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Progress towards institutionalising field-wide water efficiency change

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Water resources are subject to global constraints. This paper explores how a heterogeneous range of water efficiency responses were driven across a field of seven water consuming organisations in Australia at a time of acute drought conditions into the late 2000s.

Design methodology/approach: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of individuals from 2008 to 2010.

Findings: A limited range of poorly coordinated drivers motivated pervasive water efficiency responses in two of the seven organisations. Would-be leaders sought to invoke a water efficiency field, and champion nascent logics and theorisation in order to gain some competitive advantage. There was little sense among others of any normative, mimetic or coercive pressure to adopt homogeneous practices. While the field lacked effective champions for change, the institutionalisation of novel water efficiency practices across the field continued into 2010.

Research limitations: Further research could investigate how water efficiency responses continued to develop or wane into the 2010's, and how such practices integrate with the management of other sustainability issues (including carbon).

Practical implications: Global water resources are subject to increasing supply constraints. This paper responds by exploring how the institutionalisation of water efficiency change can be driven across a field of organisations.

Originality/value: Relatively little is understood about 'institutionalisation' as an unfinished process. This paper responds by contributing an understanding of how institutional logics developed, and how theorisation for water efficiency progressed in the context of water scarcity in Australia.

Keywords: water efficiency, sustainability, institutional logics, theorisation

Paper type: Case study