



An institutional logics approach to the heterogeneous world of highly skilled work

Highly skilled work

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to clarify the relationship of highly skilled work and (collective) power. It develops an institutional logics perspective and argues that highly skilled workers' propensity to join trade unions varies by institutional order.

Design/methodology/approach – Data from two occupational fields in Austria, university professors and management consultants, representing two different institutional orders were collected via questionnaires. Stepwise logistic regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses.

Findings – The results show that over and above organisational level variables, individual's background and employee power variables institutional logics significantly add to explaining trade union membership of highly skilled workers. Prevalence of a professional logic in a field makes collective action more likely than market logic.

Originality/value – Highly skilled workers are overall described as identifying themselves more with the goals of their employer or client and with their professional peers than with other corporate employees or organised labour. They are thus expected to develop consent rather than conflict orientation *vis-à-vis* their employers and clients. This paper supports a differentiated view and shows that within highly skilled work there are groups engaging in collective action. By developing an institutional logics perspective it provides a useful approach to explain heterogeneity within the world of highly skilled work.

Keywords Trade unions, Industrial relations, Highly skilled work

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Consent rather than coercive mechanisms are assumed to effectively govern employment and employees in contemporary workplaces, even more so in knowledge-based occupations (Burawoy, 1979; Godard and Delaney, 2000; Guest, 1987, 2011; Lawler, 1992; Pfeffer, 1994; Thompson and Harley, 2007). In many studies highly skilled employees and self-employed contractors were found to identify themselves more with the goals of their employer or client and with their professional peers than with other corporate employees or organised labour (Barley and Kunda, 2004; Jensen and Westenholz, 2004; Schnabel, 2003; Voß and Pongratz, 1998). Also, so-called knowledge workers are reported to have a significantly higher attitudinal commitment, i.e. identification with and involvement in the organisation, and a lower intention to quit than routine-task workers (Benson and Brown, 2007, p. 133). Highly skilled workers are widely expected to develop consent rather than conflict orientation *vis-à-vis* their employers and clients. Their more



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individualistic attitudes and orientations tend to undercut traditional forms of union solidarity (Beck, 2000; Valkenburg and Beukema, 1996; Zoll, 1996).

However, these assumptions about highly skilled workers' lack of interest in collective action appear to contradict a strand of literature that revealed a strong belief of employees in knowledge-intensive occupations in the relevance of trade unions and solidarity (Boes, 2006; D'Art and Turner, 2005, 2008). In evaluating the European Social Survey (ESS), D'Art and Turner (2008, p. 184) found that irrespective of sectoral location, occupation, autonomy or income satisfaction, most of those surveyed had positive attitudes towards unions. While individual bargaining power is a key variable that explains variations in trade union density between different occupational groups (Crouch, 1982; Schnabel, 2003, p. 30), highly skilled workers also seem to differ in terms of their normative orientations and belief systems and hence, their propensities to join a trade union. However, it is still an open question what social mechanisms shape highly skilled individuals' attitudes towards trade unions. In order to fill this research gap, this paper aims at devising an ideal-typology (knowledge workers and professionals) based on the institutional logics approach and existing empirical accounts. Furthermore, we choose two occupations of highly skilled workers (university professors and management consultants) and tested whether or not they differ in their propensity to join a union. The results of the empirical part of this paper support the thesis that occupations have an impact on trade union membership. As the selected occupational fields are governed by distinct institutional logics that approximate our ideal types knowledge and professional work, our quantitative study contributes to a better understanding of the factors causing trade union membership of the highly skilled workforce.

The paper adopts an "institutional logics perspective" (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, 2008; Thornton *et al.*, 2012) because of the intriguing possibilities it offers to theorise and empirically study how institutions as broader belief systems shape the cognition and behaviour of individuals. Rejecting both, individualistic, rational choice theories and macro-structural perspectives, Friedland and Alford (1991) posited that every institution in society (such as the market, the state, professions, etc.) has a central logic. Institutional logics represent frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sense making, the vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity (Thornton *et al.*, 2012, p. 2). In regards to highly skilled work, we identify two distinct institutional orders, market and professions. These two institutions correspond with two groups of highly skilled occupations, professional and knowledge work and their assigned logics of control over knowledge (Pernicka and Lücking, 2012).

We assume that institutional logics found in occupational fields shape individual identities and influence the extent to which professionals and knowledge workers are likely to adopt a collective orientation and join trade unions. In this respect, we intend to fill a research gap in industrial relations literature on the determinants of trade union membership in knowledge-intensive occupational fields. A quantitative study that compares two fields of knowledge-based occupations, university professors and management consultants, in Austria provide support for our assumption that knowledge workers and professionals differ in terms of their propensity to join a union.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present a literature review on the determinants of trade union membership and develop our own analytical framework based on an institutional logics perspective. Second, we set out our model and present operationalisations of our main explanatory variables. Third, we present the main

results of our quantitative study and discuss them according to our analytical framework. The last section contains a discussion and our conclusions.

Review of models and approaches to trade union membership

Existing models that explain collective action and trade union membership are based on either rational choice models that have been advanced by economic theory (Akerlof, 1982; Booth, 1985; Crouch, 1982; Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1998; Schnabel, 2003; Schnabel and Wagner, 2007) or explanations from the social sciences that emphasise social and ideological motives to join trade unions (Burawoy, 1979; Ebbinghaus, 2002; Hyman, 2005). The social sciences approaches offer an alternative to and extension of traditional models of rational choice in that they underline the importance of power (Crouch, 1982), norms, values and traditions in explaining behaviour. However, they largely adhere to the analytical duality between instrumental rationality and socially determined behaviour. These approaches hardly specify how the meaning of rationality itself varies by institutional order (Thornton *et al.*, 2012). Thus, they have limited capacity to explain heterogeneity in highly skilled workers' propensities to join trade unions. We argue that adopting an institutional logics perspective offers a way out of this limitation in existing literature and provides a fruitful concept for explaining inconsistent empirical results concerning the union membership of the highly skilled workforce. After a critique of dominant theoretical explanations, we propose a model that includes professional and market logics to emphasise that belief systems and associated practices have a key role in determining trade union membership.

Economic utility-maximisation models of collective action

Economic rational choice models assume that individuals are utility maximisers and decide to become or remain union members if the expected benefits of their membership exceed costs. Ever since the pioneering work of Olson (1965), economists have emphasised that trade unions face a free rider problem. This collective action problem refers to the social phenomenon that rational, self-interested actors do not act in support of their group's common interest or objective unless there is coercion or some other special incentive (Olson, 1965, p. 1). Since we now rarely find compulsory membership or so-called closed shop unionism, important individual incentives for joining a union may include personal benefits such as strike pay and legal support available to members (Schnabel, 2003, p. 6). While Olson's (1965) framework focuses on material incentives, Booth (1985) extends the theory by incorporating sociological factors into the traditional utility-maximising model. In her "social custom theory of large union membership", Booth (1985) can demonstrate that reputation-seeking individuals may join trade unions because of a social custom shared by a critical mass of group members. In this context, the social custom can be thought of as urging workers not to free-ride (Schnabel, 2003). However, as her model is still based on rational choice assumptions that perceive individuals to maximise their personal utility irrespective of the wider social environment in which they are embedded, it cannot explain how norms and customs have actually evolved and under which conditions behaviour might vary in accordance with occupation-specific sub-cultures.

Determinants of trade union membership from a social sciences perspective

A social science perspective involves both instrumental-rationality and normative explanations for trade-union membership. Crouch's (1982, p. 67) rational choice

approach to “the logic of collective action” stands out for its power-related conception of unionisation. He argues that union membership varies with the usefulness of the union to the particular workers. Based on two aspects of “usefulness”, i.e. the dependence on collective action and the ease with which organisations can be used, Crouch (1982) contends that members of professions who are powerful enough within the labour market because of the scarcity of their skills refrain from joining a trade union. However, with the exception of the conditions of supply of and demand for skills in the labour market he does not consider the wider social context in explaining trade union membership.

Institutional aspects of collective action theories can be found in studies that emphasise the principle of solidarity, the identity-forming function of union membership as well as ideological convictions and traditions that can play a significant role in determining union membership (for an overview see Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2011; Hyman, 1996, 2005). Values, such as a communist ideology for instance, may inspire workers to join trade unions because of a desire to change society rather than out of a personal interest to gain higher wages or legal support (Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2011). Based on Weber’s (1980) theory of social action, the concept of value rationality means having a rational belief in the absolute value of trade union membership and thus joining the union irrespective of any material consequences (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980). Moreover, sociological approaches assume an individual’s embeddedness in union-friendly or union-hostile social networks and focus on the relevance of political and social attitudes in determining trade union membership (Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2011, pp. 109-110).

Trade union membership of highly skilled persons

When applied to highly skilled persons, the existing theories deliver partly contradictory interpretations of empirical evidences. In their study based on the ESS, Ebbinghaus *et al.* (2011) find evidence that supports power-related conceptions. Increasing years of education first increases the probability of being a union member and then the probability decreases at about 15 years of full-time education (Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2011, p. 118). Thus, low union membership of highly skilled persons could be explained by individual bargaining power derived from knowledge and education. When compared to colleagues in lower skilled occupations, employees in higher-level occupations with extensive job autonomy and high levels of income satisfaction are deemed less likely to perceive a need for trade unions (Kotthoff and Wagner, 2008, p. 247).

However, this result differs from ESS data on individual attitudes of highly skilled respondents who express a belief in the need for the protection of strong unions (D’Art and Turner, 2008). Hence, under specific conditions, such as a weakening labour-market position, certain groups of highly skilled workers have been found to join trade unions (see Boes, 2006 for IT-workers; Pernicka *et al.*, 2010 for management consultants, university and non-university staff). And in a study at Irish universities, D’Art and Turner (2005) reveal that only modest differences exist in group, union and political solidarity between academics, semi-skilled workers and routine workers. A common explanation for an increase in union membership of white collar employees or highly skilled workers is proletarianisation and deprofessionalisation of labour (Braverman, 1974; D’Art and Turner, 2005; Raelin, 1989; Wilson, 1991). Proponents of this thesis have emphasised the significance of the conditions of employment of highly skilled labour in large organisations that have increasingly been confronted with more bureaucracy, formalisation, less discretion and hence decreasing power. Given the large heterogeneity in contemporary organisations and management practices of

outsourcing and contracting out (Grimshaw *et al.*, 2005), also atypical employment (e.g. part-time employment, dependent self-employment) plays a crucial role in determining trade union membership. Grimshaw *et al.* (2005, p. 2) point to the blurring of organisational boundaries when staff are placed in multiple employment relations where obligations as well as identifications are negotiable rather than stable. Part-time workers, in particular, are less frequently union members than full-time workers (Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2008) due to their limited presence at the workplace where unions are used to organise new members. In contrast, standard employees as well as dependent self-employed workers who are primarily dependent on a single employer in highly competitive fields of knowledge production, have been found to identify with self-determined entrepreneurs controlling their own work rather than with employees who resort to trade unions (Abel *et al.*, 2005; Heidenreich and Töpsch, 1998; Voß and Pongratz, 1998).

Summing up, existing findings reveal the following pattern: deprofessionalisation tends to increase highly skilled employees' propensity to join trade unions, while a dominance of market logic appears to contribute to a reluctance to become a union member. Thus, an analysis of institutional logics (market logic and professional logic) might contribute to a deeper understanding of the determinants of trade union membership.

An institutional logics perspective on the determinants of union membership

This paper strives to enhance existing theorising on the determinants of trade union membership in highly skilled occupations by emphasising the role of field-specific institutional logics. Institutional logics are cultural beliefs, conceptions and practices that shape identities, cognitions and behaviours. They incorporate field-specific symbolic and normative components of culture (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). A core assumption, which over time has become known as embedded agency (Battilana, 2006; Seo and Creed, 2002), distinguishes the institutional logics approach and existing social sciences models of trade union membership from rational choice models. Individuals may seek power, status and economic advantage; however, the means and ends of their interests and agency are both enabled and constrained by prevailing institutions (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Giddens, 1984; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). While rational-choice models assume an institution-free conception of interests and behaviour, they maintain the materialist-idealist dualism in which actors' interests and behaviour can be understood independently of actors' understandings (Thornton *et al.*, 2012, p. 41). By contrast, existing social-sciences explanations of trade union membership perceive of institutions and the wider social context to impact upon individual behaviour and attitudes towards trade unions. Conceptions of norms, values and traditions are perceived to shape individual and collective identities and behaviour towards trade unions. However, social-sciences explanations do not specify how occupation-specific institutional logics shape the belief systems and rationalities of individuals and collectivities. The institutional logics perspective shares with earlier social science approaches the recognition of the impact and the (re)production of institutions through (historical) power struggles over the symbolic and material control of (highly skilled) work. It is different, however, in its emphasis on the importance of specific (inter-) institutional fields or systems that impose field-specific rather than universalistic, class or organisational expectations on individuals.

Accordingly, we distinguish between knowledge workers and employed professionals and their respective capacity for market closure and professional

closure (Pernicka and Lücking, 2012; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999) and expect the extent of trade union membership to vary according to dominant institutional logics in occupational fields.

Professional and knowledge work

Professionals and knowledge workers are thought to differ in at least three ways:

- (1) they are embedded in distinct institutional orders;
- (2) that entail varying abilities to enforce and maintain market or social closure; and
- (3) provide them with different career opportunities (see Table I).

First, Institutional logics provide a link between individual agency and institutional practices and rule structures (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008, p. 101) and are perceived to shape and legitimise individual and collective interests and identities (Hingings and Tolbert, 2008, p. 482; McAdam and Scott, 2005, pp. 17-18). According to Thornton *et al.* (2012, p. 111), the key mechanism by which institutional logics exert their effects on individuals is when they identify with the collective identities of institutionalised groups. Professions and occupations are among the multiple institutionalised groups with a collective identity (Abbott, 1988).

In market-driven occupations of knowledge production prevailing market logic is assumed to contribute to individualistic identities and interests and a reluctance to join trade unions. There are many types of knowledge with differing workplace usage and purpose, as Warhurst and Thompson (2006, p. 787) point out, but a central characteristic of knowledge work is that it draws on a body of knowledge that is aimed at the economically effective production of marketable knowledge products. In line with this assumption we draw on a definition of knowledge work as being primarily and explicitly oriented towards the production of new economically exploitable knowledge, irrespective of whether an innovation is actually achieved or not (Pernicka

Ideal type	Employed professional	Knowledge worker
Purpose of knowledge production	To contribute to and apply a body of theoretical and practical knowledge according to “accepted rules of the art” (<i>lege artis</i>)	To create and apply (new) economically exploitable knowledge-based products and processes
Institutional logics and their effects	Professional logic implies self-control and legal regulation (in continental Europe) entailing permanent market closure Management logic implies vertical career trajectories and tends to have a de-monopolizing effect on professional knowledge Professional identities, norms and practices tend to contradict HR management practices and interests	Market logic implies competitive pressures on knowledge workers Innovation and/or scarce expertise and knowledge entail temporary market closure Relationships with employers or clients tend to be contractual and short term Identification with entrepreneurs, commercial and market values entails consent with employers’ interests
Career trajectories	Professional and bureaucratic career	Entrepreneurial career
Propensity to join trade union	Medium	Low

Table I.
Two highly skilled occupational groups and institutional logics

and Lücking, 2012). Although some authors use the terms knowledge work and professional work synonymously (Crouch, 1982; Warhurst and Thompson, 2006), we propose a distinction. Both categories of work draw on abstract theoretical knowledge and exhibit a high degree of job autonomy, intellectual skills and the ability and willingness to learn (Alvesson, 2004; Frenkel *et al.*, 1995; Heidenreich, 2004), but knowledge and professional work differ in terms of their contents, institutional frameworks and their potentials for social closure.

The second argument rests on the assumption that professional logic and market logic provide distinct mechanisms of closure and hence relations to management: market control and professional self-control. These closure mechanisms are understood as ideal-types that do not fully correspond with existing social phenomena. Thus, real types inevitably appear as mixed forms and approximations to ideal-types. Concerning the professions, social closure is achieved through the monopolisation of higher educational training and professional credentials (Freidson, 1986, p. 59). Moreover, professionals such as medical doctors, attorneys at law or – to a lesser extent – university professors enjoy both a regulation of their knowledge bases and practices as well as high autonomy and self-control over their work. In the academic field, however, management has attempted to regain control over knowledge production by introducing quality conformance tests and quantitative measurements for research performance and scientific excellence. In this regard, bureaucracies have a de-monopolising effect (Collins, 2004, p. 77) in that they reduce power derived from professional closure.

In contrast to professionals, knowledge work is conceived of as directed towards market innovation and the creation of unique and economically exploitable knowledge-based products and processes. This implies that market prices govern the supply of and the demand for knowledge work. Although the production of new knowledge may provide a temporary market monopoly new market entrants soon challenge this position. Thus, only incomplete closure results from using expertise or innovation to control the market (Pernicka and Lücking, 2012).

The distinct logics impact on the relationship with management: knowledge workers are expected to conform rather than conflict with management interests as both – workers and employers/clients – share an interest in improving market performance by producing new economically exploitable knowledge. As long as knowledge workers are able to satisfy their market-related interests, they are assumed to remain committed to their employer or client. Professionals, in contrast, are assumed to develop professional norms and practices independent of their particular employer's interests. In contrast to the market logic, sense-making in professionalism occurs to a lesser degree through the lens of economic self-interest, but through concerns over personal reputation, professional association and quality of craft (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Due to the professionals' aim to expand a common knowledge base rather than to produce economically exploitable knowledge, their interests are more likely than those of knowledge workers to deviate from managerial interests. This in turn is expected to increase the probability of conflicts arising between management and professionals.

In our third argument, we note that prevailing institutional logics relate to career trajectories that have an impact upon the interests and orientations of employed professionals and knowledge workers. In this section we emphasise that knowledge workers' careers are more closely related to the market than to the organisation, while employed professionals (such as university professors, hospital doctors) are more

likely to be provided with both professional and intra-organisational career trajectories. Corporations establish entrepreneurial options both for individual careers and business growth (Kanter, 1989; Voß and Pongratz, 1998). In knowledge work (such as software development, product and process innovation) intra-organisational possibilities for career-trajectories are provided to a much lesser extent. Accordingly, knowledge workers' careers are less dependent from a particular organisation and career-trajectories tend to be inter-organisational. In addition, employment relations increasingly take the form of contractual relationships, dependent self-employment or other forms of peripheral employment. From a HRM perspective, the use of contractual rather than long-term relationships assure that a firm's workers can be terminated when their skills no longer satisfy the organisation's needs (Handy, 1989). As a consequence, knowledge workers are expected to be released or to exit an organisation rather than express any large dissatisfaction. This is also due to their post-organisational career patterns that provide alternative career trajectories, such as entrepreneurial or boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Greenhaus *et al.*, 2008; Kanter, 1989). In contrast, we expect professionals to display a higher degree of conflict orientation due to their double orientation towards possible hierarchical and professional careers.

Hypotheses on the effects of power and institutional logics on trade union membership
In this section, we specify the proposed effects of institutional logics and bargaining power on trade union membership of highly skilled workers. Our first hypothesis refers to individual bargaining power, defined as the ability to defend one's own work-related interests. Over and above group differences, we assume a negative relationship between perceived individual bargaining power and the likelihood to join a union. Workers who perceive themselves as being more powerful tend to rely more on their own abilities to defend their individual interests:

- H1.* Less perceived individual power is expected to be associated with a higher likelihood of trade union membership.

Knowledge and professional work are assumed to differ in three ways:

- (1) prevailing institutional logics;
- (2) workers' abilities to enforce and maintain market or professional closure; and
- (3) career opportunities that affect self-conceptions and identities as well as orientations towards trade unions and management.

In comparison to employed professionals, we expect knowledge workers to exhibit a greater extent of individualistic orientation due to their entrepreneurial career trajectories, exit options and shared interests with employers to produce economically exploitable knowledge. Employed professionals, in contrast, are expected to develop high loyalties within their professional community, while their professional interests and practices tend to contradict managerial interests. However, because of their double career orientation towards internal and professional careers, professionals are thought to tend to stay (and possibly join a union) rather than exit their employer organisation:

- H2.* Employed professionals are expected to display a higher propensity than knowledge workers to join trade unions.

Method*Sample*

In order to test the relevance of institutional logics, we chose occupational groups that approximate our ideal-types of knowledge and professional work. Knowledge workers have been described as operating in competitive labour and product markets, facing entrepreneurial career trajectories and are sometimes engaged as dependent self-employed workers. Our sample includes employed and dependent self-employed management consultants in Austria. Employed management consultants are covered by the collective agreement for the craft and trade sector, negotiated between the Union of Salaried Employees and Printing, Journalism and Paper Workers (GPA-DJP) and the Chamber of Commerce. Dependent self-employed management consultants usually offer their services under the roof of a larger organisation that serves as a network of self-employed consultants. They are often dependent on this organisation – which provides them with access to the market – and do not employ anyone. Although dependent self-employed management consultants make their own profit, their income and employment conditions are to a certain extent determined by the umbrella organisation for which they work. As employed and dependent self-employed workers are usually engaged by the same organisation collective agreements do have an effect on both groups of workers as they set de-facto minimum wages and conditions. In cases where employers pay their dependent-self-employed workers less than collectively agreed minimum wages, there is strong evidence that employers try to circumvent an employment relationship. In regard to these so-called false self-employment contracts the GPA-DJP trade union offers a wider range of legal information and support to enforce labour law (Pernicka, 2006). However, the status as dependent self-employed workers primarily arises from the characteristics of the sector itself rather than from management strategies to undermine union power. In Austria, this employment group is entitled to join trade unions. The GPA-DJP, in the early 2000s, even set up two special divisions for organising dependent self-employed workers and professionals in knowledge-intensive occupations, including management consultants.

University professors in Austria were chosen as a traditional profession that most closely approximates our conception of employed professionals. We selected two broadly defined scholarly disciplines, social sciences and natural/technical sciences. Access to the position of a university professor is limited to scholars who have completed a standardised academic training and hold a chair and/or permanent tenure at a university. University professors have successfully restricted entrance to particular academic posts. However, since the university reforms in 1993 and 2002, university administrators have more power over staffing issues and coordinating professional activities. At Austrian universities, corporatist trade unions and labour representatives at the organisational level have been comparatively strong; however, trade union membership among scholarly staff has always been very low (Pernicka and Lücking, 2012).

There are only rough estimations of how many people work as management consultants in Austria. No particular institution lists all consultants. We chose to approach the consultants via IG work@professional, a community of experts and executive staff that is trade union based but does not require union membership, the professional group of management consultants in the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and representatives of larger consulting firms registered in a professional social network (www.xing.org). These groups circulated the link to an online survey about knowledge work among their members and co-workers. In total, 40 employed

and dependent self-employed management consultants answered our online survey. Table II describes the sample.

We had easier access to the occupational field of university professors. We chose the areas of physics, chemistry, electrical engineering and electronics (natural and technical sciences) as well as sociology, political sciences, management and economics (social sciences). Since university department web sites commonly list academic staff, we could use internet research to gather e-mail addresses of (almost) all university professors who held a chair and/or were permanently employed in the academic fields listed above in Austria. The addresses were used to send personalised e-mails with the link to our online survey. We received responses from 146 university professors (associate and full) in standard work relationships or with civil servant contracts.

Measures

Trade union membership. Our dependent variable is trade union membership. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they are trade union members (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). It is important to note that Austrian trade unions are sector unions that negotiate all-encompassing collective agreements. Universities still belong to the domain of the Union of Public Services (GÖD), while management consultants are organised within the Trade Union of Salaried Employees and Printing, Journalism and Paper Workers (GPA-DJP).

Institutional logics. Our main independent variable, institutional logics, is measured along the occupational categories of management consultancy and permanently

	Management consultants (market logic)	University professors (professional logic)
% of women	37.8	17.4
Mean age	43.1 years	49.7 years
% with academic degree	85.0	100.0
Median organisational size	10-49 employees	≥ 250 employees
% of union members	10.5	24.7
% in		
Standard employment	57.5	100.0
Fixed term contract	2.5	0
Freelance service contract	5.0	0
Dependent self-employment	35.0	0
% working in		
Social sciences		16.8
Business and economics		26.1
Natural sciences		39.1
Technical sciences		13.6
More than one of the disciplines		4.3
% working in		
Marketing and PR	12.5	
HRM	12.5	
Finance	7.5	
IT	17.5	
Strategy	20.0	
Systemic consulting	7.5	
Organisational development	5.0	
Other areas	17.5	

Table II.
Sample description

employed university professors. University professors are employed professionals and management consultants are knowledge workers. The two groups were identified to correspondent with two institutional logics, professional logic and market logic, respectively. Market logic was coded as 0 and professional logic as 1. Since we first developed the ideal-types of knowledge and professional work and then chose groups where the described logics are found we follow the plea for theory-driven comparative empirical research (Mayrhofer and Reichel, 2008). The exemplary areas listed in Table I that are used to give a summary of the logics are not directly measured at this stage.

Individual bargaining power. We used two items with four-point answering scales to measure individual power, i.e. one's possibility to advance personal interests *vis-à-vis* employers or clients (Pernicka *et al.*, 2010). One question captures perceived exit options ("Imagine you actively search for a new job. How easy or hard would it be to find a job where you can use most of your knowledge?" – very hard (0) to very easy (3)) and the other question considered substitutability ("Imagine you left your job, how easy or hard would it be to replace the knowledge you have in your current job?" – very easy (0) to very hard (3)). Higher values indicate higher levels of power. The correlation between the two items is low ($r_{sp} = 0.012$; see Table III). Thus, they were not combined into one measure.

Control variables. We further included individual and organisational control variables that are likely to differ between the two groups and also influence trade union membership (Ebbinghaus *et al.*, 2011). Respondents were asked for their sex (female = 0, male = 1), their age in years and whether their parents are or were trade union members (none of the parents has ever been a member = 0, one or both of the parents is or was a trade union member = 1). In order to reduce missing values, we offered respondents four categories for reporting organisational size (two to nine employees = 1, ten to 49 employees = 2, 50-249 = 3, more than 250 = 4). For the analyses, we created dummy variables. Organisations with more than 250 employees served as the reference category. As another organisational control variable, we included whether the organisation has a works council (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). Works councils provide unions with access to the workplace in Austria. Even if trade unions are represented at the workplace, the probability of highly skilled workers to be recruited as members is expected to be lower for knowledge workers than for professionals. This is due to both, their expected difference in job duration and their individualistic market-oriented attitudes. In addition Austrian trade unions rely on methods of recruitment that seek to recruit a highly skilled flexible workforce beyond the workplace. They focus on geographically based forms of organising and servicing rather than enterprise or workplace branches (see below and Pernicka, 2009, p. 473).

The items described were part of a larger online survey instrument with 110 structured questions about knowledge work, job descriptions, articulation of interests, work organisation, working conditions and socio-demographic information. After making relevant contacts and gathering e-mail addresses, we surveyed both university professors and management consultants in spring 2008.

Results

The correlation matrix in Table III includes Spearman's rank-order correlations between the dependent, independent and control variables. The dependent variable of trade union membership is significantly correlated with one indicator of individual power. The easier highly skilled workers think it is to find another qualified job if they left their current one, the less likely it is that they join a trade union. In contrast to knowledge workers

Table III.
Correlations,
means, standard
deviations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Trade union membership	0.222	0.417								
2. Power – exit options	1.37	0.873	-0.276**							
3. Power – substitutability	2.01	0.721	-0.037	0.012						
4. Institutional logic (professional)	0.082	0.383	0.196*	-0.013	0.175*					
5. Sex (male)	0.791	0.408	-0.031	0.035	0.078	0.245**				
6. Age in years	48.5	10.3	0.307***	-0.118	0.089	0.217*	0.216*			
7. Parents trade union members	0.398	0.491	0.208*	-0.042	-0.068	0.258**	0.091	0.103		
8. Works council in organisation	0.883	0.323	0.133	0.021	0.129	0.713***	0.023	0.057	0.167*	
9. Organisational size	≥ 250		0.099	-0.166*	-0.069	0.328***	0.029	0.000	0.121	0.380***

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

(management consultants), employed professionals (university professors) will more likely join a trade union. Age and parents' trade union membership positively influence trade union membership of the highly skilled workers. Highly skilled workers perceive their exit options as higher in smaller organisations than in bigger organisations. Employed professionals feel that they are harder to replace than knowledge workers. There are fewer women among employed professionals, they are older, a bigger proportion of their parents are/were trade union members and they work in larger organisations that more frequently have works councils.

Table IV reports the results for the stepwise regression with trade union membership as the dependent variable. In the first step, we entered individual level and, in the second step, we considered variables controlling for organisational level. Both steps resulted in an increase of explained variance; however, the improvement is only significant for individual level control variables. In the third step, the two variables measuring individual bargaining power were entered. The model improved significantly and there is a significantly negative relationship between having good exit options and trade union membership. Thus, our results support *H1*, which predicts that less individual power contributes to the likelihood of trade union membership. In the last step, we entered the dichotomous variable (university professors vs management consultants) capturing professional and market logic. Again, variance explained increased significantly. The full model has a Nagelkerke r^2 of 0.378. In addition, there is a significant relationship between dominant institutional logics and trade union membership. Over and above differences due to individual, organisational and institutional variables, the chances of being a trade union member are 81 times higher for employed professionals than for knowledge workers. We found support for *H2* predicting a higher propensity to join trade unions for employed professionals than for knowledge workers.

Discussion and conclusions

This paper started from the premise that an occupational field's belief system and associated practices (institutional logics) shape the orientation and behaviour of highly skilled workers and their propensity for trade union membership. Two groups of highly skilled occupations, professions and knowledge work, were identified that correspondent with two institutional logics, professional logic and market logic, respectively. As market logic has gained legitimacy in labour relations, some observers argue that the employee will be largely replaced by a new type of worker, the so-called *entreplooyee* (or "Arbeitskraftunternehmer") who rejects any form of collective action and trade union membership (Voß and Pongratz, 1998).

However, research on highly skilled individuals has provided empirical evidence inconsistent with this assumption. Under certain conditions, highly skilled persons develop a collective orientation and join trade unions. This paper strived to resolve these inconsistencies and emphasised the role of institutional logics in determining behaviour of employees and dependent self-employed workers in knowledge-intensive occupations.

Existing theoretical approaches do not allow us to distinguish between separate categories of highly skilled workers. Although social sciences models emphasise the role of norms, values, traditions and identities which determines trade union membership, they largely maintain the duality between rational choice and context-driven behaviour, which contributes to a lack of understanding that rationality itself may vary by institutional order (Friedland and Alford, 1991).

Table IV.
Stepwise logistic
regression

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3		Step 4	
	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)
Intercept	-5.16***	0.006	-6.36***	0.002	-5.95**	0.003	-6.43**	0.002
Sex	-0.856	0.425	-0.798	0.450	-0.825	0.438	-1.17***	0.310
Age in years	0.085***	1.09	0.089***	1.09	0.098***	1.10	0.103***	1.11
Parents trade union members	1.05*	2.85	0.898*	2.46	0.836 +	2.31	0.685	1.98
Works council in organisation			1.15	3.16	1.83	6.23	-1.56	0.209
Organisational size 2-9			-0.623	0.536	-0.425	0.654	-0.437	0.646
Organisational size 10-49			-0.191	0.826	0.341	1.41	0.479	1.62
Organisational size 50-249			0.414	1.51	0.672	1.96	1.23	3.41
Power – exit options					-0.882**	0.414	-0.971**	0.379
Power – substitutability					-0.303	0.738	-0.474	0.622
Institutional logic							4.39*	81.0
χ^2 (df)		21.26 (3)***		24.50 (7)***		35.99 (9)***		41.38 (10)***
Improvement χ^2 (df)		21.26 (3)***		3.25 (4)		11.48 (2)**		5.40 (1)*
Nagelkerkes χ^2		0.208		0.237		0.335		0.378

Notes: Dichotomous variables are institutional logic (market logic (management consultants)=0, professional logic (university professors)=1); sex (female=0, male=1); parents trade union members (none=0, one or both=1); works council in organisation (no=0, yes=1). Organisational size is a categorical variable with organisations with 250 and more employees serving as the reference category. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; **** $p < 0.10$

We argued that adopting an institutional logics perspective offers a way out of this limitation in existing literature. An institutional logics approach emphasises the importance of specific (inter-) institutional fields or systems that impose specific (rather than universalistic, class or organisational) expectations on individuals. In designating employed professionals and knowledge workers as two distinct ideal-types of highly skilled workers, this paper explored the associated institutional logics in separate occupational fields, namely universities and management consultancy, and their impact upon trade union membership. Knowledge workers and professionals were described as being embedded in distinct institutional logics, i.e. market logic and professional logic, which have an impact upon their identity and orientation towards trade unions and management. These two institutional logics involve different aims of knowledge production, perceived power resources and career opportunities that in turn seem to influence highly skilled workers' self-perception and propensity to join a union.

Based on these assumptions, we tested two hypotheses with regard to management consultants (knowledge workers) and university professors (professionals) in Austria. *H1* expected less perceived individual power to be associated with a higher likelihood of trade union membership in both groups of the highly skilled (professionals and knowledge workers). *H2* expected employed professionals to display a higher propensity than knowledge workers to join trade unions. With regards to *H1*, in both occupations, higher levels of perceived individual bargaining power corresponded with lower levels of trade union membership. However, including institutional logics (measured by professional and knowledge work, respectively) significantly increased the explanatory power of our model. Employed professionals (university professors) displayed a significantly higher propensity to join a union than knowledge workers (management consultants). In comparison to professional workers, knowledge workers were expected to refrain from organising collectively due to their orientation towards using their knowledge to gain advantages on the market (market logic).

Our study has the typical limitations of a single country study, which does not control for institutional differences at the national level. Although we controlled for many important factors, such as gender, age, parents' union membership and organisational properties (e.g. the presence of an employee representation at the workplace), generalisability might be limited due to national specificities. In order to increase the robustness of our conceptual model, future research should therefore explore other countries and occupational fields governed by the same logics (professional and market logic). Moreover, our sample of consultants is relatively small when compared with our sample of university professors. However, as approximations to our ideal types, we selected two occupational groups that largely differ in their hypothesised propensity to organise collectively. The results are significant because the big differences between the two groups outweighed a large standard error due to the small sample of consultants.

Research on institutional logics is dominated by qualitative methodological approaches. This paper takes a step towards marrying logics and a quantitative method. While this paper focuses on effects of logics on an outcome variable in future research it would be worthwhile to also use quantitative methods to better understand which dimensions are sufficient to capture the logic of a field. Traditional methods of scale development like Q-sort and multidimensional scaling combined with factor analyses could possibly advance research in this field.

Summing up this paper has proposed a more sophisticated view on developments in knowledge-intensive occupations. In emphasising institutional logics that operate in

distinct fields of knowledge production we revealed conditions under which highly skilled persons might become trade union members that go beyond existing theories on the determinants of trade union membership.

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