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# Review

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## **Emotional competence, institutional ethos and the heart of institutions**

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**EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, INSTITUTIONAL ETHOS AND THE HEART OF INSTITUTIONS**

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3 Advancing theory often requires researchers to weigh the use of existing concepts in the interest  
4 of continuity with prior work against developing new or invoking less commonly used concepts  
5 in pursuit of a distinctive and coherent line of inquiry. This is especially true when the purpose of  
6 theory development is not so much the elaboration of settled frameworks, but an examination of  
7 existing questions from a new perspective, or the integration of distinct theoretical domains. We  
8 grappled with this tension when writing our original article, and in the end favored the internal  
9 coherence needed to articulate a view of institutional actors that starts and ends with emotions. In  
10 Karl Weick's terms (2016), our inquiry pursued acts of differentiation, conjecture and attachment  
11 to help making sense of organizational realities, even though this may not fit perfectly with  
12 advancing "settled science."  
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28 The very thoughtful reactions to our paper from Lindebaum and Ashkanasy, and  
29 Toubiana et al., are further evidence of this trade-off. Lindebaum and Ashkanasy laud our effort  
30 to integrate emotions into institutional theory, but ask us to clarify boundary conditions of our  
31 theorizing, and wonder whether the concept of emotional intelligence is not sufficient for  
32 representing much of what our notion of emotional competence (EC) is designed to do. Toubiana  
33 et al., by contrast, find the idea of emotional competence useful, but question whether the  
34 concept of ethos is truly necessary and whether our theorizing would not be stronger if we  
35 connected EC more directly to institutional logics, without the addition of ethos.  
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47 In a dialogue with both papers we hope to clarify ambiguities in our reasoning that were  
48 created at least in part by the practical limitations of formulating an article-length statement in  
49 the peer review process. As it happens, EC and ethos are rather central constructs in our  
50 theorizing, and we envision them as deeply intertwined and mutually necessary. We will first  
51 respond to Lindebaum and Ashkanasy to better articulate why we establish EC as distinct from  
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3 EI, and what we propose to be the relationship between EC and EI. We will then respond to  
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5 Toubiana et al. to elaborate the reasoning for inserting the concept of ethos, and how our ideas  
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7 consequently relate to and are in fact quite compatible with the institutional logics perspective,  
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9 and even more so with institutional analysis more broadly.  
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### 12 13 **What Is Emotional Competence And Why Does It Matter?** 14 15

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17 Lindebaum and Ashkansy raise three main issues: First, that the scope of our theoretical  
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19 model is narrower than we claimed since not all workers are as invested in institutions as we say  
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21 they are; second, that our theorizing could be combined with work on collective emotion  
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23 recognition and norms; and third, that EC is not as distinct from EI as claimed and could possibly  
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25 be integrated in Mayer and Salovey's (1997) ability model of EI.  
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29 Lindebaum and Ashkanasy suggest that our argumentation in regard to EC applies only  
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31 to a "cohort of committed workers who form the core of institutional identity" and they rightly  
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33 point out that other forms of control abound in organizations that are not based on identification  
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35 with institutions. We would first like to point out that the idea that people have a personal stake  
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37 in institutions allows for a range of modalities. These include singular identification, but also  
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39 being more instrumentally invested in an institutional order for the pursuit of personal ends, or  
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41 being dependent on others that evaluate, reward or sanction displayed emotions based on  
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43 institutional criteria. But we readily acknowledge that not all organizational behavior is driven by  
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45 a stake in an institutional ethos, primarily because not all organizations and all organizational  
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47 behaviors are highly institutionalized. Our theory refers to institutions, and allows for situations,  
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49 including situations in organizations, that are not governed by strong institutions. At the same  
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51 time, this does not limit the applicability of our theorizing to a narrow set of persons, because our  
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53 framework treats the extent of institutionalization, and hence the strength of institutional control,  
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3 as variable. While institutions may not dominate all behavior in organizations, we believe that  
4 they play at least some role in most. Moreover, the two dimensions used to evaluate EC,  
5 competence and authenticity, are continuous. Thus, it is possible for someone to have lower EC,  
6 because her or his behavior is deemed less authentic/less competent by relevant audiences, or  
7 because s/he feels less competent/authentic in her/his role. In fact, the authenticity dimension is  
8 particularly relevant for the extent to which a person is committed to an ascribed actor role. For  
9 example, in Turkel's (1974) classic book there are a number vignettes of workers who are  
10 competent (that is, they feel capable of performing their roles and are deemed as competent by  
11 others), but they do not feel authentic doing so. Thus, Sharon Adkins, a receptionist in a large  
12 firm describes her relation to her role as follows: "You know you're not doing anything, not  
13 doing a hell of a lot for anyone. Your job doesn't mean anything. Because you're just a little  
14 machine." (pp. 28-29). In other words, she seems to be low on the authenticity dimension of EC,  
15 though her account indicates that she is relatively high on the competence dimension.  
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35 Lindebaum and Ashkanasy also urge us to pay closer attention to the multi-level  
36 dimensions of emotional competence and institutional norms. We largely agree and embrace  
37 their contention that "it is arguable whether the notion of 'institutionally conditioned' yields  
38 identical interpretations across, for instance, the individual and organizational level of analysis,  
39 [and] it seems plausible for future research to consider the possibility that interpretations of  
40 events can differ between levels of analysis, therefore leading to more nuanced theorizing around  
41 the concept of EC." Work on emotional aperture (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009) can help  
42 elaborate processes of emotional competence, not least because collective emotion, as much as  
43 role-specific emotion may be institutionally prescribed. And work on the varying strength of  
44 collective display rules (Diefendorff, Erickson, Grandey, & Dahling, 2011) is resonant with the  
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3 idea put forward above, that the degree and depth of institutionalization in organizations may be  
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5 variable and hence the extent of self-regulation and other-authorization is an empirical question.  
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9 Perhaps the most critical point in Lindebaum and Ashkanasy's response concerns the  
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11 distinction between EC and emotional intelligence. They are not convinced that our  
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13 conceptualization of EC is "sufficiently distinct to qualify as a new construct" and suggest,  
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15 instead, that it should be seen "as a subset of emotional intelligence, rather than a stand-alone  
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17 construct." Here we disagree. Two constructs can be related, as we noted in our article, yet they  
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19 serve rather different purposes. Thus, we see EC and EI as orthogonal rather than competing  
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21 concepts. In their response, Lindebaum and Ashkanasy's suggest that people high in EI may on  
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23 occasion resist institutions, which would seem to support the distinctiveness of the two concepts:  
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25 EC serves the institution, EI the person. Neither is a subset of the other.  
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31 EI research has not focused much on divergences between the well-being of person and  
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33 organization (or institutional order) (Fineman, 2004), and EI has traditionally been used to  
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35 explain prosocial behavior of individuals. There is, of course, a latent recognition that  
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37 emotionally intelligent people might engage in anti-social behavior (Lindebaum, 2012), this  
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39 notion still rests on an understanding of emotions as universal and fundamentally intra-personal,  
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41 with context (whether, organizational, institutional, or societal) playing a moderating  
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43 "downstream" role (Elfenbein, 2007). This is an inside-out view of emotions, starting with the  
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45 individual self. In contrast, our premise is that individual selves are social constructions that  
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47 emerge from taking roles of "managers", "employees" or any other "actors" (Mead, 1934;  
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49 Willmott, 2011), and that complex human beings are shaped into "actors" in the service of the  
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51 existence and reproduction of an institutional order. Accordingly, we adopt an outside-in view of  
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53 emotions (Barbalet, 2001; Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005), whereby institutional orders codify the  
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3 kind of emotional experiences that are necessary for their continued existence. Thus, rather than  
4 seeing EC as a special case of EI, it is equally plausible to view EI as a specific manifestation of  
5 EC, whereby institutional orders are prone to develop and codify certain emotional experiences  
6 and displays – especially those valuable for the maintenance of the status quo – as EI. This  
7 argument parallels Fineman’s (2004, 2006) observations, and might explain why EI researchers  
8 have struggled to integrate negative emotions as EI (Lindebaum, 2012; Lindebaum & Gabriel,  
9 2016) – they are less conducive to maintaining an institutional order (though see Wright,  
10 Zammuto, & Liesch, in press: for exception). In sum, the convergence of EI and EC is in our  
11 mind not a definitional but an empirical question with situation-specific answers.  
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25 It is clear that there is much value in further engagement between research on EI and  
26 institutional theory. Institutional researchers can benefit from a deeper understanding of the  
27 micro-psychological processes and psychologists from a deeper treatment of societal and  
28 institutional context. Keeping EC and EI distinct does not muddy the waters but stimulates  
29 dialogue and promises to add precision and nuance to each literature.  
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### 38 **Ethos, Logics or Both?**

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40 Toubiana et al.’s response centers on the concept of ethos, which they find lacking in  
41 definition, not well founded in contemporary institutional research, and hence a potentially  
42 unnecessary addition that adds ‘conceptual muddle’ to the institutional vocabulary. They  
43 specifically propose that the concept of values may substitute for ethos and allow for a better  
44 integration of emotion into institutional theory. We do see more bridges between our theorizing  
45 and the work on institutional logics than we were able to articulate in our article, and an analysis  
46 of the emotional foundations of institutions can by no means be detached from contemporary  
47 institutional analysis. We also suggest, however, that the specific concept of ethos is a useful,  
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3 and in fact necessary, differentiation of institutional theory's conceptual apparatus if emotions  
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5 are to be taken seriously. Conceptual muddles arise when analytic distinctions are brushed over  
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7 or concepts are over-extended to do theoretical work that they are not designed to do. In our  
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9 view, ethos adds precision to our understanding of institutions by offering an account of the  
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11 source of emotional attachment to institutions that values, norms or practices cannot.  
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16 The concept of ethos is not new, neither to the social sciences nor institutional analysis. It  
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18 has deep roots in sociology and anthropology as a means for understanding the basis of social  
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20 solidarity and institutional order. The definition of ethos used in our article, "the tone, character,  
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22 and quality of [a people's] life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying  
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24 attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects" was taken from Geertz (1957), who  
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26 dedicated substantial space to ethos for understanding cultures (Geertz, 1973). Much earlier,  
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28 Max Weber (1958[1904]), in examining the protestant work ethic, put moral and aesthetic ideals  
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30 at the heart of the emergence of institutional systems of capitalism and their ideologies. Ethos,  
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32 then, gives meaning to institutions in the form of moral worth that infuses practices and values  
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34 with worth beyond tradition or convention. In this sense, the concept of ethos captures  
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36 Durkheim's important distinction between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim, 1915/1965).  
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38 Ethos refers to the set of collective ideals that imbue institutional orders with transcendental,  
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40 quasi-religious and profound qualities. The argument is that these ideals, rather than simple  
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42 conventions, give rise to social solidarity, even among members of differentiated institutional  
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44 systems with multiple logics. We claim that this quality of institutions, diffuse as it may be, is  
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46 central to the appraisal and regulation of emotions in particular institutional orders and roles.  
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54 We thus re-introduced the concept of "ethos" in theorizing institutions from an emotions  
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56 perspective because it recruits a robust set of literatures that asserts people's desire to invest in  
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3 sacred, fantasmic ideas as necessary for social order and institutional domination. In addition to  
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5 the historical predecessors quoted above, this includes psychoanalytic social theory (Stavrakakis,  
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7 2008; Žižek, 1999), symbolic interactionism (Barton & Hardesty, 2010), social movement  
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9 studies (Goodwin, 1997) moral psychology (Haidt, 2012), communication studies (Lakoff,  
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11 2010), as well as perspectives within management and organization studies (Ashforth &  
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13 Vaidyanath, 2002; Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2014; Kraatz, 2009; Wright et al., in press). The  
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15 investment in ethos captures and directs emotional energy and provides a moral justification for  
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17 these processes that is aligned with institutional order (Voronov & Weber, 2016).  
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23         The role of the quasi-sacred social imaginary behind emotional investment in institutional  
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25 orders is not well addressed by contemporary work on institutional logics, which most often  
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27 represents practices, norms, values and beliefs on a single plane to emphasize their alignment.  
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29 When human experience is seen as fundamentally affective, ethos makes an institutional order  
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31 real important to a person's self- and other-understanding. Institutional practices and specific  
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33 norms are cues, "manifestations" of ethos that can represent but not animate a society's worth  
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35 and character. Formal organizations similarly embody ethos, some as iconic entities that are  
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37 ascribed quasi-human qualities (e.g., Ashforth, Schinoff, & Brickson, 2016), and all through the  
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39 actor-roles they create. And general values or ideologies help theorize and interpret ethos. But  
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41 they cannot, as abstract principles, constitute a person's desired self without a separate reason for  
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43 the importance of some values over others (see, e.g., Swidler (1986), for an elaboration of this  
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45 dominant view in cultural sociology).  
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52         To be clear, we do not suggest that the concepts of ethos stands above institutional logics.  
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54 Both are necessary and valuable for understanding emotions. We are excited by efforts to  
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56 integrate emotions in research on institutional logics, especially by the idea that logics entail  
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3 emotional registers (Fan & Zietsma, in press; Toubiana & Zietsma, in press). Institutional logics  
4 likely prescribe certain emotions and effectively generate field-level emotion cultures  
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6 (Hochschild, 1979: , and see also the the affinity to collective-level emotion research discussed  
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8 by Lindebaum and Ashkanasy's response)). The idea of ethos does not deny that but asks what  
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10 organizes these emotional registers and how they can be quite distributed at the level of  
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12 particular actor roles. Ethos is thus not the same as an institution's aggregate emotional register,  
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14 the means for becoming an institutional actor, but the object of emotional investment by people  
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16 inhabiting the institution, the ends of institutional actorhood.  
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23 We believe that this distinction offers conceptual advantages to institutional researchers.  
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25 For example, ethos allows for the emotional registers of logics to overlap. Ethos can, in  
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27 principle, form the basis of social solidarity and social order across a society's differentiated  
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29 inter-institutional system. It may be the case that in some societies, ideals associated with  
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31 particular logics or domains dominate and become central to ethos (for example, market logics  
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33 and rational economic man in market capitalism), but we see this as a matter of empirical  
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35 investigation, not definitional necessity. Ethos, by facilitating the alignment of the self with an  
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37 institutional order that allows for multiple actor roles, also makes it possible for people to  
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39 occasionally transcend their home logics (Fan & Zietsma, in press), and for some people to have  
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41 more difficulty to do so than others (Toubiana & Zietsma, in press).  
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47 In sum, there are many connections between our theorizing and the work on emotional  
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49 intelligence and on institutional logics, but these connections can only be researched and  
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51 elaborated when we employ constructs that bring into focus different analytic lenses. In this  
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53 regard, emotional competence and ethos are important concepts for understanding actorhood, a  
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55 central fulcrum between institutional orders and people's life experience. EC and ethos then  
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promise to clarify rather than muddle the conceptual waters of studies of emotions and institutions.

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