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ORIGINAL PAPER

Institutionalizing Sustainability: The Role of Multiple Logics in B Corp Course Integration

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Abstract

Sustainability has gained increased importance in business schools, yet its full institutionalization within the curricula remains challenging. To address this gap, business schools are increasingly collaborating with alternative organizations, such as B Corporations. However, the factors driving the integration of these B Corp courses into the curricula are not well understood. This study employs an institutional logic approach to examine in what way institutional logics coexist and shape the integration of B Corp courses within business school curricula. A qualitative analysis of 31 U.S. business schools revealed how the coexistence and hybridization of industry, social institution, and sustainability logic shape B Corp course framing, implementation, and perception. Industry logic drives career readiness and market alignment, social institution logic emphasizes community engagement and ethical responsibility, and sustainability logic promotes long-term impact and transformative education. This research contributes to the discourse on sustainability in business education by illustrating how multiple institutional logics can coexist constructively, offering a model for enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in higher education.

Keywords Institutionalization of sustainability · Business school · Institutional logic · B corporations

Introduction

Recent studies have stressed the importance of business schools transitioning from instrumental to purposeful strategies to advance societal well-being (Kitchener & Delbridge, 2020; Kitchener et al., 2022). Despite the increasing integration of sustainability into many business school curricula, achieving institutionalization remains a significant obstacle (Kitchener et al., 2022; Landrum, 2021; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016). Lozano (2006) defined institutionalization as a process in which an idea originating from individual efforts evolves into systemic changes and ultimately becomes ingrained within the organizational culture and daily operations. This process requires business schools to integrate sustainability principles, practices, and education into the core structure and operations of their curricula (Edwards et al., 2020; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016).

Recent research has highlighted universities' persistent struggles in institutionalizing sustainability, particularly within the context of business schools (Landrum, 2021; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016). Many business schools continue to impart outdated neoclassical concepts that relegate sustainability to incremental improvements, focusing on mitigating negative impacts rather than affecting transformative change (Landrum, 2021). Similarly, many business schools experience barriers to the genuine integration of sustainability, often due to a lack of political, technical, or cultural fit (Slager et al., 2020). Moreover, business schools frequently experience institutional decoupling (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016), wherein actions fail to align with sustainability commitments (Maloni et al., 2021). In the case of teaching, this often leads to sustainability courses being implemented as add-on courses—where the university's response is to accommodate sustainability into the existing system, which otherwise remains unchanged (Sterling et al., 2013). These initiatives are usually instrumental (outcome-focused) and thus do not necessarily have much impact on driving sustainability institutionalizations (Kitchener & Delbridge, 2020).

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To address these challenges, there is a growing call to overhaul business school curricula to integrate sustainability effectively. Sterling et al. (2013) described this built-in reformative approach, which sees business schools reformulating policies and programs and revising institutional norms, which can lead to a certain level of institutional change. This has prompted business schools to explore innovative approaches to embed sustainability within their existing value structure, including the development of interdisciplinary collaborations and community engagement initiatives (Edwards et al., 2020; Landrum, 2021; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016). Partnerships with external stakeholders play a pivotal role in facilitating the institutionalization of sustainability within a business school by addressing barriers and leveraging enablers such as knowledge transfer, social capital, and diverse forms of governance (Mattsson et al., 2024). Moreover, internal and external collaborations are essential for implementing sustainable development education at business schools and fostering innovative and participatory relationships despite institutional barriers (Barber et al., 2014; Syed & Omar, 2016).

Cross-sector collaboration offers a promising avenue for addressing complex societal challenges that transcend organizational boundaries, such as climate change and resource scarcity (Dentoni et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2021). The rise of academic capitalism has blurred the boundaries between universities and business entities, creating opportunities for cross-sector collaboration to address shared challenges (Bryson et al., 2006). While there is abundant research on cross-sector collaboration in the management literature, less attention has been paid to universities as participants, and studies focusing on university collaboration tend to focus on economic partnerships between universities and industry (Siegel, 2010). Business school collaborations prioritize partnerships with large for-profit companies over a wider variety of external stakeholders, limiting students' exposure to alternative perspectives and organizational domains (Kitchener et al., 2022). Thus, there is a growing need to expand collaborations to include alternative organizations, such as social enterprises and B Corporations, which embody sustainability principles (Orecchini et al., 2012) and expose students to diverse organizational models that challenge traditional business norms (Reedy & Learmonth, 2009).

Business schools are increasingly collaborating with the B Corporations, that are part of a global B Corp movement that seeks to redefine success in business by promoting a new type of business that balances purpose and profit while advocating for a stakeholder-centric approach to our economic system (B Corporation, 2022). To become B Corp certified, companies must undergo a rigorous sustainability impact assessment. Once certified, they become publicly accountable to stakeholders beyond shareholders (governance, consumer, employee, community, and environment). In this context, collaboration refers to teaching activities integrated into the university teaching curriculum. These activities usually take the form of courses, programs, or projects in which students work with local companies undergoing the B Corp certification process. The first B Corp-related course, "B Corp Clinic," was officially implemented at North Carolina State University (NCSU) in 2015. Since then, multiple business schools around the United States have integrated B Corp collaboration into their teaching curricula, which we refer here as "B Corp courses."

Despite the growing trend of integrating courses such as B Corp courses in business schools, the factors driving these institutions to implement such courses and how they become part of the curriculum remain unclear. By adopting an institutional approach, this study seeks to answer the following research question: In what ways do institutional logics coexist and shape the integration of B Corp courses within business school curricula? Through qualitative document analysis, this study identifies and examines the key institutional logics that shape the framing, implementation, and perception of B Corp courses in U.S. business schools, offering insights into how sustainability initiatives are shaped by competing values and demands within the business school environment.

Institutional Approach to Sustainability Institutionalization

The institutional approach offers a valuable lens for understanding the integration of sustainability in educational settings. It aids in understanding the mechanisms through which consensus is established regarding the interpretation of sustainability and the development and dissemination of associated concepts or practices among organizations (Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995). Although institutional logic has gained rapid interest in organizational studies, in higher education, it has only recently gained scholarly attention (Cai & Mountford, 2022). Previous studies have highlighted the potential of institutional logic theory in understanding how universities and individuals within organizations navigate these complex institutional systems in their day-to-day work (Lepori, 2016; Warshaw & Upton, 2018). This theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals and organizations interpret their environment, make decisions, and interact, reflecting dominant cultural and institutional norms within specific contexts (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logic encompasses socially constructed patterns of beliefs, values, norms, and practices that guide behavior and organize institutions in society (Durand & Thornton, 2018).

Institutional logic can be classified into two levels: societal and field. At the societal level, it acts as a "set of organizing principles that are symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained" (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248). Research has identified seven ideal institutional logics at the societal level—the state, market, family, religion, professions, corporation, and community logic—that link major societal institutions through material practices and symbolic constructions (Ocasio et al., 2017). Compared to societal-level logic, which is more connected to cultural norms, field-level logic is more connected to practice at the organizational level (Thornton et al., 2012). It refers to the belief systems and guidelines for practical action that shape the behavior and decision-making processes within a specific field or industry. In higher education, field-level logic is often aligned with societal-level professional logic, which guides the advancement of knowledge within the academic community (Frei et al., 2022). These logics are essential for understanding how different institutional logics interact and shape higher education institutions' practices and decision-making processes (Cai & Mountford, 2022).

In the past 30 years, universities have faced changes that, in turn, have affected the values, norms, and rules that frame how they experience the world around them (Cai & Mountford, 2022). Gumport (2000), for instance, described how higher education has, over time, transformed from behaving like a social institution to being more like an industry. In the past, universities have dominantly been seen as social institutions that are "devoted to a wide array of social functions that have been expanded over time: the development of individual learning and human capital, the socialization and cultivation of citizens and political loyalties, the preservation of knowledge, and the fostering of other legitimate pursuits for the nation-state" (Gumport, 2000, p. 74). However, in recent decades, industry logic has visibly taken a more dominant position, where universities, particularly business schools, are increasingly behaving more like for-profit organizations or entrepreneurial ventures (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Cornuel & Hommel, 2015; Davis & Binder, 2016), offering a diverse array of products and services within a competitive market environment (Gumport, 2000). This shift in the dominant logic has occurred in the U.S. (Berman, 2012) and European business schools (Alexander et al., 2018; Juusola et al., 2015).

Universities have historically had shifting dominant logic that has changed with the shifting environment. In the last decade, sustainability has brought alternative logic into business schools, challenging the dominant logic. Even though many business schools have started incorporating sustainability into teaching and research (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2015; Austin & Rangan, 2018; Brown, 2015), these activities rarely have a profound impact on changing their values, norms, and practices (Mirabella & Eikenberry, 2017; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016, 2020). Sustainability-related activities have a hard time making an impact when business schools operate according to industry logic, which promotes profit maximization, economic growth, and hierarchical organizational management (Reedy & Learmonth, 2009).

Previous research on organizational institutionalism has shown that most organizations have one dominant logic, which usually shifts as institutional entrepreneurs introduce a new alternative logic and push for broader acceptance (Berman, 2012). Institutional entrepreneurs are individuals or groups who create new institutions or modify existing ones by leveraging resources that align with their interests (DiMaggio, 1988). Institutional logic can also change without institutional entrepreneurs, which is possible when the environment starts systematically favoring practices based on the alternative logic. However, in both cases, alternative institutional logic needs to become broadly institutionalized to compete or coexist with the dominant logic (Berman, 2012). For sustainability to become institutionalized in the business school curriculum, it first needs to find a more predominant place in the business school; in other words, integrating sustainability across the curriculum will likely require the emergence of an alternative logic.

A key example of how alternative logic can become institutionalized in business school curricula is the rise of social enterprise education, which demonstrates how a new logic, initially introduced as a small voluntary effort, can grow into a widely accepted institutional practice. For instance, the Harvard Business School's Social Enterprise Initiative, launched in the early 1990s, started as an alternative to traditional business practices but has since become integral to the curriculum (Austin & Rangan, 2018). Today, many business schools have permanently incorporated social enterprise courses alongside traditional topics such as finance and accounting, illustrating how multiple logics—such as market-and socially driven logics—can compete and coexist within universities (Lepori, 2016; Murray, 2010).

Institutional logic research has progressed from a focus on how one logic might replace another within organizations to a broader examination of the continuous interplay among different logics, the blending of these logics, and their impacts on organizational practices and structures (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Lounsbury, 2007; Lounsbury et al., 2016; Reay & Jones, 2016). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) highlighted how competing institutional logics are often an antecedent or consequence of institutional change. Recent research has mainly focused on understanding how universities manage competing logics (Juusola et al., 2015; Upton & Warshaw, 2017) and how individuals respond to them (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Bullinger et al., 2015; Juusola, 2023). In the context of higher education, implementing a

sustainability course may be an individual's response to competing institutional logics, where the course may serve as a "bridging strategy" or "buffering strategy" to balance competing institutional logics (Narayan et al., 2017). In contrast, Upton and Warshaw (2017) proposed that universities can manage tensions between competing logics by hybridizing them. In this case, sustainability courses may be a hybrid practice where the purpose is not simply to enhance one logic over another but to align logics in a mutually beneficial hybrid form.

As organizations face pressures to align their practices with sustainability goals, combining logics becomes a critical strategy for balancing industry-driven objectives with social responsibility and sustainability values (Besharov & Smith, 2014). This perspective underscores the potential for sustainability courses to serve as bridging strategies that reconcile competing logics, ultimately fostering a more integrated approach to sustainability in business education. In the context of sustainability integration in the curriculum, this study contributes to the growing literature on sustainability in higher education by highlighting the role of institutional logic in shaping the integration of B Corp courses is crucial, as it provides insights into why certain organizational practices are adopted and how they evolve in response to external pressures (Haveman & Gualtieri, 2017).

Method

The study chose a qualitative document analysis to examine how institutional logic coexist and shape integration of B Corp courses in the business school curriculum. This analysis has proven to be an appropriate and helpful approach to examining institutional logic, particularly in the university context, as it offers analytical leverage for exploring how universities navigate institutional complexities (Lepori, 2016; Warshaw & Upton, 2018). Qualitative document analysis is particularly applicable to studying specific social phenomena, where documents can help discover the underlying meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009). Warshaw and Upton (2018) highlighted that documentary evidence can provide a rich stream of publicly available data for studying institutional logic in higher education institutions, because documents can cover a more extended period, events, and settings (Yin, 1994).

Although document analysis is often combined with other data sources, such as interviews, when used as primary empirical data, triangulation is provided using various document sources. Several higher education studies have used documents as primary empirical sources of data (Blaschke et al., 2014; Dunn & Jones, 2010; Gumport, 2000; Mampaey & Huisman, 2016; Upton & Warshaw, 2017), where data

sources have included strategic plans, mission statements, internal memoranda and meeting minutes, self-studies and reports, speeches, and news articles. Given that no single mission or strategy can completely reflect the full scope of activities and cognitive diversity within an organization (Upton & Warshaw, 2017), this study incorporated a variety of documents to capture multiple perspectives on university practices. Beyond relying solely on top-down documents like the university's mission, vision, and strategy, the study also examined sources such as blogs and social media posts contributed by various stakeholders both within and outside the university community. This allowed the study to provide comprehensive insights into university practices and the underlying, often competing, demands and expectations experienced by universities (Lepori, 2016; Warshaw & Upton, 2018).

Data Collection

The data collection started with identifying U.S. universities that engage with the B Corp movement. A total of 35 universities were shortlisted (see Appendix Table 1), of which 23 were identified through B Local websites and the remaining 12 through the B Academics directory on existing B Corp courses. The data for the directory were collected by the B Academics teaching committee through an online survey sent to all B Academics members during spring 2023. The data included information such as the name of the B Corp program, launch year, course format, partners, whether the program is for credit, student audience, and resources for running the program. The data for the 23 universities identified through B local websites were collected using publicly available information. The identified universities represent a mix of public (21) and private universities (14), as well as religiously affiliated universities (5). The universities also vary in size and are located across the U.S. The final data on each university B Corp course varied, with 12 universities having in-depth information, 9 having minimal information, and 14 having no information about the course.

The second part of the data collection involved a systematic keyword search ("University name" & B Corp) for each identified university using Google search. For each university, the study collected all links that involved textual data on engagement between the university and B Corporations. Links unrelated to university–B Corp engagement and documentation lacking significant contextualization were ignored. Some searches that yielded no relevant links were excluded from further data collection, which decreased the number of universities from 35 to 31. A total of 126 documents were collected, including public documents, reports, blog posts, news articles, social media posts, event announcements, and course/program overviews. In addition, the data collection involved collecting publicly available

documents from university websites, including documentation on the business school's mission, vision, and sustainability strategy, collecting a total of 31 documents. Overall, the data included 157 documents comprising 1187 pages of text, ensuring both breadth and depth of coverage across various institutions. This amount of material is comparable to other studies employing qualitative document analysis within higher education contexts (Upton & Warshaw, 2017). Appendix Table 1 provides an overview of the collected empirical material, demonstrating the scope and diversity of the data collected.

Data Analysis

The analysis involved capturing institutional logics followed by an investigation into understanding how these logics shape B Corp course integration. The study implemented Reay and Jones's (2016) pattern-inducing analysis, where the term pattern describes "a set of symbols and beliefs expressed in discourse (verbal, visual, or written), norms seen in behaviors and activities, and material practices that are recognizable and associated with institutional logic" (p. 442). The pattern-inducing technique involves using empirical textual data to identify logic by analyzing and coding (grouping) text in ways that show behavior or beliefs guided by particular logic, drawing on the concept of logic as both symbolic and material (Friedland & Alford, 1991). The pattern analysis was undertaken using the qualitative software, Atlas.ti to assist in the coding and analysis.

The pattern-inducing analysis involved first coding the 31 documents consisting of 148 pages of text on the business schools' missions, visions, and sustainability strategies to capture their institutional logics. Following Gioia et al.'s (2013) data analysis process, the data were analyzed by coding into first-order concepts and then abstracting into second-order themes. The analysis was conducted iteratively, involving continuously revisiting the data and adjusting categories as the examination progressed. This dynamic process focused on identifying overarching patterns that spanned the entire dataset, aiming to capture broad cultural phenomena rather than concentrating on individual actions or participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Only the most frequently appearing first-order concepts and second-order themes were included in the final analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). In the final stage, synthesizing these recurring patterns enabled the formation of higher-order, aggregated dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013), which structured the emergent findings into a cohesive conceptual framework.

After the pattern-inducing analysis conducted to capture the institutional logic of business schools, the study conducted a pattern analysis on documents collected in the B Corp courses. The analysis involved coding the textual data from 126 documents by first familiarizing with the data

and generating initial codes. Initial first-order categorizing involved coding all passages that comprised description activities and actors related to the B Corp courses; capturing the rationale or purpose of the courses, as well as personal experiences of the different stakeholders who produced or participated in the courses; extracting the data down from the initial 1039 pages to about 120 pages. Due to the data imbalance among the identified universities, a comparative analysis was not conducted among the identified business schools. Instead, universities were discussed as one unit using the perspective of the analysis at the country context level, in other words, examining the integration of B Corp courses in U.S. business schools. The second-order theming involved using "bottom-up" and "top-down" approaches (Xu & Zammit, 2020) to search, review, and define the main themes related to the institutional logic of business schools identified in the first part of the pattern analysis and how they potentially shape B Corp course integration.

The analysis findings presented in the next section will first provide an overview of how B Corp courses are being integrated into business schools, followed by the findings of the pattern analysis, which are structured according to Gioia et al.'s (2013) data analysis process.

Findings

Overview of B Corp Course Integration

Although the first official B Corp course was launched at NCSU in 2015, the data (Appendix Table 1) show that some universities actively engaged with B Corporations even before this formal integration. Since 2015, several business schools have incorporated these courses into their curricula (Fig. 1).

As detailed in Table 1, B Corp courses are implemented in various formats. The most straightforward approach involves offering the course as an independent class or lab/clinic typically run by dedicated faculty members or students (e.g., NCSU, EMU, and UOG). Alternatively, the B Corp
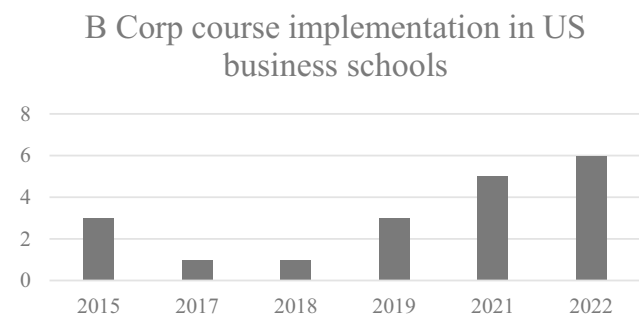

Fig. 1 Overview of B Corp implementation between 2015 and 2022

Table 1 B Corp integration into the curriculum

B Corp Integration into business school	
Course format	- B Corp integrated as part of study program - Independent course (elective/directed) - Project/Clinic taught alongside another course - Independent Clinic/Lab - Internship & Fellowship - Student-run elective/program
Participants	Level - Only Undergraduate/Graduate - Both undergraduate and graduate level Major - BBA or MBA only - Open for all majors
Funding Sources	University Funding - Funding for hiring external advisors, mentors, lecturers - Full-time/part-time faculty - Administrative support - Funding for events, marketing resources External Funding - Voluntary financial contributions from participating B Corporations - Scholarships from foundations - Funding from B Lab No funding - Volunteer faculty - Student-run programs
Partnerships	Teaching - B Local - Alumni - B Corporations Mentoring/Advisor - Students (previous year participants) - Alumni - B Corporations - B Local - B Corp consultants Collaboration - B Corporations (as clients) - B Local (events, marketing, advocating) - B Academics (teaching resources)

component can be integrated into existing courses as a case study or course project (e.g., ASU). In addition to courses, some universities engage with B Corporations through internships, fellowships, or student-run volunteer programs (e.g., USF and NMU). In some cases, entire educational programs are built around the B Corp framework (e.g., MBU).

Most B Corp courses are offered as electives or optional courses, primarily targeting undergraduate and graduate students in business schools, although some are extended to students across other disciplines. The funding for these courses varies significantly: some receive full university funding (e.g., UCB, UOG, LU,) while others receive only partial funding (e.g., UF, NMU, EMU, UNH, USF), rely on external sources, or operate on a volunteer basis, with faculty donating their time or the course being student-run. Many B Corp

courses are also conducted in partnership with the local B Corp community, which contributes through teaching, mentoring, or advising. Additionally, many business schools support the broader B Corp movement by organizing public events related to B Corp.

The findings also show that B Corp courses are often introduced through bottom-up initiatives led by individuals within the university, such as faculty members or students (e.g., EMU, NCSU, and UNH). These courses often start as small-scale pilot projects, "*a faculty member's passion project*" (UNH 4), driven by the personal interests and values of the individuals who are passionate about the B Corp movement: "*Against the backdrop of the growing phenomenon of stakeholder capitalism, Wilson and her colleagues saw the opportunity to help students experience and influence a more socially and environmentally conscious version of capitalism by working in partnership with real corporations. And so, the B Impact Clinic was born*" (UNH 14).

Over time, these pilot projects may evolve into more permanent offerings within the curriculum. For instance, after receiving positive feedback and increased interest from local businesses, a program that began as a small-scale initiative at NCSU grew into a formal, structured course: "*After receiving positive feedback and increased interest from local businesses, the Director Jessica Yinka Thomas thought, 'Why don't we create a more formal program?'*" (NCSU 1).

Coexisting Institutional Logics

The findings of the pattern-inducing analysis of university goals show that business schools are guided by a set of patterned behavior and belief systems identified as industry logic, social institution logic, and sustainability logic (Appendix Table 1)—which, in turn, shape the integration of B Corp courses (Table 2).

Industry Logic

Industry logic positions universities as functioning more like businesses, focused on producing goods and services in a competitive marketplace (Gumport, 2000), aligning their goals with market demands (Alexander et al., 2018; Berman, 2012; Juusola, 2023; Upton & Warshaw, 2017). Under this logic, business schools emphasize the need for graduates to remain competitive in the job market and ensure that the schools maintain a competitive edge by responding to external pressures. The pattern analysis shows, how industry logic has strong presence in all sample business schools, but less in B Corp courses (Appendix Table 1). In those business schools, where industry logic was also visible in B Corp courses, framed B Corp courses to meet market demands and enhance student employability, by having emphasize on how these courses equip students with practical skills, work

Table 2 Data structure of the pattern analysis of capturing institutional logics

University goals	B Corp course	Institutional logic	
Providing students with practical experiences that enhance their career readiness, aligning with market demands	Students gain practical experience/work experience through the course Students gain competitive advantage in the job market	Individual orientation	Industry logic
Meeting the demand for businesses seeking to enhance their social impact by providing services to address their needs	Course offers a response to changing external environment that is creating market demand for sustainability	Reacting to industry needs	
Developing resource-generating offerings to support the institution's educational objectives	Course offers opportunities for alternative revenue streams for business schools	Economic sustainability	
Contributing to economic development by supporting students' and businesses' market competitiveness	Course offers diversification/competitive advantage over other business schools		
Developing ethical business leaders who positively impact communities Collaboration with local businesses for community benefit	Providing opportunity for students to support local community Engaging with local B Corp community members	Community orientation	Social institution logic
Fostering a supportive and connected academic community that can positively impact the campus and community	Course aligns with personal values of students and faculty who participate in the course Course allows students to be part of a bigger community of like-minded people	Social sustainability	
Emphasizing commitment to community and economic development for enhancing quality of life	Supporting local businesses on their sustainability journey	Reacting to societal needs	
Commitment to creating a more sustainable future by developing students' capabilities to be future generators of sustainable value	Providing students capabilities for creating more sustainable future	Future orientation	Sustainability logic
Recognizing that university is but one component of larger inter-connected communities	Taking part in the B Corp movement Collectively advocating for alternative ways of doing business	Collective action	
Delivering transformational educational experiences to address global sustainability challenges	Allowing faculty members to act as change agents to provide transformative education Providing students with competencies and practical tools to become agents for transformative change	Creating transformative change	

experience, and a competitive advantage in the job market: "*Many of our students have little experience in strategic decision-making. This program offers them the opportunity to understand business operations from a management perspective and develop solutions to complex problems*" (ASU 1).

Besides the course offering practical management skills, the findings show that many business schools frame B Corp courses to provide students with skills that align with the growing market demand for sustainability (Gitsham & Clark, 2014). For example, findings showed how *Portland State University (PSU)* frames its B Corp course as part of a broader effort to produce students who are equipped for strategic decision-making and who prioritize social impact in their careers (PSU 5). Similarly, *North Carolina State University (NCSU)* highlights how their B Corp Clinic allows students to engage directly with businesses, providing hands-on experience that aligns with industry expectations for employability (NCSU 3).

Additionally, industry logic places a strong emphasis on economic sustainability, involving goals for creating new revenue streams (LRU Goals) and prioritizing existing financial resources on activities that support business schools' strategic goals (CC Goals). Universities are increasingly expected to align their revenue generation strategies with market behaviors (Alexander et al., 2018). The findings reflect this, as several schools utilize B Corp courses as a means of securing external funding, generating alternative revenue streams, or relying on external resources to run the courses. At the *University of New Hampshire* (UNH), for example, the B Corp course runs on external funding. In some cases, the B Corp course also can serve as a way for business schools to differentiate themselves in a competitive higher education market: "*NC State's Business Sustainability Collaborative is among the global leaders in the field. Our B Corp Clinic connects students with aspiring B Corporations, offering consulting experience while providing businesses with cutting-edge sustainability insights*" (NSCU 3).

Social Institution Logic

In comparison, social institution logic frames knowledge as a public good, emphasizing the role of universities in fostering community engagement and ethical responsibility (Gumport, 2000). Business schools adopting social institution logic see themselves as institutions that bridge education and civil society (BC Goals), with goals centered on developing responsible, ethical leaders who contribute to local and global communities: "*The Walker College of Business prepares students to be ethical, innovative leaders who positively impact communities both locally and globally*" (ASU Goals). The pattern analysis shows how social institution logic is visible in most business schools and all

B Corp courses (Appendix Table 1). B Corp courses are framed to prepare students to become ethical leaders who positively impact their communities. Particularly, business schools with religious affiliation presented strong social institution logic, where ethical orientation is not merely a byproduct of the curriculum but is deeply embedded in the institutional culture, influencing how business education is delivered and perceived; "*Striving to be an inclusive and diverse community that educates and cares for the whole person, we encourage and model lifelong commitment to thinking critically, making ethical decisions, pursuing social justice and finding God in all things*" (SJU Goals).

This logic positions B Corp courses as instruments for community outreach, where students engage with local businesses and contribute to social causes. At the *University of Florida (UF)*, students contribute significant hours of service to local businesses as part of the B Corp course, helping these businesses pursue more ethical and sustainable practices (UF 7). Similarly, *NCSU* frames its B Corp Clinic as a way to strengthen community ties, where students work with local businesses and form long-term relationships with organizations committed to social good (NCSU 1). This community service aspect of the B Corp course aligns with the prominent social institution logic that emphasizes helping businesses contribute positively to society; "*A lot of small businesses don't have access to consulting services or would have to pay hefty premiums, especially in larger markets. To bring free environmental and social responsibility consulting to the community provides something that not a lot of other places have…We hope to help organizations working to make the world a better place. If we work together, we'll go further*" (NMU 1).

Moreover, the findings show that many B Corp courses emerge from bottom-up initiatives, often driven by faculty and students who are personally committed to promoting the public good and social responsibility. These grassroots efforts reflect a strong ethical commitment and align with social institution logic by contributing to the development of communities and fostering a sense of shared values among faculty, students, and local businesses. Findings showed how, for instance, NCSU and UNH faculty member's passion for social responsibility led to the development of the B Corp course (UNH 4,14; NCSU 4), which can evolve over time into a more structured program (NSCU 1). The faculty member's personal commitment to social responsibility and sustainability allowed them to act as change agents within their institutions, which led to B Corp courses being integrated into the curriculum.

Sustainability Logic

The pattern analysis showed how majority of business schools practice sustainability, at a various level, (Appendix

Table 1). Most universities have a separate sustainability plan or strategy, while some have integrated sustainability into their core strategy, mission, or values "*Portland State University is leading the way to an equitable and sustainable future through academic excellence, urban engagement, and expanding opportunity for all* (PSU Goals)." The findings align with existing literature that identifies sustainability logic as an emerging alternative institutional logic, promoting long-term thinking, collective action, and transformative education (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2015; Reedy & Learmonth, 2009; Silva & Figueiredo, 2017). Sustainability logic is strongly visible in B Corp course, where the course is framed, implemented, and perceived as sustainability course (Appendix Table 1).

The findings show how the B Corp course supports the business school's goals to provide students with transformational future oriented learning: "*delivering uniquely future-focused academic programs, transformative hands-on experiences, and meaningful connections and collaborations that engage the passions of our students to create a better world* (CC Goals)." B Corp courses, framed within sustainability logic, provide students with the mindset and skills needed to drive sustainable change in business, preparing students to create long-term value for both business and society: "*We develop students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society*" (NCSU 3).

Sustainability logic similarly fosters broader institutional involvement in global sustainability efforts (Reedy & Learmonth, 2009), by fostering a sense of interconnectedness, where business schools, faculty, and students are seen as part of a larger movement working toward a sustainable future (LRU Goals, UCB Goals). Findings show

how B Corp courses are not only academic offerings but are considered part of a broader mission to instill sustainability values in students: "*We are educating students about B Corps by actively participating in the movement*" (EMU 1). B Corp courses also function as change agents within business schools, challenging the traditional market-driven practices of business schools by fostering a movement that promotes sustainable business practices; "*I hope we're training students to change capitalism from the inside, so we can get everyone to adopt B Corp principles*" (KSU 3), while also contributing to the schools' broader missions of transformation and impact; "We're *building a global network of educators and researchers committed to embedding social and economic impact into business education*" (NCSU 4).

Discussion

Institutional logics provide a framework for understanding how business schools navigate competing and complementary demands by shaping organizations' values, practices, and goals. Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argue that institutional logic influences organizational behavior by guiding decision-making processes and determining which logics are prioritized or hybridized within institutional contexts. This study identifies how three identified logics—industry logic, social institution logic, and sustainability logic—shape the integration of B Corp courses within business schools (Fig. 2), particularly in framing, implementation, and perception of the courses. The findings advance our understanding of how multiple logic coexist and hybridize within business schools, leading to blended organizational

Fig. 2 Logic hybridization in B Corp course integration
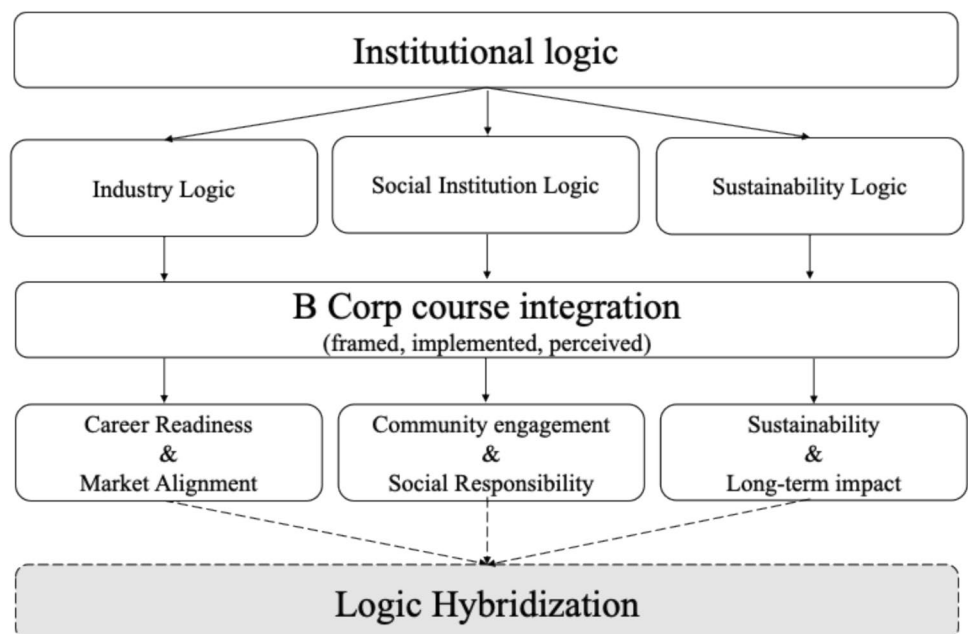
practices. By embracing hybrid logic, business schools can create courses like B Corp that achieve multiple objectives: providing practical, market-aligned skills while promoting social responsibility and sustainability. For instance, the B Corp Clinic at North Carolina State University (NCSU) serves as a pioneering example of how business schools can integrate industry, social institution, and sustainability logic into a cohesive course. This clinic allows students to engage directly with local businesses, providing hands-on experience while promoting sustainable practices, thereby achieving multiple educational objectives.

The findings align with institutional studies that suggest that embracing logic hybridization between conflicting logics can help organizations balance economic imperatives with social and environmental objectives (Battilana & Lee, 2014) and provide broader legitimacy, enhanced efficiency, or institutional change (Jiang & Zhang, 2023). The study provides new perspectives on sustainability institutionalization by showing how these three institutional logics can be complementary and compatible, providing a richer understanding of how organizations can thrive amidst competing demands.

Firstly, it is important to understand how logics manifest within organizations (Thornton et al., 2012), and how multiple logics relate to one another within organization (Suddaby, 2010). Previous research has identified universities as institutions with multiple logics coexisting (Juusola, 2023; Snelson-Powell et al., 2016); however, less research has been given to how these different logics manifest internally (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Cai & Mountford, 2022; Pache & Santos, 2013). For example, mission and strategy may either be shaped by multiple logics or driven by a single dominant logic, with other logics playing lesser roles depending on the context (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013).

The study findings reveal variation among business schools, with some embedding industry, social institution, and sustainability logic into their mission and goals. In contrast, others prioritize industry and social institutional logics, relegating sustainability to a peripheral role. One possible explanation could be the institutional context and how external stakeholders may influence how business schools prioritize specific logic over others. For instance, the differences in priorities between public and private business schools can be attributed to their funding models and stakeholder influences. Private institutions, relying on tuition, often prioritize attracting students as customers, leading them to adopt strategies highlighting their unique offerings and competitive advantages (Webster et al., 2018). Public institutions, funded by taxpayer money and accountable to a broader range of stakeholders, are often expected to reflect their commitment to societal contributions (Mousa, 2021). However, research shows how public schools are shifting toward business-like operations, which in turn see public schools attempting to integrate traditional academic norms with business practices (Grossi et al., 2020; Kleinman et al., 2018). This market orientation may result in a greater emphasis on industry logic, also visible in the study findings.

While the findings showed how industry logic is present across all sample business schools, its visibility is less pronounced in the context of B Corp courses. The less pronounced emphasis on industry logic within B Corp discourse could simply suggest a shift toward more socially responsible education. However, another possible explanation could be institutional barriers that are due to logics competing for the space in business school. Research shows that competing or misaligned logic can create tensions (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Besharov & Smith, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013), which can hinder the institutionalization of sustainability (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). If business schools prioritize employability and market-driven goals, they may struggle to fully embrace the principles of B Corp education, which could lead to a situation where B Corp courses are treated as peripheral rather than central to the institution's mission. This can be visible, for example, in the variation of B Corp course integration, where some B Corp courses are implemented as add-on elective courses or programs that may be entirely volunteer-run and may not receive any institutional support.

However, in some examples, the B Corp course is part of a more prominent sustainability integration in business schools. For example, the B Corp courses at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and NCSU, begun as a faculty member's passion projects, demonstrate how bottom-up initiatives can lead to the integration of sustainability into the curriculum. Besharov and Smith (2014) argue that successful institutionalization occurs when organizations manage to integrate multiple logics, allowing them to address competing demands and navigate institutional complexity. This view is supported by Thornton et al. (2012), who highlight the importance of balancing competing institutional logics, such as industry and social institution logic, to meet diverse organizational goals. This sees business schools trying to balance their strategies to the specific logics they encounter, where each of these logic plays a distinct role in shaping the educational landscape, influencing how sustainability is conceptualized and operationalized within academic institutions. Besharov and Smith (2014) highlight that managing logic hybridization can vary significantly, depending on the compatibility and centrality of the logics involved.

Compatibility reflects the degree to which different logics can coexist without significant conflict (Besharov & Smith, 2014). In the B Corp course context, the integration of industry, social institution, and sustainability logic can be seen as a compatible hybrid relationship. The NCSU's B Corp Clinic exemplifies this compatible relationship, where students gain career-ready skills (industry logic), engage

with local businesses and communities (social institution logic), and promote sustainable practices (sustainability logic), illustrating how business schools can successfully navigate the complexities of multiple institutional logics. Centrality, conversely, refers to the extent to which a particular logic is integral to an organization's identity and operations (Besharov & Smith, 2014). For instance, the findings showed how business schools with religious affiliations are strongly driven by social institution logic, with a strong ethical commitment to service learning and community engagement. Previous research suggests that these schools will pay more attention to sustainability than other schools, as it aligns with their religious mission (Rasche & Gilbert, 2015).

The findings thus suggest that some business schools demonstrate high logic compatibility and centrality between industry, social institutional, and sustainability logic, while other schools demonstrate lower logic compatibility and centrality. However, the relationship between compatibility and centrality is dynamic and can evolve over time (Besharov & Smith, 2014). As business schools respond to changing external conditions and stakeholder expectations, the compatibility of different logics may shift, affecting their centrality. For instance, the increasing emphasis on sustainability has led many business schools to reassess the compatibility of industry logic with sustainability logic, resulting in sustainability becoming more central to business school identity and strategy. For example, findings showed that due to increased market demands for sustainability, courses like the B Corp course can serve as a unique selling point that appeals to prospective students who are increasingly concerned about corporate ethics and environmental issues. Battilana and Lee (2014) suggest this hybridized approach can help organizations balance economic imperatives with social and environmental objectives, thereby supporting logic compatibility and centrality.

Besides benefiting business schools, integrating hybrid logic within business school curricula can significantly enhance the educational framework that equips students to navigate complex organizational landscapes. First, incorporating multiple logics into the curriculum allows for a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability issues; by moving beyond a singular focus and embracing a broader spectrum of institutional logics, business schools can foster critical thinking and encourage students to question existing practices and norms. As one student articulated regarding his B Corp learning experience, "*It has instilled in me the values of sustainability and corporate responsibility, and what's funny too is the right thing can also be economical*" (UOG 10). Students develop a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between business and societal needs by engaging with diverse perspectives. Besides students, studies also emphasize the necessity for educators to adopt a critical stance toward management education, which is essential for translating sustainability principles into actionable curriculum content (Filho et al., 2019; Glover et al., 2011; Lambrechts et al., 2013). The findings showed how the B Corp course allowed educators to teach about alternatives to traditional business models while providing students with practical tools and skills aligned with traditional business education.

Conclusion

This study advances institutional logic theory by demonstrating that conflicting logics can, under certain conditions, function in complementary and compatible ways. By revealing how organizations can leverage hybrid logic to support sustainability, this research challenges the traditional view that institutional logics are inherently oppositional. Instead, it provides evidence that multiple logics can coexist constructively, enabling organizations to navigate and thrive amidst competing demands. These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of institutional logic, emphasizing that integrating seemingly conflicting values is possible and can also serve as a strategic advantage, promoting resilience and adaptability in complex organizational landscapes.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for both business schools and policymakers. The findings illustrate how business schools can effectively integrate multiple logics into their curricula, balancing market demands with social and environmental goals. B Corp course can serve as a valuable model for other institutions aiming to integrate sustainability into their curricula, highlighting the importance of navigating and integrating multiple logics to meet diverse institutional pressures.

However, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The research primarily relied on document analysis, which may not fully capture the nuanced interactions and evolution of institutional logics in practice. The reliance on a single method may obscure the complexities of how these logics are operationalized and reconciled at the institutional level (Alvehus & Hallonsten, 2022). Future studies could benefit from employing additional data collection methods, such as interviews or case studies, to understand better the dynamic processes by which institutional logics interact, compete, and hybridize over time. Additionally, while the findings effectively show evidence of the hybridization of logics, the exact step-by-step process through which these courses are integrated remains beyond the scope of this research. Future research could explore the role of internal negotiations, faculty dynamics, and institutional adjustments in driving sustainability education, employing methodologies such as longitudinal studies or in-depth case studies. This could offer a more granular

understanding of how sustainability initiatives, such as B Corp courses, evolve over time and become embedded in the curriculum.

The role of faculty as change agents is also critical in this context. Faculty members often act as institutional entrepreneurs, promoting sustainability initiatives and integrating new logic into the curriculum. Their commitment to social responsibility and sustainability can catalyze the integration of B Corp courses, demonstrating how individual actors can influence institutional change. Understanding the dynamics of institutional logics can provide insights into how these change agents can effectively navigate and reconcile competing demands within their institutions (Johansen & Waldorff, 2017). While these dynamics were not the primary focus of the research, they open avenues for further study of how these individuals, acting as institutional entrepreneurs, contribute to the hybridization of logics and the broader institutionalization of sustainability.

Data availability The data for this study were sourced from publicly available documents. No new data were created for this study.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares no competing interest.

Informed Consent Not applicable, the study uses publicly available data.

Research Involving Human Participants and/or Animals Not applicable, the study does not involve Human Participants and/or Animals.

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