logics.

## LOGIC-BASED RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Implementing changes in logics is challenging not only because systems, structures, and routines generate inertia but also because individuals who identify with those logics are likely to resist passionately (Heinze and Weber, 2016). If resistance is not handled, changes may be superficial and symbolic at best (Kraatz and Block, 2008). Yet attention to logic-based resistance to change has typically been implicit, with a few exceptions. Heinze and Weber (2016) showed how medical elites resisted efforts to advance the logic of integrative medicine. Marquis and Lounsbury (2007) found that bankers prizing the community banking logic resisted the national banking logic. Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) noted that symphony musicians resisted the encroachment of the market logic on their aesthetic logic. In each case, a single “home” logic (McPherson and Sauder, 2013) is associated with a particular set of individuals (Pache and Santos, 2010), typically due to their professional socialization.

While most studies do not acknowledge that people may carry multiple logics, exceptions exist in studies of the hybrid role, involving individuals socialized into two or more logics, as a specific mechanism to manage tensions between constituent logics in hybrid organizations (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Heinze and Weber, 2016; Spyridonidis and Currie, 2016). Consistent with others (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca, 2009), however, we contend that all individuals, not just those in hybrid roles, carry multiple logics because they have been socialized into them either through working in hybrid organizations or through their involvement in other logics in their personal lives or in their past (Pache and Santos, 2013a; Almandoz, 2014).

Yet as Swidler (1986: 277) proposed, individuals may “know more culture than they use,” at least in particular settings. Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) noted that individuals’ actions depend on the availability, accessibility, and activation of cultural knowledge encapsulated in logics. Crucially, even though multiple logics may be available to people in their cognitive processes, that does not imply each logic is “equally likely to be invoked” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012: 83) or accessed. Even when logics are accessed, they may not be activated in social interactions, particularly if they are not

legitimate within the context. When a new logic is introduced in an organization, the dynamics of logic availability, accessibility, and activation at the individual level may have ramifications for how existing logic settlements are affected. Further, changes at the organizational level may have implications for changes at the field level, particularly if elite firms are working to accommodate widely shared societal pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

### Handling Logic-Based Resistance

Studies of institutional logics and microlevel institutional change, more broadly, highlight myriad tactics used by change agents to handle resistance, such as engaging those affected by the change using transparency and accountability (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly, 2006), improvising (Reay, Golden-Biddle, and Germann, 2006), framing (Kaplan, 2008; Reinecke and Ansari, 2020), coalition building (Kellogg, 2009), and activating subordinates to influence resisters (Kellogg, 2019). Many studies highlight the tactics of “hybrid” change agents (Blomgren and Waks, 2015) who carry both incumbent and incoming logics. Heinze and Weber’s (2016) intrapreneurs formalized free spaces to build capacity for incorporating the new integrative medicine logic in organizations dominated by conventional medicine. Kellogg’s (2009) reformers worked in cross-position collectives in relational spaces to challenge resisters of new regulation in a hospital. Battilana and Casciaro’s (2013) clinical managers leveraged intra-organizational social networks using affect to co-opt influential resisters. Spyridonidis and Currie’s (2016) nurse consultants moved “uneasily” between the professional and managerial logics to position themselves, in the eyes of doctors, as experts with knowledge of patient care.

Even though these hybrid change agents ostensibly had a greater capacity to handle resistance because of the dual logics they carried, they tended to either pivot toward the resisters’ dominant logic or to neutralize logic expression. For example, Heinze and Weber’s (2016: 163) institutional intrapreneurs felt compelled to leverage activities deemed legitimate by the “dominant conventional order” to counter resistance, and Spyridonidis and Currie’s (2016) hybrid nurse consultants gravitated toward the professional logic to make the managerial logic more palatable for the higher status doctors. The “tempered radicals” described by Meyerson and Scully (1995) tended to gravitate toward the professional logic despite attempts to keep valued personal beliefs salient. The clinical managers studied by Battilana and Casciaro (2013) slipped in their drive for change as they themselves became co-opted by affective ties with resisters. While these studies suggest that hybrid change agents enjoy only “partial,” not “unfettered,” autonomy to access the logics they carry (Martin et al., 2017), it raises the question: Can change agents access and activate their logics in a way that they are not co-opted by resisters? We see a glimpse of this in DiBenigno’s (2018) study in which both mental health providers and army commanders used “anchored personalization,” staying anchored in their home group identity while building stable, personal relationships to co-construct integrative solutions to conflict. Besharov’s (2014) pluralist managers at Natural Foods prevented slippage by removing explicit discussion of ideological values in day-to-day work while routinizing those ideologies in formal policies.

Yet it is striking that in all of these studies, resisters are assumed to hold only one logic—the one at the source of their resistance. That resisters may carry multiple logics comes into sharp focus, albeit implicitly, in studies that show how new organizational practices are not embraced by the very individuals they are meant to benefit. Ironically, these individuals impede the implementation of change. For example, groups who perceived themselves as targets of discrimination or harassment in the workplace avoided using the dispute resolution system or protection mechanisms put in place (Edelman et al., 1993; Marshall, 2005; Kaiser and Major 2006). In an extreme case of a social movement reform implementation inside a hospital, some individuals who were initially part of the cross-identity reformer coalitions later joined forces with staunch defenders (Kellogg, 2012). These studies attribute resistance to factors that range from practices being deficient in addressing the issues to fears of retaliation and status loss, or being openly encouraged or even coerced by powerful individuals to reject the change (Edelman et al., 1993; Heimer, 1999; Kellogg, 2012). This raises some questions. What constrains resisters from equally accessing their available logics? Could change agents broaden their repertoire of tactics or responses if they were aware of all of resisters' logics, not just the one at the root of resistance?

Studies of organizational change suggest that change agents must “craft their issues and use moves that resonate with the dominant schemas, values and meaning systems of their higher-power targets, even when influencers privately hold alternative motives” (DiBenigno, 2020: 22). Yet we find that change agents' tactics have had mixed results in handling resistance. In Dutton et al. (2001), some issue-selling moves more successfully shaped change than others. Further, studies examining change in professional practices have shown the failure of change tactics that did not address concerns about challenges to deeply held professional values of autonomy, responsibility, and expertise (Dobbin, 2009; Kellogg, 2012).

Social movement studies of change focus on the use of collective action frames to define a grievance that challenges the status quo and mobilize supporters for change (Benford and Snow, 2000; Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch, 2003; Ansari, Wijen, and Gray, 2013). Yet the results of framing and mobilizing within organizations have been mixed (Kellogg, 2009, 2012), likely because the people who must be mobilized are the very people who are deeply embedded in existing logics. Reframing efforts through frame alignment processes (Kaplan, 2008; Lee, Ramus, and Vaccaro, 2018) or laminating new meanings on existing frames (Goffman, 1974) may work in some situations and not in others. Scholars attribute the success of reframing processes to skillful implementation (Fiss and Zajac, 2006), yet they may be missing potential supporters' deeper conflicts and dilemmas. Further, framing is often an interactional process (Kaplan, 2008) involving intersubjective co-constructions of meaning (Reinecke and Ansari, 2020). Therefore, understanding which logics guide and constrain resisters under various circumstances may be critical to skillful reframing.

We surmise that the plurality of change agents and resisters may have significant implications for institutional agency. McPherson and Sauder (2013), at one extreme, provided a mostly unencumbered view of institutional agency in which people could freely access and activate logics strategically, even hijacking others' logics. Yet this view runs counter to most studies in the logic

tradition, which show that individuals are far more constrained and conflicted in accessing and activating other logics (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017). Existing work on competitive and cooperative dynamics among logics at the field and organizational levels (Jay, 2013; Pache and Santos, 2013b) provides useful cues to the potential of the availability of more logics at the individual level to open space for discretion and creativity (Binder, 2007; Waldorff, Reay, and Goodrick, 2013). Yet we lack clarity about when individuals can access and activate the logics they carry and how are they constrained by those logics.

## METHODS

We study a revelatory case (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007): the introduction of the “counsel” role, changing the highly institutionalized career structure in elite UK law firms, from 2006 to 2018. The counsel role unsettled law firms’ professional–corporate logic settlement by violating the “up-or-out” tournament for promotion to partnership (Galanter and Palay, 1991). It did so by introducing “family” as a third logic (e.g., Thornton, 2004), a move that has been controversial in other professions (e.g., Briscoe, 2007). We entered the field directly after the counsel role was introduced when it was still fragile, resistance was vocal, and its institutional anchoring was particularly visible.

### Research Context

Elite law firms have been hybrids for more than 20 years, combining professional and corporate logics (Cooper et al., 1996). Partners—lawyers socialized into the professional logic—are owner-producer-managers who prize democratic decision making and professional autonomy (Cooper et al., 1996). Yet partners, especially managing partners, also use the corporate logic extensively as they manage productivity, competition, and firm growth (Cooper et al., 1996). Junior lawyers, called associates, are socialized into the professional logic through formal education and apprentice-like relationships with partners (Maister, 1993; Hitt et al., 2001). Associates aspire to partnership, which they achieve by meeting grueling billable hours targets (Landers, Rebitzer, and Taylor, 1996) and performing high-caliber work. Those who fail to be promoted must leave the firm, signaling to clients that only the best are retained (Galanter and Palay, 1991).

Non-lawyer managers in functions such as finance, marketing, and human resources embody a corporate logic. HR professionals, key to our study, recruit and retain staff and thus require a deep understanding of lawyers’ professional values. As HR directors told us, they display behaviors that make them “look and sound like a senior lawyer” and lend the “credibility of gravitas” while engaging with business issues and exhibiting staff-centered “empathy.” HR directors thus have both corporate and professional logics in what we describe as their “personal logic profile.”

In the early 2000s, unprecedented growth and internationalization (Morgan and Quack, 2005) unleashed a “war for talent” among elite law firms. At the same time, interest in work–life balance intensified in society, particularly among millennials (Bresman, 2015), conflicting profoundly with the long working hours of the up-or-out system (Briscoe, 2007). Partnership promised no

reprieve from work–life challenges and had “lost some of its allure” (Green, 2005: 117). A *Legal Business* survey in 2006 revealed that only 37 percent of UK associates considered partnership an appealing career goal, and 75 percent wanted an alternative that better balanced work and family. That year, some elite firms introduced “counsel” as a high-status role to retain senior associates with valued specialist technical expertise in a position just below the partner rank—the first formal violation of the up-or-out system. While the role had corporate merits in the war for talent, it also signaled the entry of the family logic, which was traditionally unmentionable in elite law firms. This was a radical change because even though associates, partners, and managing partners were family members and thus embodied the family logic, they maintained a strict separation between their work and family lives. How law firms accommodated family in their professional–corporate logic settlement and, to do so, dealt with resistance to the counsel role was our focus.

### Data Collection

We addressed our research question—how do change agents handle logic-based resistance to an organizational initiative that introduces a new logic?—by studying a change that was introduced in five elite UK law firms (F1–F5). We added a sixth firm (F6) later in our data collection, as we explain below. These firms are exposed to the same market and institutional pressures and compete for the same clients and staff. Of the HR directors we interviewed, two had worked for two of the firms in our sample and two others had worked for three sample firms, as well as other elite London law firms. All were involved in a tight network of law firm HR directors. It is often said that “lawyers are like cats, and therefore impossible to herd. Law firms are also like sheep; they tend to follow one another” (Larkan, 2011: 23). Our sample comprised the “lead sheep.” We focused inside each organization to study the fallout of the change initiative it introduced to adapt to a societal change and the field-level discourse it sparked about work–life balance. Because our sample comprised elite firms whose practices diffuse to other firms in the professional field, change processes that happened at these firms implicated field-level logics. Data were collected from 2007, just after all five firms had formalized the counsel role, until 2018. During this time, the role was stabilized in all but Firm 5. We drew on three data sources: legal press, interviews and informal discussions, and organizational documents.

**Legal press.** We captured field-level discourse about the war for talent, work–life balance, and the challenges elite law firms faced through *The Lawyer*, *Legal Week*, and *Legal Business*, three key publications in the UK legal field. *The Lawyer* daily newsletter produced over 1,100 articles on career issues in 2006–2007 alone. Connecting field challenges, especially the strengthening work–family discourse, and firm promotion systems helped us to understand the rationales for counsel. Reports of new counsel appointments confirmed that our sample firms pioneered the new role and allowed us to compare interview and media statements across our sample and the broader legal field.



**Interviews.** We conducted 67 in-depth interviews, lasting an average of 75 minutes, with HR directors and managers (21 interviews), managing partners (7), partners (13), associates (17), and counsel (9).<sup>1</sup> Interviews occurred in three waves: 2007–2009 (41 interviews), 2012–2013 (13), and 2018 (13), focused on counsel role initiation, stabilization, and settlement, respectively. Because few counsel had been appointed and the role was politically sensitive in the first and second waves, the firms allowed us to interview only two counsel, but we also interviewed several associates for whom the role would be a viable alternative. In the third wave, we gathered reflections on the previous five years from HR directors and counsel, who shared a rich account of how the role had evolved. We triangulated our insights with interviews in a sixth firm (F6), which one of our early respondents had joined. We interviewed the HR director, managing partner, or both in all three waves in each firm except Firm 5, which did not change its stance over time. Interviews were conducted by two authors, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. We also attended events at which managing partners and/or HR directors were present. In two of the five firms we conducted focus groups with HR managers who corroborated and elaborated on what the HR directors had told us. In interviews, we aimed to capture the rationale behind the counsel role, the concerns that prompted resistance, and the ways in which the concerns were addressed. Interviews with managing partners focused on financial and managerial implications of the role, while HR directors elaborated on how they responded to the concerns of associates and partners to mitigate resistance. Finally, counsel shared their personal experiences of settling into—and living—the role.

We performed member checks of our findings with HR directors and by presenting emerging insights at conferences for lawyers and managers from elite firms. We documented their feedback, deepening our insights into the counsel role implementation. For instance, two senior partners from F5 spoke frankly about their concerns about the counsel role in the main London office. All of these efforts cumulatively helped us reach a point of theoretical saturation.

**Organizational documents.** Our sample firms shared job descriptions, competency frameworks, and appraisal forms for associate, partner, and counsel roles, triangulating interview data and providing further insight into the positioning of the counsel role within the traditional up-or-out trajectory. In 2018, three sample firms shared their formal reviews of the counsel role with us based on interviews with counsel, partners, and associates, providing insight into how effective the responses to mitigate resistance had been. In addition, press releases and firm websites highlighted the rationales for the counsel role and its positioning vis-à-vis clients and showed the changing tone and content of announcements about counsel promotions and their valuable role.

## Data Analysis

We systematically coded interviews by role (associates, partners, managing partners, counsel, and HR directors) and iterated between data and the

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<sup>1</sup> In our citations of interview quotes, we identify the sources as HRD (human resources director), MP (managing partner), P (partner), A (associate), and C (counsel).

literature to allow theoretical insights to emerge through four stages of analysis (Locke, 2001).

**Stage one.** Two authors read all interviews and coded passages describing the counsel role and its rationale, concerns raised by associates and partners, and responses by HR directors and managing partners. We attended to similarities and differences within and across the groups within each case firm and across the five firms. We noted homogeneity across the firms with respect to the divergence of views among the different groups of constituents. But Firm 5 differed, rejecting the counsel role for its head office while introducing it elsewhere. Here, we could interview the HR director only once and only in the presence of a partner. After later resigning, the HR director confided that the managing partner did not support the counsel role, and thus the HR director's own role in implementing the change had been constrained. Our analysis produced in-vivo codes that captured rationales, concerns, and responses in participants' words.

**Stage two.** Iterating with theory and among authors, we categorized the rationales, concerns, and responses according to the logics and logic elements they represented. We clustered the rationale for the counsel role into three categories: retain specialist technical skills, serve critical business need, and enhance work–family balance; see Table A1 in the Online Appendix (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0001839220962760>). We saw that all four groups used corporate and professional logics when describing rationales for the role, as one would expect in the existing logic settlement of the two logics. Further, the family logic was raised by HR directors directly and by associates when referring to the needs of some of their colleagues, especially women, though not for themselves. All three logics were “available” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012: 83) in the personal logic profile of each group, but we noted crucial differences. For example, when associates expressed concerns about career status, they did so with respect to the legal profession while HR directors spoke of status in terms of hierarchical position in the firm, corresponding to differences in their home logics—professional and corporate, respectively. We were also intrigued that concerns were activated at specific logic elements, such as “status in profession” as the basis of attention or “personal capitalism” as the economic system, and responses, in turn, were targeted to these specific logic elements by activating elements such as “status in hierarchy” or “bureaucratic processes” of the corporate logic, also in the associates' logic profile. As we mapped our data onto Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's (2012: 54) “constituent elements” of logics, we found that while most ideal-typical elements closely resonated with our data, some needed to be adapted to our context. For example, in the professional logic, the basis of norms such as professional autonomy and democracy resonated more than membership in a guild or association. In the family logic, our respondents talked about being present for family, which resonated with “status in the household” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012: 73). Table 1 shows the content of the three logics on multiple elements, as adapted to our context. When our elements diverged from Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012: 73), we noted their logic element in parentheses for each logic element.

**Table 1. Professional, Corporate, and Family Logics and Their Elemental Building Blocks in Law Firms\***

	L1: Professional Logic	L2: Corporate Logic	L3: Family Logic
e1: Basis of attention	Status in profession	Status in hierarchy	Being present for family—love and support (status in household)
e2: Sources of identity	Association with quality of craft	Bureaucratic roles—formal processes and systems	Family reputation
e3: Basis of strategy	Personal professional development (increase personal reputation)	Pursue firm growth (increase size and diversification of firm)	Increase family honor
e4: Basis of norms	Professional norms—e.g., professional autonomy, democracy (membership in guild and association)	Employment in firm—recruitment, retention, training, and well-being of employees	Membership in household
e5: Economic system	Personal capitalism—effort/reward equity calculation	Managerial capitalism	Family capitalism
e6: Sources of legitimacy	Personal expertise	Market position of firm	Unconditional loyalty
e7: Sources of authority	Partners and peers (professional association)	Executive committee and managing partner (board of directors and top management)	Patriarchal domination
e8: Informal control mechanisms	Role models and peer pressure (celebrity professionals)	Organization culture	Family politics

\* Categories are derived from Thornton (2004) and Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012). Elements are adapted as necessary to the law firm context. The original articulation as in Thornton's ideal type is in parentheses. Categories shaded gray are prominent in our analysis.

We noted a clear pattern: resisters' concerns were rooted primarily in the professional logic, but HR directors' responses were invoked mainly from the corporate logic, though each sometimes used the other logic. This resonates with the idea that not all available logics would be "equally likely to be invoked" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012: 83). Rather, the logic that is more likely to "spring to mind"—be chronically accessed—is the home logic (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012; McPherson and Sauder, 2013) that individuals are most deeply embedded in through identification and socialization. Yet as we noted above, even though the lawyers' home logic is the professional logic, the corporate logic sprang to mind when considering rationales for the counsel role, and HR directors, whose home logic is the corporate logic, also accessed the professional logic and family logic, as did associates (for their colleagues). We realized that chronic access was not confined to the home logic. What we observed resonated with Weber and Glynn's (2006: 1648) argument that "in any given situation, several possible institutionalized identities and scripts may be plausible, but the immediate situation primes which one is relevant for action formation": the context supplies "situational cues" suggesting which of the chronically accessible logics available in the personal logic profile is appropriate—not necessarily the home logic. We referred back to Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's (2012) concepts of availability,

accessibility, and activation to understand why different groups were activating specific elements of the accessed logic in interactions, noting that activation is a function of both knowledge accessibility *and* focus of attention (Higgins, 1996). We realized that the situational cues associated with both concerns and responses not only cued which logic the different groups accessed but also focused attention to specific logic elements. We illuminate these micro dynamics in our findings.

**Stage three.** We identified different patterns of logic element access and activation by associates and partners to reveal concerns, prompted by situational cues, and by HR directors and managing partners to respond to cues they received from resisters. We were struck by how the change agents' responses were based in the activation of elements of logics that were legitimate within the existing (professional and corporate) logic settlement. Engaging in a more abstract level of theorizing, we identified three forms of concerns, which revealed incompatibilities with the counsel role, and three corresponding resistance-handling responses that created compatibilities with the role; see Table A2 in the Online Appendix. *Irreconcilability concerns* occur when change cues resisters to an element from an illegitimate logic that they perceive as directly threatening a corresponding element from a legitimate logic. Activating one means being unable to activate the other. Irreconcilability concerns were met with *redirecting responses*, as change agents used discursive framing to shift resisters' attention away from the logic element at the root of a concern to an element of another legitimate logic in their logic profile. *Ambiguity concerns* occur when resisters experience lack of clarity about how a change affects deeply held norms and values connected to elements within the existing logic settlement. These concerns were met with *reinforcing responses*, as change agents buttressed the logic element at the root of resisters' concern with an element of another legitimate logic in their logic profile. For example, change agents used policies, practices, and values from one logic to safeguard an at-risk element from another. Finally, *contradiction concerns* occur when resisters perceive potential trade-offs between elements based in different logics, each of which is legitimate and valued within the existing logic settlement. These concerns were met by *reassuring responses*, with change agents claiming that two logic elements can be kept active simultaneously, not compromising either.

**Stage four.** To assess the outcome of the resistance-handling responses of HR directors and managing partners, we coded the data collected in wave three. Crucially, in this phase we were able to better access counsel voices through interviews and through reports into which counsel had given vital feedback. Further, the HR directors in three of the four pioneering firms were new, yet the responses remained in place. A new firm (F6) was also a point of triangulation. Two themes emerged from our wave three data. First, the three responses had been persistent and had *stabilized* the role in F1–F4 and F6. We use the term "stabilize" to reflect that the role was fragile at wave two, at risk of being rejected by associates and partners, yet it persisted. In all firms (F1–F4, F6), the HR directors noted that "there had been a steady growth of counsel numbers" since its inception. In our findings section, we report the most

current data of total counsel numbers, gender composition, and proportion relative to partners. Our second theme was a surprise: as the counsel role was being enacted in daily firm operations and elaborated through new systems and processes, counsel themselves helped to *harmonize* the logic elements that had initially been at the root of each concern and response pair. We observed that the harmonizing mechanism enabled logic elements of each concern and response to work together seamlessly across logics, which resulted in updating the settlement between the professional and corporate logics to make space for the family logic.

## THE COUNSEL ROLE AND ITS RATIONALES

Here we explain how firms defined the counsel role and how associates, partners, HR directors, and managing partners articulated the rationales behind it. In the next section we examine the concerns that fueled resistance among associates and partners and describe how HR directors responded.

The up-or-out system had been unchallenged before counsel was initiated as an alternative to partnership. Hence the role had to be defined and communicated with care. Interviewees cast counsel as a “high-status role” reserved for “technically brilliant” people. Legal media highlighted the role’s origins in London’s elite law firms to echo its prestige but also clearly positioned it as “an alternative career path, the most senior legal role in the firm below that of Partner” (Hodges, 2008). It was rationalized by all respondents as retaining specialist skills and fulfilling a business-critical need (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix). F3’s managing partner emphasized, “You can’t afford to lose fantastic, capable people, particularly if they are rocket scientists.” A partner (P1) in F2 seconded: “In specialist areas . . . you do need the senior technical experience as it is much more technical and specialist in terms of what you’re expected to know.”

An associate explained that in a war for talent, such departures were painful “after you’ve invested in them for seven or eight years, when they’re completely up to speed” (A3, F4). Partners noted that counsel was a way to protect the firm’s investment and important for firm growth. They welcomed counsel as a way of recognizing the diverse talent needed for firm strategy: “You need all sorts of different people . . . partners who are external-facing business winners, getting in new clients, but also you need people who are just good at their job and can actually produce. And if there is some recognition for that in a different title, then I think that’s a good thing” (P2, F3).

Managing partners in all firms but F5 supported the counsel role as a means of managing growth through more corporate structures: “Law firms as organizations are getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and it seems to me you can’t have a structure which is essentially a trainee, associate, partner structure in an organization that’s developing to the sort of size that big law firms are now” (MP, F4). While the retention of “rocket science” legal skills was based in the professional logic, rationalizing the counsel role as serving business needs was based in the corporate logic.

Associates and HR directors also mentioned work–family balance as a rationale for the counsel role for “younger lawyers in particular [who] did not want to work unpredictable hours” (HRD, F1). HR directors knew that in the *Legal Business* survey of 2006, 75 percent of associates had expressed work–life

balance concerns, and 37 percent had expressed waning interest in partnership. In interviews, by contrast, the associates more narrowly noted that “for women, [counsel] is particularly promising” (A2, F1), linking retention to family issues: “it is tricky for people that have children to balance becoming a partner . . . and having a family” (A2, F3).

Both HR directors and associates hence associated the oft-cited work–life balance with *family* life. Conceptually, the HR directors accessed the family logic in the context of the lawyers’ professional lives. Associates did so more selectively only for their colleagues but not for themselves, a distinction they crystallized when elaborating their concerns with the role.

## RESISTANCE TO THE COUNSEL ROLE: CONCERNS AND RESPONSES

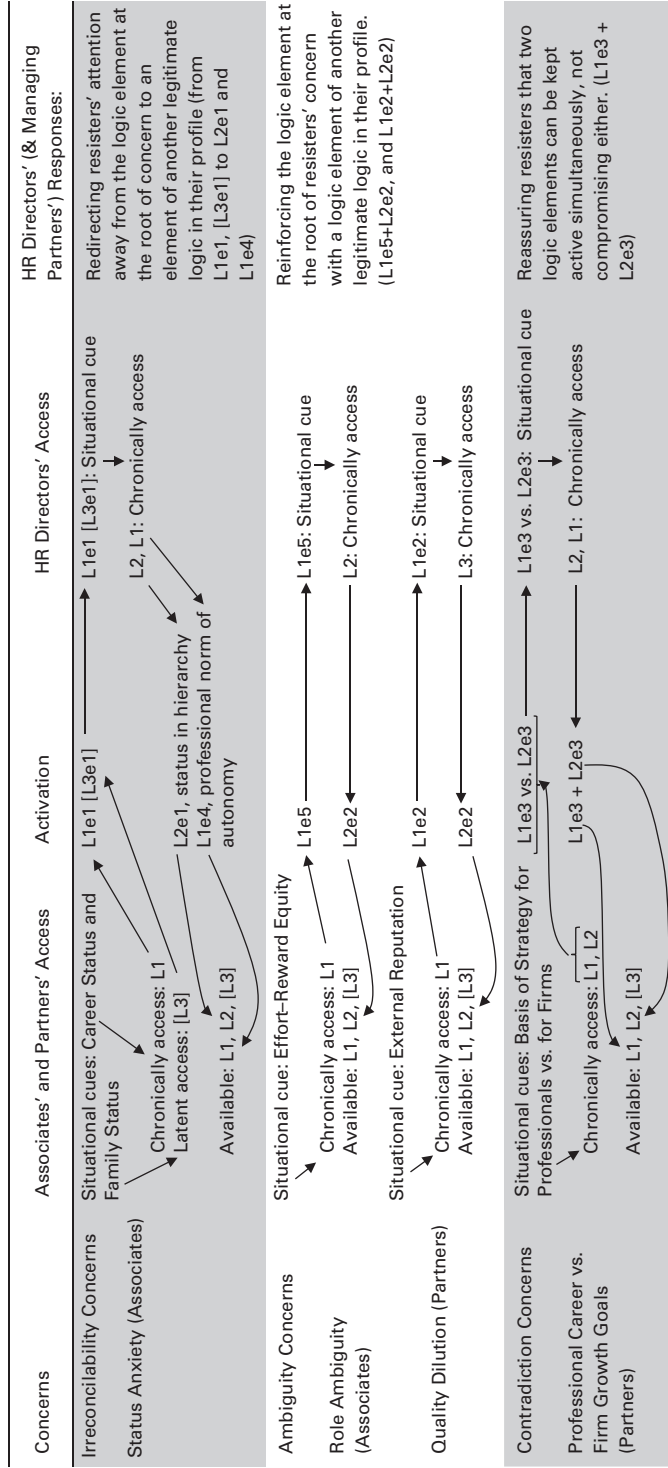
Even though associates’ responses to a survey were a strong trigger for the counsel role, both associates and partners across our firms voiced three concerns during its implementation, which we label *irreconcilability of professional and family status*, *ambiguity in value for professionals and the firm*, and *contradiction between professional career and firm strategy goals*. We elaborate each concern here, followed by the HR directors’ response; refer to Table A2 in the Online Appendix for illustrative quotes. To describe each concern, we highlight the situational cue prompted by the new role, which triggered associates or partners to chronically access a logic in their logic profile and activate a specific logic element, surfacing an incompatibility with the role. Under each response to a concern, we highlight the situational cue HR directors received from resisters’ logic-based resistance and the logic they chronically accessed, also available in the resisters’ logic profile, to interpret it. We point to the logic elements they activated to redirect, reinforce, or reassure the associates and/or partners, which created compatibility with the role. We label professional, corporate, and family logics as L1, L2, and L3, respectively, and refer to the specific logic elements as e# as detailed in Table 1. To foreshadow theory development, in Figure 1 we summarize conceptual signposts of situational cues, logics chronically accessed, and elements activated.

### Irreconcilability Concern Handled by Redirecting Responses

The counsel role prompted associates to think about career status—a situational cue they interpreted through the professional logic—which revealed incompatibilities with the role. First, associates perceived the counsel role as being off the successful path to partnership, and second, they associated it with making time for family (based on the family logic), which was not legitimate within a legal career. To them, professional status and family status were irreconcilable.

Associates’ primary anxiety about the counsel role was that “it is still the thing in law that if you aren’t made partner you haven’t succeeded” (A2, F3). Partner status is taken for granted as the career prize every lawyer strives toward. An associate claimed that the counsel role said “you are not good enough to be a partner” and was “an acknowledgement that you are second best” (A3, F4). The managing partner of F3 shared concerns expressed by some newly appointed counsel: “What’s the point [of counsel]? Am I no longer to be exclusive? Am I no longer in a privileged position?” A senior associate in F2 said “the difference between getting in [as partner] and having to look at

**Figure 1. Tackling Resistance: Situational Cues, Access, and Activation**



those options . . . is huge." Another lamented, "What am I doing with them [counsel]? They're no-hopers, there's no way they're going to be a partner. . . . I just don't want to be here." After being congratulated, a newly minted counsel asked, "Why? Why are you congratulating me? Because I've kind of, you know, downgraded" (C1, F4). An associate in F4 admitted that if he did not make partner, "I would be out of here very quickly and get on somewhere else—I don't have time to waste" (A2, F4). The pressure to achieve the prized career status made them anxious to be *seen*, on a daily basis, as striving ambitiously toward that goal. Associates noted, "I have seen X work ferociously hard to get to partner" (A3, F2), "I am more of an ambitious person" (A2, F4), and "it is self-imposed because it is my personal aspiration to be partner" (A1, F4).

When reminded that they had applauded their firm for introducing the counsel role, contradicting their rather negative stance toward it as a career option for themselves, respondents clarified that their personal aspiration to be a partner was not everyone's aspiration. One senior associate stated that the counsel role "was a nice thing for the firm to do *for people*, but it is not aspirational *for me*" (A2, F1). The role was attractive for those with "commitments outside work" (A2, F2), those "who have a wider focus like they've got a family . . . and don't want the extra responsibility" and are unwilling to give the "extra pound of flesh you need to give as partner" (A3, F3). Another associate said, "You're expected to basically sacrifice your personal life for the firm, and not everybody's willing to do that" (A1, F3).

Most strikingly, they cast the new role as "something for female lawyers who want a family" (A1, F1) and said, "I think for women it's particularly promising because we have these stupid losses of good people who can't easily combine having a young family with doing the work" (A2, F1). They stereotyped women as mothers who might eschew partnership ambitions because, as one associate put it, "mothers won't sacrifice their children's lives" (A3, F3). In short, they associated the counsel role and the work–family balance concerns with female colleagues. We found this intriguing because associates across a wide spectrum of law firms anonymously expressed the importance of work–life balance in surveys. But in interviews, they were conspicuously silent about its salience for them personally, except for a few who acknowledged the hypocrisy. One associate related his own work–family struggles yet rejected the role for himself: "As counsel you can negotiate working hours. In the last six weeks I have had a terrible time, billing 65 hours a week including weekends; [I] cancelled three family engagements—very frustrating . . . *but* the counsel role does not interest me at all. I want to push for partnership" (A1, F1). A junior partner in F2 noted that "when you come out the other side [of partner selection] you continue to work ridiculous hours and make stupid sacrifices for the firm," but when asked how he viewed the counsel role, he conceded, "Probably negatively, which sounds quite hypocritical given what I have just said." Some, including counsel, corroborated our hunch, noting that "maybe it's that people just don't admit it to your colleagues" (A3, F2). A junior partner in F1 called work–life balance a "myth." In our interviewees' minds, to fulfill one's career ambitions by becoming a partner required making "sacrifices" in one's personal life. The counsel role, therefore, was for those who did not have the same aspirations and were less willing to make those



sacrifices, such as their female colleagues. For themselves, career and family status were irreconcilable.

In short, the counsel role triggered a situational cue of career status that the associates interpreted through the professional logic (L1) activating the “status in profession” element (L1e1; see Figure 1), which revealed an incompatibility with the role. Associating the counsel role with making time for family intensified the incompatibility because prioritizing work over family to strive for professional status was normatively expected in an elite law firm (e.g., Wallace, 1997). At the same time, associates thought some colleagues, particularly women, would not wish to sacrifice being present for family, a situational cue they interpreted through the family logic (L3e1), activating the “being present for family” element but only for “others.” Associates kept the family logic latent for themselves even though they expressed frustrations about the sacrifices they made. In sum, the associates were cued to status elements of two different logics they perceived to be irreconcilable because activating one (professional status) precluded activating the other (family status), which was illegitimate within the professional logic.

**Redirecting to compatible and legitimate logic elements.** HR directors thus received two situational cues connected with associates’ career–family status irreconcilability concern: L1e1, reflecting concerns about career status in the profession, and a latent cue, L3e1, reflecting work–family balance concerns, which they publicly expressed as relevant only for female colleagues. HR directors of F1–F4 worried that the counsel role would become a “mummy track,” jeopardizing the goal of retaining valuable talent. They responded to these concerns first by redirecting associates’ attention away from the traditional notion of career status (partner) to instead emphasize the hierarchical position of the counsel role and its status vis-à-vis partner and associate. Second, they redirected associates’ attention away from work–family balance and women as the focus of the counsel role by recasting the role as an option to suit a variety of preferences for “all men and women,” consistent with valued professional norms of autonomy and control. As we elaborate, in each redirection, HR directors used discursive framing to shift associates’ attention away from seeing the role through incompatible logic elements toward seeing it through other elements of legitimate logics within the firm with which the role was compatible.

*Redirecting professional career status concerns toward status in the corporate logic.* HR directors of F1–F4 interpreted the situational cue of associates’ career status concerns through the corporate logic and activated the “status in hierarchy element” (L2e1) using discursive framing to redirect associates’ attention to the status of the counsel role in the law firm hierarchy. They asserted that counsel “is not a second-class alternative. . . . It’s actually a very meaningful role” (HRD, F2). It is “not for failed partnership candidates” and “not a consolation prize” but “a destination in its own right—an aspirational goal” (HRD, F1). They added privileges to position counsel close to partners in terms of status and to distance them from associates. For instance, they prefaced counsel role descriptions with either “just as partners” or “unlike senior associates.” Thus in F3, “Counsel can attend partner meetings,” and in F1, “Counsel has access to the partners’ lounge so that they feel part of the group,

albeit not part of equity partnership. . . . [They] have access to sensitive information, access to some partner benefits, and are included in the management team . . . in a way that senior associates are not."

They recast the counsel role itself as an alternative to—but not the end of the road to—partnership, saying that "not everyone has to go through it to make partner . . . for some it is a very, very good platform," such as those "who need to build a business case for partnership" (HRD, F1). "We thought it would be foolish to say, 'You won't become partner after you have been [counsel],' because there may be people whose circumstances change" (HRD, F3).

In sum, the HR directors imbued the counsel role with legitimacy and status, both in absolute and comparative terms. Rights and privileges positioned counsel closer to partners and away from senior associates, and the chance to make partner from the counsel role clearly positioned the role on the corporate hierarchy. Using discursive framing, HR directors thus redirected associates' attention away from status in the profession (L1e1) toward the counsel role's status in the corporate hierarchy (L2e1), which they believed would resonate because the corporate logic was available in associates' personal logic profile (Figure 1). In other words, they redirected associates to view the role through a compatible element of another logic. Such redirecting did not take place in F5; the counsel's status in that firm was undermined by the message that "the job for life is partnership" (HRD, F5).

*Redirecting unmentionable family status concerns toward professional norms in the professional logic.* HR directors also had to respond to family status concerns, which associates attributed to others but repudiated for themselves publicly, even though anonymously they had expressed it was important to them. HR directors responded with their strength in a law firm: "to bring empathy" (HRD, F3), "to listen . . . [and] connect with them [lawyers]" (HRD, F6), and to "be good at reading the room around what's the mood, the politics and be there to make their business successful" (HRD, F1). Accordingly, HR directors interpreted the latent situational cue from associates' career–family struggle (L3e1) through the professional logic, understanding that associates did not want to be seen as privileging family issues over career ambition because they saw the family logic as unmentionable at work. F1–F4's HR directors recast counsel as a choice for "those who choose to go along a different track," are "open to other options where they can do a great job," or "want to step back." Enhanced work–family balance thus became only one of a variety of preferences to attract candidates to the counsel role, and the role was framed "for all men and women," attempting to weaken the strong link associates made between the role and women and family.

Thus the HR directors used discursive framing to gently redirect the associates from being present for family (relevant for others) to professional autonomy (Cooper et al., 1996), activating the "professional norms" element of the professional logic (L1e4). Traditionally lawyers built their own roles based on work interests, valuing choice (Bucher and Stelling, 1969). For the HR directors this alleviated the risk of the role being rejected altogether or becoming a "mummy track" and, consequently, the family logic continuing to be unmentionable. In stark contrast, the HR partner in F5 amplified, rather than muted, the gender aspect and explicitly positioned counsel as a "career proposition for women." The HR director in F5 said she felt tightly constrained in

framing the role and felt it would not succeed without support from the HR partner or managing partner.

In sum, HR directors used discursive means to redirect associates' attention from "status in profession" of the professional logic to "status in hierarchy" of the corporate logic (L1e1 to L2e1) and from "status in the family" ([latent] L3e1) to "professional norms of autonomy" of the professional logic (L1e4). Doing so helped to make the status irreconcilability surfaced by the counsel role irrelevant by redirecting attention away from seeing the role through incompatible logic elements toward seeing it through other compatible logic elements, each based in a logic legitimate within the firm.

### **Ambiguity Concerns Handled by Reinforcing Responses**

The counsel role prompted two situational cues, one each for associates and partners, surfacing concerns that the counsel role was ambiguously defined. Associates thought about effort/reward equity, which they interpreted through the professional logic, activating that logic's "personal capitalism" element (L1e5) (Figure 1). They were concerned that the counsel role would not be compensated fairly relative to senior associates and partners. Some worried that the counsel role was a "glorified associate or a senior associate by another name" (A3, F3). Others compared it with partner: "[I]f I am going to be doing the same job as a partner, then why can't I be a partner?" (A2, F4) or "[W]hat would be the real differences in responsibility?" (A3, F2). One associate did not mince words: "You'd get the worst bit of the partner's job, the slightly admin side . . . but without a huge, whacking profit share" (A3, F5). Even a newly appointed counsel was unclear: "You get a slightly different bonus based on the other objectives . . . but you still have the same chargeable hours targets as associates, even though you're now supposed to be doing something else. This needs working out . . ." (C1, F4). An associate in F5 was cynical that "you'd be left out of crucial business decisions. And you'd still be doing fee earning as well and still reporting to a partner. I can't see how it would be less work pressure. So I have to say for me, I don't think that's interesting at all . . ." (A3, F5). Some suspected that firms "haven't explained sufficiently what [counsel] is because they don't want to have to" (A2, F2), as counsel saved on pay and boosted their all-important profit-per-partner metric.

The counsel role cued partners to consider its implications for senior professionals' quality, perceived as critical to the firm's external reputation. Partners interpreted the situational cue through the professional logic activating the "association with quality of craft" element (L1e2), which revealed a potential incompatibility with the role (Figure 1) because its quality implications were ambiguous. They were concerned that permanently retaining non-partners "will lower the bar," constituting a "clash between principle and short-term expedience" because "it's quite a strongly held feeling in the firm that you have to get . . . where your best people get promoted because that's the only way that the firm succeeds" (P2, F4). F5's HR director noted, "Partners are not comfortable with having a separate career path because they still cannot see how it could work."

In sum, associates activated the "personal capitalism" (L1e5) element of their professional logic, which surfaced ambiguity concerns about the role's relative value in effort/reward terms for them individually. Partners activated the

“association with quality of craft” element (L1e2) of the professional logic, revealing that it was unclear whether the counsel role would undermine the mechanism ensuring that the best rise to the top, sending a strong quality signal to clients (Gilson and Mnookin, 1985). Thus both associates and partners were concerned that the implications of the counsel role for prized norms and values were ambiguous, raising potential incompatibilities with the role.

**Reinforcing with corporate logic elements.** The HR directors received the situational cue of “personal capitalism” concerns from associates’ professional logic (L1e5) and “quality of craft” concerns from partners’ professional logic (L1e2), both of which they interpreted through the corporate logic (L2). They responded by reinforcing the effort/reward value associated with the counsel role with policies and practices based in the corporate logic. F1’s HR director recognized that “it’s all well and good telling them that ‘this is your title’ and giving them a different pay packet, but they have to feel it on a day-to-day basis.” Likewise, F3’s HR director noted that to stifle perceptions of counsel as only a “glorified associate,” it was insufficient to give it “a slightly different badge” and imperative to “make sure there is a level of detail behind it.” The HR directors activated the “bureaucratic processes and systems” element of the corporate logic (L2e2), also in associates’ logic profiles, to clarify “role-specific responsibilities,” “role-specific training programs,” and “rigor in appraisal criteria” to emphasize the role’s distinctiveness. F4 introduced a counsel competency framework whose “performance areas” were broader than those for senior associates, including “client relationship and business development,” “management skills,” and “contribution to the wider firm.” Also, counsel responsibilities were differentiated from those of partners. In F3, for instance, the HR director clarified that “counsel is doing great quality work and leading work coming in” but “not the wining and dining,” and “a partner is expected to contribute 2,500 hours per year to the business, but [counsel] comes out at 1,950.” While all firms except F5 revised performance criteria, F1 was an exemplar:

We have a thing called the five dimensions of partner contribution . . . clients, people, knowledge, practice, and partnership. When we are assessing partner candidates, we would look for a certain standard in all . . . five. We will flex that a little bit in respect of counsel and look for strength in at least three . . . accept[ing] threshold [levels] in the other two. (HRD, F1)

In addition to harder performance metrics, HR directors also used softer means such as organizing a counsel retreat to create a “community feeling” among its membership or an “International Network of Counsel” as F1 did. Although counsel engaged with partners on firm-wide topics, there were clear limits, as the HR director of F1 noted: “The global partner retreat was only for partners. As important as it is to include counsel, it’s also important to retain what is important about being partner.” At the end of the first round of interviews, some associates confirmed changes in their “remuneration package and appraisals” and a “lot more communication with associates as to career development . . . the counsel role as well” (A2, F1).

To address partners’ concerns, the HR directors activated the “bureaucratic processes and systems” element of the corporate logic (L2e2), also in partners’

logic profile, to put policies and practices in place that buttressed the quality expectations of counsel. The HR director of F1 introduced rigorous due diligence processes to “build confidence in the role” and “guard against a potential misuse of the role,” clarifying that “we are not putting people in the role who do not have the right skills.”

Rigorous vetting of “potential candidates for counsel by the Partnership Committee” (HRD, F3) and a tighter “formal appraisal system” had broader quality consequences, raising the bar for “all lawyers.” (HRD, F1). The managing partner of F3 was pleased that “our HR director has introduced a ranking for all lawyers in the appraisal system from this year . . . it will help us manage the path to partnership.” The HR directors involved partners in meritocratic talent development activities to the extent that they became “converts” themselves. An associate commented that since the counsel position was established,

there is a much more structured formal appraisal, but also emphasis on informal semi-annual discussions between the associate and the partner he/she works with. Partners themselves are converts now. . . . Also, if opportunities open up for alternative roles the partners let the individuals know. (A2, F2)

In sum, the HR directors reinforced the counsel role’s effort/reward equity (L1e5) relative to other roles and its positive quality implications (L1e2) for the whole career ladder by activating the “bureaucratic processes and systems” element of the corporate logic (L2e2) to put policies and practices in place that buttressed the at-risk elements. In contrast to redirecting resisters’ attention away from logic elements causing irreconcilability concerns, the HR directors thus addressed ambiguity concerns by safeguarding valued beliefs at the root of resisters’ concerns with an element of another logic to ensure compatibility with the role.

### **Contradiction Concerns Handled by Reassuring Responses**

The counsel role also prompted two simultaneous situational cues to do with the career advancement of young lawyers and the firm’s growth ambitions, which the partners interpreted through the professional and corporate logics, respectively. Partners personally valued the professional development of bright junior lawyers to enhance the firm’s capabilities as well as the firm’s ability to capitalize on growth opportunities because both impacted the profit-per-partner metric (Hitt et al., 2001). They were concerned that the counsel role would force a trade-off between privileging the career strategy of young lawyers coming from the professional logic (L1e3) and the firm’s growth strategies from the corporate logic (L2e3). They worried that the role would block professional career development opportunities for associates with potential and, in turn, demotivate them. This view resonated in the legal media: “Partnership will only ever be for a select few. . . . But to keep attracting the best in the first place, the firm has to be *up-front with assistants about their prospects*” (Legal Business, 2006: 74).

A partner (P2) in F5 worried that retaining counsel could “fossiliz[e] a group of people that actually cuts off opportunities for younger people.” A partner (P1) in F2 reiterated, “It’s a balancing act . . . between giving our stars the

responsibility and experience at a junior level or allowing more senior lawyers to be in the role of counsel and doing the jobs that they could otherwise be doing, which of course creates a logjam." While the partners spoke of supporting associates' career strategy, they also referred to firm strategy to "grow the business" (P1, F4) or become "30 percent bigger" (P1, F1) and recognized the benefits a variety of people with "different titles" could bring to "churn things when work comes in." Even though they alluded to growing the business as a rationale for counsel, they tended to privilege opportunities the firm's growth created for the rising stars' development: "So if you had three or four fantastically able senior associates . . . they would themselves be capable of generating growth in the business and therefore, you know, the business you'd expect in three or four years' time would be three or four partners greater" (P2, F4).

The up-or-out system has a built-in mechanism to make individual professionals' career strategy and firm strategy mutually reinforcing by developing and retaining the best and most ambitious associates, who help to acquire new clients and maintain the firm's elite reputation (Hitt et al., 2001). When the counsel role triggered partners to experience a contradiction between the "personal professional development" element (L1e3) and the "pursue firm growth" element (L2e3), they thought it would disturb that mechanism, surfacing an incompatibility with the role. While they recognized the role's potential to provide valuable talent to support the firm's growth ambitions, they worried that would occur at the expense of associates' professional development. Thus partners were internally torn between guarding associates' professional opportunities and firm strategy.

**Reassuring by claiming professional and corporate logic elements are not conflicting.** The managing partners and HR directors in F1–F4 received the situational cue of partners' internal conflict between "personal professional development" from their professional logic and "pursue firm growth" from their corporate logic. They interpreted the contradiction partners perceived through both the professional and corporate logics and responded by reassuring them that counsel would be "small numbers," "no more than . . .," or only a "small proportion" and that "the ratio between partners and counsel needs to be kept in balance" (MP, F2), but without specifying a ratio. They claimed that counsel numbers would remain small enough to leave sufficient development opportunities for associates. Although managing partners played a supportive role to back the HR directors' other resistance-handling actions, they *led* efforts to address the professional career/firm strategy goal conflict perceived by partners, especially the more "old school" among them. The managing partner of F3 was candid: "I tended to spend time with the very influential partners who had entrenched opinions." The managing partner of F2 reiterated that "the firm wants to attract excellent young people and give them the best experience . . . so [counsel] is going to be a small proportion, but it is not fixed." Managing numbers, his peer in F1 noted, would also "ensure it remains a high-status role." In other words, they reassured that professional career strategy and firm growth strategy goals were not conflicting. Yet managing partners remained cautiously vague to avoid the opposition that a more specific policy on counsel numbers may have elicited. Managing partners and HR

directors thus used reassuring language to keep both professional career (L1e3) and firm growth (L2e3) elements active simultaneously, signaling that the counsel role was compatible with achieving both goals. In contrast to the HR directors' reinforcing response, which used rigor and transparency, the reassuring response eased partners' minds with deliberate vagueness.

## UPDATING THE LOGIC SETTLEMENT

In the early, rather fragile period of the counsel role's introduction and implementation, resistance could have caused it to be rejected outright, yet over time, the change agents' resistance-handling responses started to stabilize the role. We returned to the firms five years later to examine how the role had progressed. The third wave of interviews (2018) and legal media reports (2014–2019) revealed that the counsel role in F1–F4 was—in the words of the HR directors, managing partners, and counsel—“embedded now,” “settled,” “established,” “not going to go away,” “influential and powerful.” One HR director (F2) stated that “it is very genuinely something [associates] themselves aspire to, which wasn't there when it first came in.” Even announcements of counsel promotions on firm websites became more prominent and celebratory, with senior partners emphasizing promotion as “a significant achievement—this is an exceptionally bright group and they should feel very proud” (F1) and “recognizing the strong technical capabilities of these senior lawyers and the additional leadership skills they bring to our client teams” (F2). The number of counsel had steadily increased, and as intended, it was a relatively small proportion compared with the number of partners. Strikingly, the gender composition was evenly balanced; see Table 2. The role was a “broadchurch” (HRD, F3) used in “myriad ways” (HRD, F2). It was thus perceived as an option to suit a wide variety of preferences, as reflected in this summary of interviews from F1–F4:

Typically in the counsel role the individuals would be “very technically able, very specialist, very niche” but not have the interest or skill set to become a partner. . . . “It is a destination in its own right, an alternative to partnership”; it is sometimes a “holding bay” or an “interim position” when “there is no business case for partner”; or

**Table 2. Counsel Role Distribution: Gender Composition and Proportion of Partners in HQ (UK)\***

Firm	2018 Counsel			2018 Partners	% Counsel
	M	F	Total		
F1	11	18	29	187	16
F2	18	21	39	145	27
F3	64	66	113	328	34
F4	11	13	24	163	16
F6	22	14	36	145	25
F5	1		1	173	< 1

\* F1: globally, male counsel outnumber female counsel; F3 underwent a significant merger and has been streamlining numbers in different roles.

“for those of partner quality who just cannot commit the time and energy—want to take a specific break or may have young children”; “also now with agile working and people wanting to have a slightly different career path, we do have a number of people who have all the right qualities for partnership and have said no and are doing . . . well-paid roles as counsel”; “sometimes in other global offices . . . the opportunities for partnership are more limited, but you need . . . a name and a seniority in the market, you need a status that isn’t a partner but actually opens the doors or clients are prepared to pay for it.”

Counsel, HR directors, and managing partners in F1–F4 and F6 reiterated that the role was not a “dumping ground for women” or “a consolation prize”: “When we have our partner promotions conversations and we determine that an individual isn’t ready for promotion to partner, we try and *resist* them being made counsel in the interim because we don’t want it to be seen as a consolation prize” (HR, F4). The notion of the role stabilizing while embracing its flexible nature is nicely captured by this managing partner:

We thought it settled . . . possibly in the third successful promotions process with some counsel becoming partners, but also when senior associates became partners *without* being counsel, and lawyers becoming counsel who had different aspirations. . . . Also, we now have many very talented counsel just choosing to be counsel—some real linchpin people—in some pretty significant management roles in the business. (MP, F3)

Our wave three data thus confirmed that the role had stabilized. The logic elements that resisters activated to surface their concerns and those that change agents activated to respond became harmonized as the counsel enacted the role and elaborated it via new structures, systems, and processes, ultimately updating the firm’s professional and corporate logic settlement to make space for the previously unmentionable family logic; see Table A3 in the Online Appendix.

### Harmonizing Logic Elements

By harmonizing, we mean that elements from two or more logics remain distinct but are used together in such complementary ways that they seem to operate seamlessly as one logic. Harmonizing occurred both between the professional and corporate logic elements and between family and professional logic elements, updating the logic settlement to make space for the incoming logic.

**Harmonizing professional and corporate logic elements.** In the third wave of data collection we noted subtle shifts in the way the counsel role was viewed in the firm that occurred through its enactment and elaboration. The first shift we noted was related to status. Instead of differentiating their position relative to partner or senior associate, counsel began to focus on the position itself. Some counsel in F3 expressed to the HR director: “Why are we driving this so much as a comparison with the partner role? Why can’t this be . . . more about what counsel *do*?” Over time, as counsel enacted the role in normal firm operations and elaborated it through organizational processes,



professional peer relations took precedence over hierarchical positioning. Both from our interviews and reports, we learned that counsel perceived themselves as “senior, highly skilled, knowledgeable lawyers in the firm,” “acting as a conduit between partners and more junior lawyers,” “a senior legal advisor, with high autonomy,” “freeing up partner time,” and “a mentor for senior associates.” Counsel “manage the clients and then just defer lightly to the partner on it” (C5), and the “[c]lient gets the benefit of the experience of somebody who’s been doing it as long as a partner has but somebody who is maybe more available because they don’t do as much of the business development” (C8). Strikingly, the Counsel Role Review (internal document, 2015, F4) found that the counsel provide “valuable revenue generation” as “experts on [legal] matters across the firm.” A managing partner (F1) articulated on their website that counsel “bring varied skills and interests to the table but what they all share *is exceptional legal expertise and the . . . drive to succeed in the business.*” C7 summed it up this way: “Partners are owners, but we do almost exactly the same job. We . . . help each other all the time because we’re equally expert in stuff, but he’s called a partner and I’m not. If we were in BP or something . . . you don’t get promoted based on whether you have bought some shares.” Thus counsel became professional peers with specific roles instead of something less than partners and more than senior associates. Instead of continued redirection from status in profession (L1e1) to status in hierarchy (L1e2), the two logic elements harmonized in the minds of counsel and others as well as in the day-to-day processes, updating the existing logic settlement in the firms. As a result, the counsel role became assimilated into the career ladder along with associates and partners.

The assimilation was helped considerably by the ongoing reinforcing of the role’s quality and effort/reward equity through bureaucratic processes and systems. A “framework of competencies [was] needed” (C5) to enable “striking the right balance between flexibility and autonomy of each counsel’s practice and clear measures of performance” and “defining the purpose and scope of the role for consistency across practice areas and across regions, whilst maintaining enough flexibility” (Counsel Role Review, internal document, 2015, F4). The “variety of business objectives for counsel roles results in varied performance goals, which feeds into the remuneration package” (F4), including “equity points and bonuses” (F6), all developed in consultation with counsel and other members of the firm. Intriguingly, the use of “bureaucratic processes” (L2e2) to reinforce the “quality of craft” (L1e2) was now of concern not only for partners but also for counsel themselves, who worried that the flexibility in the role catering to too many different aspirations might compromise quality: “The very aspiring counsel started feeling that their group was being diluted by these people who had different aspirations, and it was an issue. The way we dealt with that was to have a very clearly articulated quality threshold, a very strong process” (MP, F3) “that’s all done through the partnership committee process. . . . [P]eople get rejected, which shows it’s a proper process” (C7). The HR director at F3 confirmed, “Last year (2017) actually we realized the bar was too low. . . . We removed the counsel that we thought were underperforming.” Across F1–F4 and F6, there was a realization that there was a lack of proper “post-promotion [to counsel] performance management,” especially to fend off pressures from “big bear partners to promote pet counsel” (MP, F3). The enactment and elaboration of these bureaucratic

processes (L2e2) safeguarded professional values of effort/reward equity (L1e5) and quality (L1e2) not only for associates and partners but also for counsel, who wanted to be held to the same standards of rigor, thus harmonizing these elements from the corporate and professional logics.

Finally, the assimilation of the counsel role on the career ladder was also helped because firm members were reassured that both lawyers' career strategy (L1e3) and the firm's growth strategy (L2e3) could be achieved together as the counsel role was enacted and elaborated. There continued to be "no fixed cap" on counsel numbers (HRD, MP, F1–F4, F6), and concerns about associates' career advancement had dissipated: "I don't think it is a problem . . . more go from senior associate to partner than counsel to partner" (C5). The counsel title had become "more valuable in our [global] offices as it . . . opens doors or clients are prepared to pay for it" (Counsel Role Review, F4). A counsel in F1 also noted that "in parts of continental Europe, a counsel is seen as almost equivalent of a partner," reiterating the need to monitor counsel numbers to maintain exclusivity. Thus the role was both a valued rung on the career ladder and a strong contributor to firm strategy.

**Harmonizing professional and family logic elements.** More dramatically, the elaboration and enactment of the counsel role made space for the family logic to enter the firms. As the counsel role became assimilated into the career ladder and its distinct contribution to the firm, alongside other professional peers, became clear, it also became clear that desiring work–family flexibility did not mean one was not ambitious and hardworking. The family status element (L3e1), previously stigmatized in the firms, began to harmonize with the professional norms of autonomy (L1e4), alleviating the irreconcilability between professional and family status.

Recasting the counsel role to encapsulate choices continued to "broaden the options for career progression" (Counsel Role Review, internal document, 2015, F4) and cater to a variety of lifestyle preferences. Our third wave of interviews confirmed that over time it led to "very explicit discussions" both at the leadership level and between mentors and associates about "what you're looking for in your careers" (MP, F3), which naturally led to discussions of balancing work and personal lives. As this managing partner articulated, "[T]he success of 'speak your mind, don't try and bury these things' led to talking openly about what it means to have a family." Notably, it stimulated a broader narrative in the firms about achieving balance between work and personal life, "not unique to the counsel population and irrespective of level or gender" (HRD, F6). Across F1–F4 and F6, we were struck by the deep questioning of taken-for-granted notions, which triggered "reducing the need for presenteeism by letting people work in a way that suits them" (HRD, F1; C5 echoes). In one firm, change was made so that "you had the right to apply to work from home one day a week" (HRD, F6; C8 echoes). Another firm ran an "anti-presenteeism campaign" that "has taken on a whole new very positive life . . . you get rid of this walk of shame that people used to talk about, you know, when mothers have to leave at 5 p.m. to collect their children . . . 50 eyes in the back of your head, 'ah, part-timer, not really committed'" (HRD, F3). The "un-gendered" nature of the initiatives was conspicuous: shared parental leave was viewed positively because "it's becoming a parent's issue,

not a woman's issue" (HRD, F1; C5 echoes). In sum, the entire discourse in these firms bloomed around the belief that "regardless of what role you perform, being agile and working in a flexible way should be available to all" (HRD, F2). A practice group in F6 went as far as to position flexible working as "an innovation tool. You're in a more relaxed environment at home, and you can think more creatively."

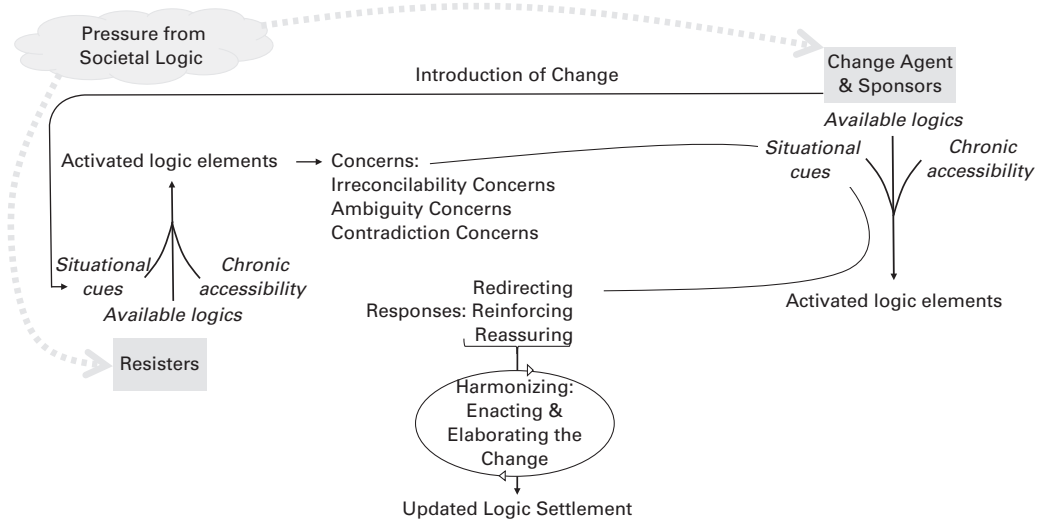
HR directors and managing partners ramped up symbolic messaging that balancing work and life applied to everyone and "to have a life, a family, shouldn't be a point of embarrassment" (HRD, F3). For instance, they showcased partners' own stories of home and work, focusing on "working fathers and how they made it and on working mothers" (HRD, F1). In F3, they set up "bring your child to work" days with partners participating. And in F6, when employee surveys and focus groups suggested that "partners aren't role-modeling part-time working, flexible working," a partner volunteered, "I'll tell anybody that I take my kids to school two mornings a week, on a Tuesday and a Thursday, so people will see me coming in late." At meetings he encouraged other partners "to work from home and to lead by example, really do" (HRD, F6). Notably, while the counsel role was becoming gender balanced, the proportion of women becoming partners was also increasing in our firms during the last five years of our study, as reflected in the legal media.

Partners embody "status in profession," and as they became central figures in the discourse about work–family balance, status in the profession and being available for family no longer seemed antithetical. Rather, the latent family logic was allowed to become active as work–life balance became a firm matter. Counsel summed up the harmonizing this way: "I don't choose to be counsel for [family]; you can easily become a partner and work part-time" (C7); and "counsel was never a way of doing less work or being able to be part-time, because we have part-time partners and we have part-time counsel" (C5).

Thus as counsel and others in the firm elaborated new ways of communicating about and managing career and family issues, and as partners openly enacted their role as family members, the initial irreconcilability experienced by junior lawyers between professional status and family status was alleviated. The "being present for family" element of the family logic and the "professional norms of autonomy" element of the professional logic harmonized. The family logic was thus gradually becoming an active member of the existing logic settlement.

## DISCUSSION

Examining how change agents handle resisters' logic-based concerns when a new logic enters an organization, we focused on revealing the underpinning dynamics of how available logics are accessed and activated between pluralistic change agents and resisters. We summarize our findings in an inductively generated model of handling logic-based resistance to update logic settlements shown in Figure 2. Our research unpacks the implications of intra-individual plurality, which has been only implicitly considered in the literature. This plurality means individuals have multiple logics available to them from both their professional and personal lives. Which logics individuals use is driven partly by chronic access (i.e., the logics they use most frequently) and partly by situational cues—contextual stimuli that help to frame what the situation "is a case of"

**Figure 2. Model of Handling Resistance to a New Logic in an Existing Logic Settlement**

and, as a result, what logic should be used to interpret it. More generally and as depicted in Figure 2, a new change prompts a situational cue that resisters interpret through one of their available logics, which they chronically access, activating a specific logic element that they express to change agents and others. These activated logic elements, which reflect resisters' concerns about the change, then serve as situational cues for change agents, who interpret them through the same logic or a different logic in their profile. Change agents can respond to resisters by activating elements of the logic, also available to resisters, to make sense of the change in a way that creates perceived compatibilities with the change, alleviating resisters' concerns. We show that knowing which logics resisters have available enables change agents to use their own plurality, and that of resisters, to handle resistance by "making the logics case."

Our study conceptually expands the roles of availability, accessibility, and activation of logics in shaping the institutional agency that is salient for many decision-making situations involving logic-based negotiations among organization members. These microdynamics are relevant in any organizational action that triggers divergent views from different groups of individuals because they are cued by the situation to different logics in their profiles. Our study further illuminates that access to and activation of logics at the individual level, and between groups of pluralistic individuals, are precursors to updating existing logics at the organizational level to make space for a new issue. We show that over time, as individuals enact the change in day-to-day operations and elaborate it through new processes and systems, the logic elements initially at the root of their concerns and those that change agents activate in response will harmonize. The harmonizing of these logic elements not only makes it more comfortable for individuals to enact the change but also updates the logic settlement at the organizational level to make space for elements of the new logic that the change represents. We argue that the updating occurs at the level of

specific logic elements and the new logic is also assimilated at the level of elements that the new organizational practice or policy cues individuals to activate.

We make three contributions to the microfoundations of institutional action, underpinned by the dynamics of logic availability, accessibility, and activation. First, we highlight how three different forms of concerns expressed by resisters are handled by change agents, illuminating when and why certain tactics are efficacious. Second, we elucidate how individuals' enactment and elaboration of the change through new systems and processes updates the logic settlement and assimilates elements of a new logic. Third, we provide new insights into when and for whom logics constrain action, addressing contradictory notions in the literature about institutional agency.

### How Do Change Agents Handle Logic-Based Resistance?

We provide three key insights about handling logic-based resistance. First, we highlight the different forms of logic-based concerns that emerge when a change introduces a new logic into a firm's settled logics. Second, we add to the portfolio of change tactics shown in prior studies of microinstitutional change and, importantly, shed light on the processes that underpin their efficacy. Third, we explain how change agents can improve the efficacy of their responses by tailoring them to the forms of concerns expressed and using only logics that are already contextually legitimate in the firm.

**Forms of logic-based concerns.** We found that resisters' logic-based concerns manifest in different forms, extending what we know about institutional contradictions (Seo and Creed, 2002). Logic-based concerns are underpinned by the different ways in which resisters access and activate logic elements across their profile, prompted by different situational cues. *Irreconcilability* concerns occur when change cues resisters to an element from an illegitimate logic that they perceive as directly threatening a corresponding element from a legitimate logic. Activating one means being unable to activate the other. *Ambiguity* concerns occur when resisters experience lack of clarity about how a change affects deeply held norms and values connected to elements in the existing logic settlement. *Contradiction* concerns occur when resisters perceive potential trade-offs between elements based in different logics, each of which is legitimate and valued within the existing logic settlement.

**Extending the portfolio of change tactics in micro-level institutional change.** We identify change tactics to handle logic-based concerns that add to those identified in studies of micro-level institutional change (Kellogg, 2019). Further, we provide new insight by illuminating the microprocesses that underlie when certain tactics work well and why. *Redirecting* involves change agents using discursive means to shift resisters' attention from a core belief attached to an element of one logic (e.g., status) to a belief attached to the same or different element in another logic, providing an alternative institutional anchoring. To handle irreconcilability experienced between two logic elements, two redirecting moves may be made to make the irreconcilability irrelevant—one

from each element. In our study, change agents redirected resisters' attention from "status in the profession" to "status in the firm hierarchy" and from "being present for family" (which was illegitimate) to "professional norms of autonomy." Issue selling has emphasized the importance of shaping others' attention (Dutton et al., 2001), and our study extends this idea by showing that in some situations it entails *shifting* resisters' attention from a problematic focus to a more comfortable one that is compatible with the change. The redirecting response also resonates with framing processes of keying a new interpretation of an existing activity (Goffman, 1974) and laminating it over an original frame (Gray et al., 2015; Reinecke and Ansari, 2020). Yet while Lee, Ramus, and Vaccaro (2018) described keying and lamination framing processes that entailed open engagement, feedback, and validation with the target audiences, such free expression of contextually illegitimate concerns may not be possible for resisters. Accessing some logics at work may have negative career implications and may be emotionally very challenging for individuals (Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010), yet not expressing the identity may make individuals look or feel hypocritical and cause them angst (Meyerson and Scully, 1995). Redirecting hinges on the change agents' knowledge of what is available in resisters' logic profile and their activation of a contextually legitimate logic element that provides a different way of seeing the change from the one at the root of their concern. Thus, we expand the repertoire of change tactics to accommodate situations in which individuals may face cultural barriers to openly displaying support for a change that violates their professional identity and norms, a situation that occurs broadly with respect to family issues in professions (Kellogg, 2009; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020) and other issues (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010). We also highlight why our change agents avoided the change tactic of engaging potential resisters in designing and implementing the change (Schlesinger and Kotter, 1979), which managers have used to win over professionals (Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev, 2015), and similarly, why relational spaces wherein reformers could work together to find new ways to accommodate changes (Kellogg, 2009) would not have worked. Associates were unwilling to freely express the (contextually illegitimate) family logic for themselves for fear of sabotaging their career aspirations, rendering engagement and relational space organizing useless.

*Reinforcing* differs from redirecting in that change agents maintain resisters' focus on the element of concern but also activate an element in another logic in the resisters' profile to buttress the at-risk belief at the root of their ambiguity concerns. Change agents used bureaucratic policies and practices of the corporate logic to reinforce effort/reward equity and quality elements of the professional logic in our case. Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev's (2015) study showed how bureaucratic reforms, introducing job-posting systems and job ladders, increased transparency for job seekers and hiring managers with positive effects on diversity. We theorize more generally that more transparency *per se* may not have the desired effect unless it buttresses a logic element in the individuals' logics that they see as potentially under threat. We also note that while in our study, and in the Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev (2015) study, it was bureaucratic reforms that safeguarded a valued logic element, other logic elements could also suffice. For example, using sources of authority or legitimacy from one logic to buttress another could also work as a reinforcing move.

Change agents in our study used *reassuring* in response to perceived contradictions between two valued goals. Reassuring involved change agents keeping two logic elements active simultaneously while claiming that achieving *both* goals (e.g., career strategy and firm strategy) was possible through small pragmatic constraints to mitigate the perceived contradiction. While reassuring is a framing strategy, it differs from the bridging, amplifying, extending, and transforming strategies (Snow et al., 1986) identified in the literature by simply pledging to protect two goals that are seen as contradictory. According to Lewis (2000: 760), change reveals “contradictory yet interrelated elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously.” In Luscher and Lewis’s (2008) study of change from hierarchical structures to self-managing teams at LEGO, managers experienced contradictory demands to address conflict in teams, on the one hand, and to keep the team task-focused to ensure productivity, on the other. The managers were nudged to move from viewing this as an either/or dilemma toward a both/and paradox (e.g., Poole and van de Ven, 1989; Lewis, 2000) to help them view conflicting demands as complementary. The managers worked through the paradox by splitting tensions temporally, focusing on conflict resolution first to enable the team to then focus on its task. In contrast to splitting (Luscher and Lewis, 2008), the reassuring response helped change partners’ perception of an either/or contradiction between two goals to a both/and paradox that could be managed by signaling that constraints on one goal would protect the other threatened goal. This resonates with the findings of Malhotra and Hinings (2015), where resisters became more open to change when change agents committed to protecting certain values.

Together, the logics-based concerns and responses we identified contribute to the organizational and microinstitutional change literatures by not only extending the tactics change agents can use but also highlighting the importance of tailoring the type of response to the form of the concern and ensuring the responses used are contextually legitimate.

**The importance of tailoring responses.** The change tactics we identify resonate with those in the literature, but we go further to shed light on why studies show mixed results and how the efficacy of the change tactics can be enhanced. We show that our change agents’ responses to different forms of resisters’ concerns were logics driven. Simply put, if change agents’ tactics are driven by the form of resisters’ concern and the underlying logic elements they activate, rather than by the absolute merits of a tactic, the efficacy of the tactic would increase. In our study, for example, while reinforcing was used to bring clarity to resisters’ ambiguity concerns about prized values, it was explicitly avoided in response to contradiction concerns, which featured potential trade-offs between two valued goals. By being deliberately vague about limits on counsel numbers, change agents could reassure resisters that both goals could be achieved without risking endless debates about specifics. While the strategic use of ambiguity has long been seen as a device for facilitating organizational change (Eisenberg, 1984), our findings identify when it should be used: in response to perceived contradictions between two valued goals. By contrast, neither reassuring nor reinforcing could be expected to work when there were irreconcilability concerns because of a direct threat to an element

of a legitimate logic from an element of an illegitimate logic. Instead, redirecting worked to shift attention away from irreconcilability and toward more compatible elements. Issue sellers in Dutton et al.'s (2001: 721) study used the "logic of a business plan" to present an issue using rationality—numbers, charts, bottom-line impacts, facts, and evidence—to give the issue legitimacy. In a similar vein, the issue sellers used a tactic of continuous proposal making driven by the belief that repetition would prepare the target to better "hear" the full proposal (Dutton et al., 2001: 722). Yet the impact of these tactics was mixed. We contend that had the tactics been tailored to individuals' specific logic-based concerns, they would likely have performed better. Understanding whether an issue reveals an irreconcilability between two values, an ambiguity with regard to a prized value, or a contradiction between two values may help change agents to tailor issue-selling tactics to achieve better resonance with audiences. Thus our findings contribute to the micro-institutional change literature by connecting specific responses to specific forms of logic-based concerns from resisters.

**Using contextually legitimate responses.** More broadly, our findings suggest that change agents' responses are more effective when they leverage resisters' available logics to activate logic elements specifically to target those at the root of concerns—but only when those logics are contextually legitimate. Past scholarship has acknowledged principles, beliefs, and values as the basis of change resistance (e.g., Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007; Truelove and Kellogg, 2016; Wright, Zammuto, and Liesch, 2017), and studies have shown that organizations respond more to issues consistent with organization-level values rather than individual values (Bansal, 2003). Change agents persuade resisters by using legitimation tactics such as theorization (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002) and rhetoric (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) to connect with their beliefs and values. But when legitimation does not attend to values, it is less effective. For example, the managers' legitimation tactics in Kellogg (2019) did not win doctors' support for patient-centered medical home reforms because the frame they used did not resonate with most doctors, neglecting what doctors really valued. In Dutton et al.'s (2001) study, issue-bundling moves were more successful when they linked an issue to highly valued and legitimate organizational goals than when they linked the issue to other issues that were still developing and not yet legitimate. Extending these insights, our change agents' legitimation strategy, underpinning all of their responses, was to activate elements of logics in resisters' profiles that were legitimate within the firm. Our change agents were sensitive to not only what would resonate with resisters' logics but also what would not because of its illegitimacy within the firm. Rather than forcing resisters to engage an illegitimate logic with the angst it provoked, change agents redirected them to an element of a legitimate logic. Our findings suggest that a legitimation strategy's efficacy depends significantly on its resonance not with *any* logic in a resister's logic profile but rather only with contextually legitimate logics. Change agents are well advised to be aware of the elements of logics that are situationally cued by the change and to build legitimation tactics in accordance with those elements *and* the situationally legitimate logics in play.



## Implications for Updating Logic Settlements

Our study provides insights into logic settlements' resilience to updates as individuals enact changes in firms' normal operations and elaborate them through new systems and processes. In our study, as counsel enacted the role, the logic elements at the root of resisters' concerns and those activated by change agents *harmonized*: elements from two or more logics remained distinct but were used together in such complementary ways that they appeared to operate seamlessly as one logic. Harmonizing enhances logics' compatibility—the "extent to which the instantiations of logics imply consistent and reinforcing organizational actions" (Besharov and Smith, 2014: 367). It is not the same as lamination, which transforms a frame by superimposing or adding a new interpretation to it (Goffman, 1974; Lee, Ramus, and Vaccaro, 2018), because harmonizing instead reduces friction between logics to enable them to work seamlessly at the element level. Harmonizing updated the firm's professional and corporate logic settlement to make space for the previously unmentionable family logic.

**Harmonizing at multiple levels.** Harmonizing works at the individual level to alleviate the internal angst individuals experience in enacting their logics. Through enactment and elaboration, the counsel role became imbued with professional status, being present for family became a legitimate option open to people pursuing their professional autonomy, bureaucratic processes safeguarded quality and effort/reward equity for all, and the counsel role was seen to contribute to both personal career and firm growth strategies. Harmonizing the logic elements that caused resisters' concerns with those of change agents' responses enabled individuals to enact their logics more seamlessly and comfortably, avoiding the agonizing pull toward one logic over the other for fear of moral recriminations (Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010), accusations of hypocrisy (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), or damage to valued relationships (DiBenigno, 2018). Few examples exist in the literature of how multiple logics can be reconciled and smoothly enacted. In Battilana and Dorado's (2010) study, the successful microfinance bank socialized inexperienced people into the hybrid's blended banking and development logic. Such a strategy would not be viable, however, in professional organizations in which credentials are required. Alternatively, Waldorff, Reay, and Goodrick (2013) described how physicians segmented their days, complying sequentially with different logics (Pache and Santos, 2013a). Yet segmenting within actors may be prone to slippage in execution. We argue that harmonizing elements across logics may avoid slippage and help individuals to express their logics seamlessly and comfortably.

Harmonizing occurs not only at the individual level but also at the organizational level between the same elements of the logic settlement and with elements of the incoming logic. In other words, the existing logic settlement is updated to make space for elements of the new logic. The literature suggests various structural approaches to integrate logics at the organizational level, yet each has limitations. When logics are compartmentalized in different units (Battilana and Dorado, 2010) or intact logic-based practice sets are selectively coupled (Pache and Santos, 2013b), different parts of the organization may pull in different ways, risking mission drift and conflict, particularly when the

environment changes. When whole logics are blended rather than elements being harmonized, distinct elements might be obscured (Smith and Besharov, 2019), potentially leading to overestimates of compatibility (Dalpiaz, Rindova, and Ravasi, 2016); key individuals may continue to defend one logic while resisting the other logic in the blend (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005). Instead, in our context harmonizing reduced the friction between logic elements, enabling seamless enactment. While harmonizing is similar to frame fusion wherein different logics remain intact but fuse symbiotically at interfaces in cross-sector partnerships (Le Ber and Branzei, 2010), in our study, harmonizing occurred intra-individually and organizationally, not inter-organizationally (see also Ramus, Vaccaro, and Brusoni, 2017). This ensured that pluralistic firm members shared the same toolkit of frictionless logic elements and the firm's logic settlement was updated with respect to the same logic elements to seamlessly enact the change.

While this change occurred at the organizational level, we contend that this sets the stage for durable logic updating in the profession, as elite firm practices diffuse to other firms in the field (Sherer and Lee, 2002; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Smets, Morris, and Greenwood, 2012). The counsel role has begun to diffuse at the field level, in large part because most law firms are facing similar issues among a generation that values work-life balance, beginning the updating of the field logic. Over time through harmonizing at the field level, the distinction between logics is likely to blur, as melody and harmony together make beautiful music. The complete field-level logic updating process is likely to unfold over decades and will occur through multilevel processes: from societal to individual to firm level (with iterations) and then to the field. While we do not argue that this is the only way that logics can be updated, our study brings into stark relief that multilevel, multi-logic processes are involved in logic updating.

**A new logic assimilates into an existing settlement at the element level.** Our findings suggest that rather than a whole logic being assimilated, an incoming logic is assimilated at the element level. The counsel role triggered a situational cue of "being present for family," an element of the family logic that associates valued but could not activate for themselves at work because of its conflict with the professional logic. This suggests that when a change introduces a new logic, only some elements may be relevant to that context and time, not the whole logic. Ramus, Vaccaro, and Brusoni (2017) hinted at the importance of the element level when they showed that logic integration is facilitated when logic adherents formalized each logic in detail to prioritize what really mattered to them and identify areas in which they could be more flexible. Focusing on the element level offers flexibility in leveraging the full toolkit of individuals' logics. Further, it is likely to keep the logic settlement more resilient without needing formal structural "guardrails" to minimize conflict (Smith and Besharov, 2019: 24) as a new logic element is assimilated. Importing the family logic as a whole would have been difficult and likely counterproductive for the law firms, but by focusing on the element at the heart of resisters' concerns and harmonizing it with existing logic elements, HR directors "snuck in" the family logic, opening space for conversations about family that may reveal other elements in the future.

### When Do Logics Influence Institutional Agency and for Whom?

Our study resolves inconsistent views in extant literature regarding the constraints associated with logics and their influence on those who carry them. Significant work has shown how resistance to change is institutionally anchored as individuals respond negatively to violations of their logics (Glynn, 2000; Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017) and work to defend them (Reay and Hinings, 2005; Murray, 2010; Wright, Zammuto, and Liesch, 2017). In contrast, McPherson and Sauder (2013) suggested an unconstrained view—that people can use logics strategically, even hijacking others' logics.

Our study clarifies that logics do not universally constrain people's behavior even when those people are deeply committed to them (Pache and Santos, 2010), as our partners and associates were with the professional logic, because people are holistic beings who straddle professional and personal lives, past and present, and thereby carry multiple logics (Voronov and Yorks, 2015). The neonatal physicians carrying the logic of medicine in Heimer's (1999) study also likely carried a family logic, like the parents with whom they were in dispute. Even though the lawyers in our study strongly identified with the professional logic and accessed it for career issues, they also accessed the corporate and family logics available to them when expressing their rationales for the counsel role. We argue that the potential for agency in choosing which of the available logics to access for social action and interaction (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012: 83) is cued by the situation. Situational cues "make different logics more or less accessible . . . focusing the attention of individual actors during social interaction (Ocasio, 1997)" (Glaser et al., 2016: 38). We move beyond Pache and Santos's (2013a) contention that one's degree of identification with a logic determines its use. We suggest instead that situational cues can prime individuals toward any logic in their profile, and thus individuals are more flexible in accessing different logics than has been suggested in extant work.

Yet we are not suggesting an unencumbered view of agency in which people freely use logics strategically (McPherson and Sauder, 2013). In the law firms we studied, people's intra-individual plurality did not leave them completely free to choose among logics: the family logic was stigmatized within the firm. Associates were triggered by the career-challenging cue of the counsel role to access the professional logic, as were partners when they perceived quality and career-related consequences for associates. Put differently, resisters in our study unequally accessed and activated their home logic when cues suggested that key elements of it were under threat, and associates even resisted a change designed to benefit them by keeping the family logic latent because it was illegitimate within the professional logic. Thus logics did constrain action significantly, likely intensifying the angst associates experienced with the family logic from their personal lives (e.g., Meyerson and Scully, 1995).

The constrained institutional agency we describe above is "loosened" when change agents help resisters see the issue differently via situational cues. HR directors leveraged resisters' logic profile to cue them to other elements of contextually legitimate corporate and professional logics while shifting their attention away from elements of the family logic, which the resisters repudiated for themselves. Thus change agents were able to relax the constraints

resisters experienced in accessing and activating their own logics, which did not occur in past studies involving individuals who also resisted changes made for their own benefit (Edelman et al., 1993; Marshall, 2005; Kellogg, 2012).

At the same time, there is a risk, as seen in other studies, of change agents being co-opted by the dominant logic at the root of resistance (e.g., Battilana and Casciaro, 2013; Spyridonidis and Currie, 2016). That did not happen in our study; the HR directors remained emotionally detached from the professional logic, even though they understood it well and could use it. We argue that their detached understanding of the professional logic better equipped them to diplomatically respond to professionals' concerns while avoiding co-optation. Our fifth firm provides a counterfactual: the HR director's detached position was compromised by a partner of HR who chronically accessed the professional logic, embroiling her in lawyers' resistance. Similarly, in Battilana and Casciaro's (2013) study of change in the NHS, clinical managers' emotional ties to both the logic and the resisters co-opted them and dampened their motivation for change. By contrast, in Kellogg's (2009) study, the reformer physicians were those who identified less with the "iron man persona" of the professional logic because they had other emotional attachments: they planned to enter other specialties, they had significant family responsibilities, or they valued patient-centered care. We thus lend nuance to the notion of "emotional competence as the capacity to belong to and inhabit an institutional order" (Voronov and Weber, 2016: 457) by highlighting how deep knowledge of, but emotional detachment from, an institutional order enables another form of emotional competence: the ability to use a logic without being co-opted by it.

Thus our findings address the discrepancy in past studies between individuals being highly constrained by their dominant logics at one end and having relatively unfettered use of logics at the other end (McPherson and Sauder, 2013). We show that people are not universally constrained by one dominant logic as they have other chronically accessible logics available to them. Yet even pluralistic individuals are not completely free to equally access and activate their chronically accessible logics but are primed by situational cues. Others (e.g., change agents) can loosen logic constraints by cueing those individuals toward other available logics or even by shifting their attention away from certain logics if necessary. Our study emphasizes that logics are not everywhere and for everyone all the time. They do not fully constrain action, and yet neither can they be used by anyone at any time. Instead, our findings illustrate mechanics by which logics influence agency.

### Limitations and Boundary Conditions

An important boundary condition for our study was that both change agents and resisters had multiple logics in their profiles, including the two logics of the firms and a third personal logic (family) that is widely available to individuals even if it is poorly integrated into workplaces. While this may seem like a constraining condition, we contend that this is often (perhaps even usually) the case, since employees are members of society and they walk societal logics into work with them. In our context in particular, different members (associates, partners, and HR directors) were not equally identified with each logic, but all had familiarity with each of the three logics, which is similar to

other firms that employ professionals. Other contexts to which our findings may be relevant include the rise of environmental or corporate social responsibility concerns in society leading to new corporate practices (Lounsbury, 2001; Soderstrom and Weber, 2020), the acceptance of LGBTQ rights leading to same-sex partner benefits (Briscoe and Safford, 2008), and the anti-racist Black Lives Matter movement leading to revisions in companies' hiring, promotion, and training practices and the reimagining of policing. Whether employees or firms take the lead in advocating for changes, our results suggest that incorporating changing societal values into organizational practices can be problematic because of logic-based resistance.

Another boundary condition relates to the type of change we studied, which was evolutionary rather than transformational: the primacy of corporate and professional logics was maintained through the harmonizing process. In addition, change agents in our case had the endorsement of managing partners in all but F5, giving them both authority and legitimacy in the minds of resisters, which likely contributed significantly to the success of their redirecting, reinforcing, and reassuring responses. In F5, by contrast, the managing partner did not endorse the new role, nor did the partner for HR, who cast the role as a career proposition for women, leaving the change agent with little legitimacy to redirect, reassure, and reinforce resisters.

We also studied a context in which there were already two logics within a logic settlement. It is likely, however, that the responses identified in our research would generalize to settings in which there was just a single logic or there were more than two logics operating. We could also ask whether it is necessary for employees to hold the incoming logic; could it instead be a logic that is newly salient to both firms and employees? The COVID-19 pandemic provides an interesting illustration. A community logic-based practice of social distancing to save lives was very quickly assimilated into new corporate logic practices. Work-from-home and virtual meetings went from being exceptions to norms reinforced with bureaucratic processes, with reassurances that at least in the short term, the contradiction between close working relationships and physical distancing could be managed via Zoom and other virtual tools. Senior shopping hours and the wearing of masks quickly became redirected and harmonized with serving customers (basis of strategy) and sources of legitimacy of the corporate logic. Thus we suggest that our responses are also generalizable to situations in which the incoming logic was not salient to potential resisters before the change, though societal pressures in this case were intense.

We also focused on elite firms as innovators, with the expectation that leading firms' innovations often diffuse to become field practices, though this might not be the case for all firms. In addition, we studied respondents' reports of interactions, rather than interactions themselves as one would do in an ethnography, creating the possibility that people retrospectively made sense of interactions to suit new understandings. Yet we studied this change as it was in process, capturing a broad scope of people's interpretations of concerns and responses as they occurred and checking on outcomes in a subsequent wave of data collection. While ethnographies have advantages, institutional changes take time to settle, and maintaining an ethnographic presence over many years would be infeasible.

Focusing on the personal logic profile, and considering individuals as holistic people rather than just organizational actors, opens useful avenues for future research to expand attention beyond the usual market, corporation, and

professional logics to include logics of family, community, or religion. Individuals are embedded in the social domains of both their professional and personal lives. It seems perplexing that organizational scholars have to date failed to acknowledge individuals' innate ability to navigate different social domains and their respective logics. It is also perplexing that career structures like those in the law firms we studied have generally failed to accommodate changes in family structures, gender-based employment patterns, and desires for greater work–life balance despite the massive changes that have affected families over the last 50 years and more, and work–life balance policies continue to be little used because they often attract negative career consequences (Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020).

The change we studied invoked some logic elements but not others. Future research is needed to investigate whether the constituent logics of an existing settlement and the incoming logic affect which elements become salient and whether some logic elements are more consequential than others. For example, several studies have invoked the importance of values (Vaccaro and Palazzo, 2015; Wright, Zammuto, and Liesch, 2017), the “basis of norms” in Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's (2012) categorization, in stimulating resistance. We might also expect “sources of identity” to play an outsized role in provoking resistance to change. Yet we know little about the relative importance of different logic elements and their effect on change and stability.


Logic availability, accessibility, and activation concepts provide a useful lens for studying not only change agents and resisters who carry multiple logics but also collaborations among professional groups with different expertise or institutionalized status hierarchies. Past literature has highlighted a variety of ways to foster collaboration between different occupational groups: rules and routines (Feldman, 2000), boundary objects and common spaces (e.g., Bechky, 2003), and cross-cutting demographics (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014). We suggest that examining groups' available logic profiles and the elements they could activate in each other may unpack a deeper and more sustainable basis for collaboration, with relevance to multiple professional groups, cross-sector partnerships, alliances, and other types of collaborations.


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## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article can be found in the Online Appendix at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0001839220962760>.

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