

# TRIBES, WARLORDS AND TRANSFORMERS: AN INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS MODEL OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION

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Architecture has often been described as profession divided by a foundational logic of aesthetics versus one of production: Creatives versus Suits. The business plan is one way that architects have sought to reconcile and mediate between the demands of design creativity and profit. In the theory of practice, the business plan integrates and balances issues of strategy, available resources and operational contingencies. Through a survey the business planning practices in different sized Australian architectural firms is established. The institutional logics evident in business planning indicates the way in which architects structure their firms and how they collectively resolve conflicts between design thinking and the prosaicism of efficiency. A survivalist model of institutional logics is proposed for the architectural profession that accounts for a range of reasoning schemas. This logics of market survival is evident as a result of neo-liberal policies, service disaggregation and fee for service competition. The model suggests that the foundational logic of the creative-business divide disguises the survivalist logics of the architectural profession and hampers the architectural professions ability to foster innovation.

Keywords: architect, institutional logic, architectural design, professionalism

## INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes an institutional logics framework that accounts for recent shifts in the Australian architectural profession. Business planning practices are used in this research as a point of analysis to broadly examine the logics of architects in Australia. Business plans provide a window on the socially constructed material practices, assumptions and values and beliefs that shape the cognition and behaviour of architectural firms.

Institutional logics are defined as “as socially constructed sets of material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape cognition and behaviour” (Thornton, Ocasio and Lansbury 2012). Basharov and Smith (2014) argue these logics provide a legible set of “organising principles” for specific arenas of social life. The institutional logics framework proposed here is developed through questioning the pre-existing logic types that see a binary divide between the architect as artist, or “Creative”, and the architect as business person, or “Suit”. Questioning this binary, through a survey, aligned with an investigation of business planning practices, generates an institutional logics framework that better reflects broader developments in the architectural profession in Australia since

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the 1980s. This emergent framework indicates how the institutional logics approach might be further developed in studies focused on architects in the future.

### **Shifting Institutional Logics**

Debates around material practices, values and shifting institutional logics and architects are evident in a special issue of *Building Research & Information* devoted to “New Professionalism” (BRI 2013: 40:1). Here Duffy and Rabeneck argue that the rise of neoliberalism since the 1970s has eroded trust in architects as a profession; engendering a scepticism, both within the construction industry and more broadly, of the architect’s specialist knowledge. They argue architectural knowledge is increasingly being created by competitors and architects may no longer have the institutional structures to resist this. They sound the warning on the basis of: commoditisation of workflows through technology, knowledge concentration in large multidisciplinary firms and the capture of intellectual capital, once the province of architects by contractors, subcontractors, product suppliers and IT providers along supply chains (Duffy and Rabeneck, 2013).

In the same issue of BRI, Bordass and Leaman (2013) contend that the built environment professions, such as architects, have a key role to play in the Anthropocene and are vital to gaining sustainability outcomes. They argue for a “middle role” for architects between supply chains and specialist knowledge mega-firms. To adopt this role, they assert that professionals with disciplinary expertise must adapt their institutions, in order to overcome what they see as two dangers arising from the ongoing commodification of expert knowledge. The first is, a managerialism that constrains freedom, and the second, the contexts that privilege regulations and bureaucracy. In response and concurring, Bresnan (2013) noted that architects are constrained from undertaken collaborative actions because of current divisions of labour. Arguing that, if architects are to be orientated towards sustainability then studies that recognise, “the complex institutional and organizational terrain within which established and emergent professional groups act and interact”, are needed (Bresnan 2013).

Alongside market competition and the need to address sustainability another shift in institutional logics relates to the institutional logics of gender. This is evident in an Australian ARC grant entitled *Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work, and Leadership*. The grant researchers found that as of January 2013 there were 11,743 members of the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) yet only 28 % of these people were woman. Many of these woman (65%) were in the AIA membership categories made available for people who are not registered architects (affiliate, graduate and student). Whilst woman have been graduating from the schools of architecture in Australia in roughly equal numbers since the 1980s, only 14% of female architects identify as either Sole Practitioners, Partners and Directors/Principals of architectural practices. These researchers have now formed an incorporated association called Parlour. Indicative of the crisis in the Australian profession Parlour has produced a series of accessible guides on equitable practice. Pointing to a shifting logics in the profession these guides include resource material and narratives on pay equity, career progression, work-life balance, overtime issue, leadership and negotiation.

### **Pre-existing Logics**

The shifting logics of commodification, the need for innovation around sustainability and gender balance in the profession are in contrast to the entrenched logics that characterise architects. One of the influential strategic frameworks specifically applied to architects is Weld Coxe’s super-positioning framework (Coxe, et al., 1987). Coxe’s work indicates

the institutional logics that underpin the professional services firm in the 1980s and 90s. Coxe categorised architectural firms along two different strategic dimensions. The first dimension is a binary. This dimension is based on participation: “Professional” passion or “Business” drive. In other words, is the firm a Practice-based business where the firm’s owners or employees get value, personal or otherwise, from doing the work? Or, is it a Business-based practice where the impetus is to focus on earnings and making a profit. The second Coxe dimension is threefold and based on how the work is approached. This framework distinguishes three types of activities: Delivery, Service and Idea. Delivery is getting the job done, Service is focus on the relationships and Idea, is of course, a focus on design attributes of the project. Over time firms migrate from being Practice-based and Idea focused to being Business-based practices with a focus on either delivery or service. (Coxe, 1987).

In Australia, another area where an entrenched and pre-existing institutional logics exists is in relation to accreditation standards which have since 1990 been administered by the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA). The National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA) establishes standards for architectural education and assessment of professional competency. The standards are described as the “activities involved in the practice of architecture.” The standards are underpinned by a set of ideas concerning practice management which is described as firstly “the holistic understanding and organisation of the business and profession of architecture in relation to delivering projects.” Involving little to do with an external facing outlook because “It involves the knowledge and execution of the processes involved in providing architectural services” as well as “the knowledge and implementation of appropriate systems to establish and maintain an architectural practice” and “the knowledge and enactment of the broad range of ethical and legal obligations required of a Professional Practitioner.” (NSCA website 2016)

As Ghemawat (2002) notes capitalism has seen waves of various business fads and cycles too numerous to mention. Yet, the Australian system of architectural accreditation appears to eschew matters related to business strategy, planning and implementation, innovation and entrepreneurship. In this system, technocratic regulation and a legalistic logic constrains both practice and architectural education. Derived from the law of Torts a professional architect is one who “can demonstrate the standard of skill, care and diligence widely accepted in Australia for competent professional architectural practice.”

McNeill describes the globalisation of architectural practice and locates architectural design in a global system (McNeill 2009). He, amongst others (Sklair 2006, Sklair and Gherardi 2012), traces the trajectories of star architects and the way in which these architects constitute the global architectural system. Related to these “stars”, he examines and questions the rise of large integrated services firms in this global system. For example, he notes that the rapid growth of AECOM is indicative of a sensibility that views architecture as being “under-skilled” and “under-scaled”, and whilst the media “tends to put the architect at centre stage”, this is despite a global system and a “corporate reality, which is that architects are no longer the key agents in the production of space (if they ever were)” (McNeill, 2009: 380). In another study of the Pritzker prize winners Heynen looks at the identity of the star architects arguing that “the traditional role model for architects has been gendered male” and this construction centres on male genius, gendered descriptors of avant-garde practice (cutting edge, innovative, daring, original) as well as the idea of individual “authorship.” Heynen sees this latter term tied to notions of male genius, virility, integrity and authenticity. All of which, as Heynen notes and is well known, is exemplified in Ayn Rand’s book *‘The Fountainhead’*.

The above perspectives indicate the need to revise the institutional logics which underpin architectural practices. However, no studies in Australia have explored the institutional logics of architectural practice. Thornton, Jones and Kury (2005) use an institutional logics framework that is a dialectic between two different types of architects. They denote these logics in binary terms as an aesthetic logic and an efficiency logic. Predictably, the aesthetic logic is represented by the “designer-architect” and the efficiency-logic is represented by the architect as “engineer-manager”. However, this binary framework is based on their own linear and somewhat naïve summary of architectural history in the 20th Century. It is a binary of ideal types that does not account for neo-liberal economics, competition for saleable knowledge, technology shifts, the fragmentation of the profession in different countries, nor the professions globalisation since the 1990s; and as importantly, issues around gender diversity.

A central issue of the institutional logics methodology is the tendency to reifying of a set of logics and then locate actors within that. Besharov and Smith (2014) argue for the need to develop a multiplicity of logics in order to account for nested, intertwined and interconnected logics. To an extent, this points to the need to develop new models of institutional logics. Ideally, frameworks of institutional logics must resist a reliance on reified, stereotypical, singular, dominant, binary or homogenous approaches to logics; as they argue it is important to recognise that “wide variation in how multiple logics manifest internally” Besharov and Smith (2014). As Linderoth notes (2016) in a discussion of organisation principles across industries institutional logics is shaped by an “interplay among elements in the institutional properties” and not simply binary properties. But for the researcher avoiding stereotypical approaches may be difficult. For example, Jia et al., (2017) appear, at first glance, to reify a binary logic in the construction safety field; resulting in an institutional logics employing a binary logic of religion (Confucianism vs. Pragmatism). But this conceptualisation is based on Friedland and Alford's (1991) societal logics and arguably the concept could include any number of religious categories. But, the tripartite of survivalist logics discussed below (Table 2) suggests that emergent institutional logics, could both be framed, extended and interpreted along a spectrum and incorporated into more dynamic models of institutional logics

## RESEARCH DESIGN

A survey questionnaire was devised to directly discern if the binary of designer-architect Creative vs. Suit, was prevalent in the business planning practices of Australian architects. In other words, the primary research question was to see if this binary was an evident or emergent logic in architectural profession. It was felt that a questionnaire survey would best discern prevailing attitudes amongst the profession prior to more detailed research.

In the third section of the survey questions were asked that directly explored if a binary of institutional logics existed between architects as creatives and as suits. Questions around the pre-existing logics of Coxe's distinctions of Practice based or Business Based practice were asked. Thornton, Jones and Kury (2005) ideal types of institutional logics were built into subsequent questions. For example, Sources of Legitimacy and Authority were explored through a non-forced Likert ranking question which asked “Do you think strategic and business planning is important in order to enhance” either managerial practices, firm efficiency, firm scale and scope or reputation, design outcomes or design practices of the firm. Table 1 summarises the survey questions based on the characteristics proposed by Thornton Jones and Kury (2005). Later research might

develop different characteristics possibly employing the same methodology evident in the contribution of Jia et al., (2017) regarding the logics of safety management.

The survey employed a gradated Likert scale (1 to 5) without a forced ranking for survey questions as this might then provide false positives that a clear binary distinction existed between Creatives and Suits. The survey was designed in three sections. The first section in the survey focused on firm demographics, history and outlook. In the second section a number of broad questions were asked about business planning practices.

## SURVEY RESULTS

An email pool of around 1793 architects were invited to respond to the survey. The database used was database of mainly members of then Australia Institute of Architects that had been compiled in previous years. There were 129 (7.1%) responses. Given the low response rate later research on this topic will limit the overall size of the pool.

Table 1: Binary Institutional logics model (This authors terms in italics)

Characteristics	Aesthetic Logic	Efficiency Logic
	<i>Creatives: Architect as Artist-Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Suits: Architect as Engineer-Manager</i>
Economic System	Personal Capitalism. <i>Local and Regional Capitalism</i>	Managerial Capitalism. <i>Global Capitalism</i>
Sources of Identity	<i>Creatives</i>	<i>Suits</i>
Sources of Legitimacy and Authority (Question 11)	Reputation of Architect, design outcomes and design practices.	Efficiency of managerial and design practices, scale and scope of firm.
Basis of Mission (Question 12)	Personal Reputation of firm with clients, Win prestige and Awards	Knowledge and range of specialisations Reach of firm into new markets.
Basis of Attention (Question 13)	Resolve Design Problems	Resolve Firm's future IT infrastructure.
Basis of Strategy (Question 14)	Prestigious Sponsors, Patrons and clients win Design Competitions	Increase corporate clients Stable and recurring client base Increase markets for services
Governance Mechanism (Question 15)	Atelier Professional Knowledge	Partnership/Ownership Corporate

First section results: most firm respondents were from small firms reflecting the Australian profession at large. Many of the respondents stated that their main area of work was in the area of housing. 68% stated that they did single bespoke housing and 52% medium density and 30% high-density. Far fewer firms undertook specialised areas such as ESD advice (22.45%), Urban Design (35.71%) Heritage Advice (22.45%) and Urban Planning (23.47%). Outside of housing the largest area of work was Commercial (48.98%) and then Community (39.80%). Clearly, the stereotype of the design architect who turns down commercial work because it is by its nature driven by financial profit is a fallacy. It would appear from these results that architects are primarily reliant on housing for their income and may do any commercial work that comes along.

Second section results: 83% of respondents felt that strategy formulation and business planning should be either have a great deal or a moderate amount of focus at architecture schools. As one respondent noted “I think it is sorely lacking and needs to be addressed in architectural education.” Going on to say that “The culture of the 'all-nighter' is a classic example of poor time management and acceptance of unrealistic deadlines.” Measure by weighted averages on the Likert scale respondents were evenly divided around the Weld Coxe strategic dimensions. The vocation of architecture and producing designs that serve society (Weighted Average: 4.15) was only slightly ahead of a focus on “Creating tangible benefits for both the firm and its clients.” Whilst relatively evenly spaced, firms appeared to think that their practices were more intent on creating well-built and compliant designs (4.29) and providing services that built relationships (4.38) over and above the drive for unique architectural designs that exhibit firm expertise and innovation (3.97).

Third section results: Business planning practices were evident in some firms but almost 56% of practices said that their business plans were either non-existent or they had not been updated for more than year (30%). Only 19.47% of firms had a regular strategy and formulation and business planning cycle and 14.9% said that their plans were regularly updated. In a subsequent question 31 of architects stated that business planning was a part of an ad-hoc and organic response to the work at hand.

Despite the above lack of business planning there was strong support for integration between design thinking and business planning processes. Respondents felt that strategy decisions in the firm were not primarily the domain of either design architects (23.33%), business orientated directors (6.45%) but by both (33.33%) or as part of a collaborative process between staff and all directors (22.58%). Respondents felt that business planning and design thinking were integrated and complementary activities rather than opposed activities. Most respondent agreed that Strategic thinking and business planning can be regarded as a design exercise (3.78) and that the purpose of a business plan is to integrate strategic, business and design knowledge (3.70).

Paradoxically, despite the lack of business plans, business planning was seen as being more important that the firm’s mission be to reach new places or markets (4.11), or increase the firms range of specialisation (3.36), build reputation with clients (3.91) rather than help win prestigious awards (3.36). Business planning, as a focus or basis of attention, suggests architects would rather use it to focus on future technological infrastructure (3.98) than design problems (3.22). Architects also responded that as a basis of strategy business planning could enhance a stable and recurring client base (4.07) and new markets (3.57), rather than a win design competitions (3.01) or obtain prestigious clients or patrons (3.47).

## DISCUSSION

The above results suggests that in practice architects have adopted a more inclusive “both-and” view in regards to the binary distinction between Creatives and Suits. This suggests that a different institutional logics is at play in architectural firms rather than a logics based on a simple binary. This is different to the logics suggested by Coxe’s conceptualisation. The results suggest that architectural firms recognised the value of strategy and business planning even if they were unable to embark on their own business planning exercises. Most respondents appeared to value equally, or rank design values below, more managerially orientated business values. A sharp distinction would be evident if there appeared to be a polarisation in the results between designs orientated values and business values in survey responses.

Comments from the survey respondents reveal, the differences between large and small firms, and a survivalist logic that is at play. As one respondent noted in relation to developing specialist areas of knowledge “Close contact and reach to each specific interest is paramount to both survival and reputation broadly in community and profession.” Another respondent stated that for small firms there was “often the constant switch between short-term project related issues and longer term goals, and making sufficient profit to be able to fund longer term thinking (and when we do, we are too busy!).” The solutions offered by respondents to the dilemmas facing smaller firms was to “operate on a cooperative model as it is the only way.” But as one respondent from a regional practice noted. “We have had very unsuccessful JV experience with large corporate architectural firms” going on to say that the “experience has left us very disillusioned as we have realised that our salaries are very low when compared with the charge out rates of these big strategic practices.” Then stating that “Sadly design expertise is not rewarded in our neck of the woods.”

Survivalism is also evident in other responses such as, “I really think that in the majority of firms, business planning is considered a secondary activity after design. There are many firms that have been active for decades that still struggle with fees and getting paid.” As another respondent lamented: “It's a 'chicken and the egg' situation where stability encourages strategic & business planning. At the moment, it's more about survival than anything else. There are too many architects vying for what little work is considered relevant for us to be involved. I have no doubt that the pendulum will swing back in our favour, but I am sceptical about whether it will happen soon enough to save my career.”

The survey results taken alongside the comments collated above from various respondents appear to indicate that, rather than a binary institutional logic, a survivalist institutionalist logic dominates. This logic is centred on different sized firms. The responses suggest that the fight for survival in a competitive market, particularly the housing market, hampers the ability to innovate. To survive most firms, seem more focused on building compliant designs on time and to budget, alongside a focus on building client relationships through service provision, rather than developing unique designs that exhibit innovation and expertise. This is worrisome given the need to create innovations around sustainability. This survivalist logic illuminates why respondents felt that strategy and business planning should be a part of professional curricula for architects. Yet, as they are struggling to survive, they either do not, or have not had, the time to formulate strategy and business plan. In the housing market architects have many competitors and adversaries along market driven design and construction chains. Housing is a key area where sustainable methods can impact on carbon emissions; yet in this market segment architects may be struggling to make a headway.

### **A Survivalist Institutional Logics**

This overarching institutional logic of survivalism is arguably the result of a number of factors. The changes since the 1970s in professional status as a result of neoliberal policies leading to so-called market competition. The loss of traditional services to project managers and subsequent disaggregation of full fee-for-service regimes. The rise of new technologies alongside new procurement systems have also led to a more competitive environment for architects. Despite its allure and heroic mythology in architectural traditions architects have in reality abandoned the binary logic of Creative vs. Suit. Consistent with the above results architects now conform to a different logics, structured by firm size, as set out in Table 2.

**Tribes:** Tribes are small community based and local practices. These firms create a design knowledge ecosystem around their own local field of practice. These are small firms which develop linkages both within their teams and the communities that surround them. These firms inwardly focused are bottom up in the way they create design knowledge. They are collaborative and community orientated. Whilst a single designer may dominate these tribes the emphasis is on consultation. As many of these firms feel they are struggling to survive these Tribes will sometimes form together to make bigger firms.

**Warlords:** Warlords are best exemplified by the so-called star architects. They dominate the national and global systems. These firms create a knowledge ecosystem around themselves that is dominated by a single, style, aesthetic ideology or person. These firms create design knowledge on a project by project basis. However, the creation of design knowledge is secondary as the firm seeks legitimacy through media hits. They are focused on winning prestigious commissions and often create conflict in order to win media presence. They are intent on creating seminal projects that build their reputation in the architectural canon.

**Transformers:** Are large multi-disciplinary and networked firms that work within the global system and often across borders. In these firms, design, knowledge, systems and governance are integrated. These firms create highly specialised design knowledge which is integrated into their own systems. As a result, these firms are large enough to anticipate, create, design and deliver large meg-projects such as urban infrastructure and cities. These firms are intent on building projects that enable the firm to be continually self-sustaining. They transform as they their constituent networks ebb and flow.

*Table 2: Institutional logics model for Architectural firms*

Characteristics	Tribal Logic	Warlord Logic	Transformers Logic
Name	Community Architects	Star Architects	Mega-firms
Survival and conflict modes:	Territories dominated through local knowledge. Avoids conflict in order to survive.	Territories dominated via media channels. Creates conflict in order to build media presence.	Territories constantly captured, expanded and rebuilt. Resolves conflict in order to govern.
Economic System	Local Capitalism	Regional and Global	Global
Sources of Identity	Community	Global Media	Revenue Growth and Entrepreneurship.
Sources of Legitimacy and Authority (Question 11)	Reputation of Architect, design outcomes and design practices.	Media hits, prestigious projects and academic positions.	Revenue, global reach and size of firm extent of specialisation.
Basis of Mission (Question 12)	Personal Reputation of firm with clients,  Win prestige and Awards	Knowledge and range of specialisations  Reach of firm into new markets.	Predatory  Revenue growth and Profit.  Integration of smaller firms.
Basis of Attention (Question 13)	Bottom up design and consultation processes	Avant-gardism. Reputation in the architectural canon.	R&D Integrated Systems and Governance,

			Infrastructure Technologies
Basis of Strategy (Question 14)	Any clients sponsors or patrons. Increase community connections.	Increase corporate clients Stable and recurring client base Increase markets for services	Entrepreneurial Futures Mega- Projects Knowledge creation and integration.
Governance Mechanism (Question 15)	Atelier. Professional	Singular Warlord or Star Architect. Project teams	Corporate. Multi-functional groups. Networks

## CONCLUSION

This research questions dichotomising, binary or overly simplistic notions of the logics at play in the architectural profession. In previous work an interpretation of logics in relation to architectural practice has tended to reify around a number of binary and over simplistic notions. Whilst this paper only seems to extend these notions, by replacing a binary logics with a tripartite one, this tripartite model is only a first step to beginning to develop models of architectural practice that embrace complex ecologies and logics of practice. Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model points to an approach that could be explored further (Bronfenbrenner 2009). Arguably, the development of institutional logics framework is a two-stage process. In the first stage categories are identified and in the second stage these categories are conceptualised, each on a spectrum, with non-static and perhaps overlapping or nested relationships.

The survivalist logic model proposed here could be easily tested in further surveys and research. Indeed, a grounded theory approach might also better justify this research. A Google Analytics analysis of the websites of each of the above types of firms would help to confirm and refine the model. More research is required to more accurately identify and quantify the financial dynamics that underpin the survivalist logic. For example, how many firms in the tribal class are profitable? How different firms come into existence, operate and change over time in for example from a tribal; to Warlord logic to a Transformers logic. Comparative case studies of the different types would also clarify these matters. Following on from Jia and Rowlinson (2015) and Jia et al., (2017) these types could be characterised as different design systems which operate at different institutional levels.

Since the 1980s Australian architects have been told taught that architectural design is important. This has been reinforced via the AIA peer awards system, publication and through networks of established patronage. This notion has in turn reinforced the idea that architects are designers who oppose the strictures of business planning and managerial efficiency. Yet, architects recognise the importance of strategy formulation and business planning practices. If anything, the survey responses indicate an emphasis more on business planning than a drive for design. This is because many Australian architects are driven by the need to survive as the competitive environment eats away at their livelihood and destroys their profession.

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