

# Assessing sustainable impacts amidst institutional constraints:

A case study of the Ghanaian mining industry

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# Content

## Literature review

- Institutional theory and institutional constraints
- Business sustainability research and institutional theory
- Business sustainability research and impact assessments

## Research

- A case study of OSH practices in the Ghanaian mining industry
- Results: Institutional constraints to learning from safety incidences

## Implications

- Triangulation of impact assessments
- Evolution or revolution?

# Institutional theory and institutional constraints

- ❑ Institutions provide order to social life by enabling and hindering social action
- ❑ Institutions are defined as shared beliefs, norms, and values
- ❑ Beliefs, norms, and values are often taken for granted and unattended in research and practices

**→ Institutional constraints are taken for granted beliefs, norms, and values which impede learning and change in social contexts**

# Unclarities in the use of institutional theory

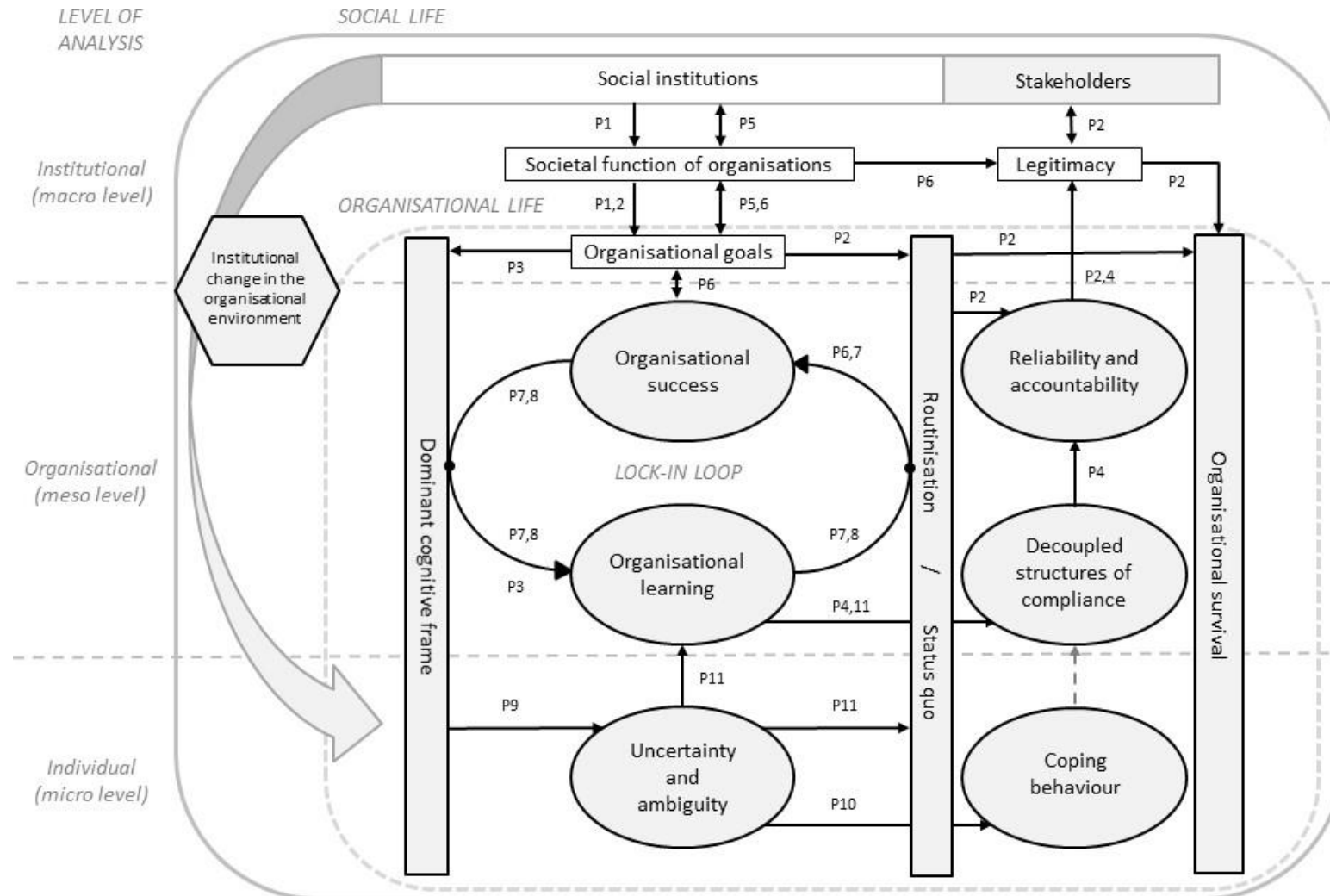
- ❑ What are institutions in research contexts?
- ❑ Where and how do institutions unfold among actors?
- ❑ How dynamic are institutions?
- ❑ What are the impacts of institutions on researched phenomena?

→ **'Taken for grantedness of taken for grantedness' in applying institutional theory**

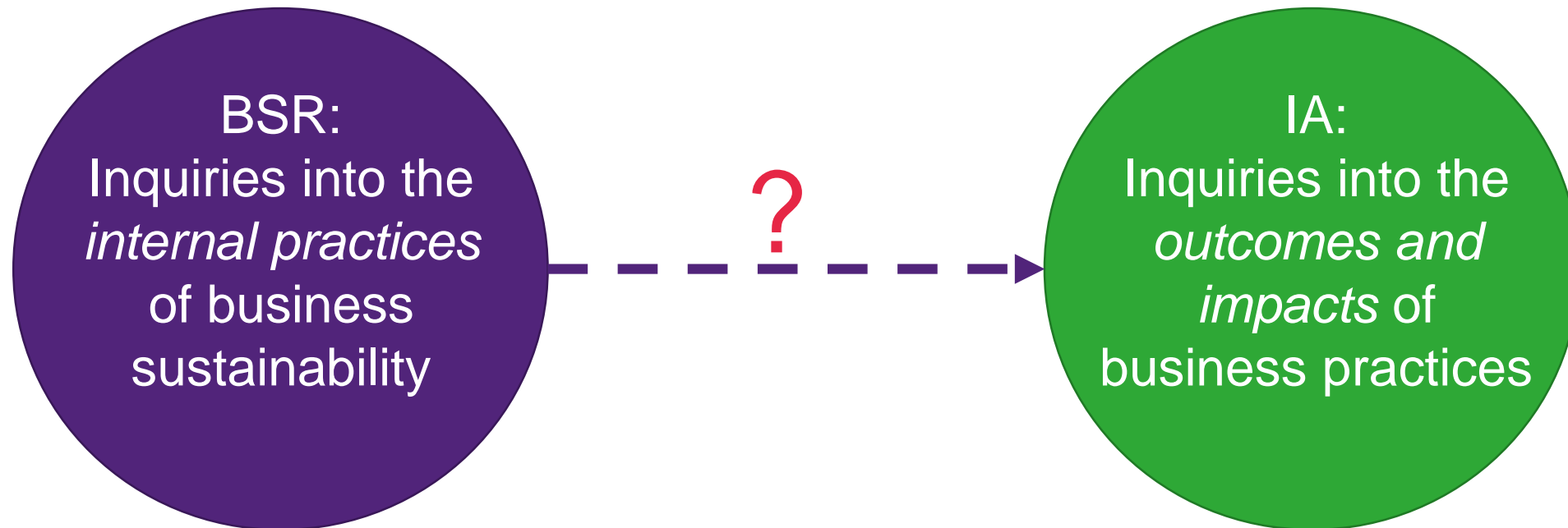
# Effects on business sustainability research using institutional theory

- Are concepts of business sustainability research or sustainability practices of businesses 'institutions'?
  - Which are the institutions influencing business practices in research contexts?
  - Do all stakeholders always and equally exert institutional pressure?
- **How is business sustainability enabled or impeded by societal institutions?**
- **The challenge: Sustainability requires an unprecedented shift in societal institutions about how we perceive of human development in the world**

# A new perspective: Institutional constraints to business sustainability



# Business sustainability research and impact assessments



Halme et al., in press:

“However, **we are not aware of any empirical research** that would really tease out **the link** between CSR management and environmental and social performance to understand the nature of this link, when it will lead to performance improvements, and when and why the link might be broken, preventing performance improvements”

# Research questions

How do institutional constraints affect changes for sustainability?

What are the implications for change interventions and impact assessments?



# Case study

- ❑ Learning from safety incidences in 5 large-scale mining operations
- ❑ All mines operate best practices in the form of OHS management systems
- ❑ Interviews with 41 investigators and 8 victims of accidents
- ❑ Interviews took place from October 2016 to March 2017
- ❑ Content analysis of transcripts

→ What impedes learning from safety incidences?



# Wealth as an institutional constraint

At the organisational level:

*“The truth of the matter is that we say safety is our paramount thing, we all agree. But the point is, **the key focus here is to make sure that we get our gold.**”*

Frontline supervisor with core safety job

At the individual level:

*“I was concerned about the company, **the fact that we were losing money**, because the rig was there doing nothing.”*

Frontline supervisor, incident victim

# Hierarchy as an institutional constraint

At the societal and organisational level:

*“**You cannot write something against your boss** even though that is the right thing and exactly what happened. An accident happened and in the course of finding the causes, you realised your manager faulted. **We don’t have the culture to boldly write and say ‘yes, he faulted.’”***

Frontline supervisor with core safety job

At the individual level:

*“I, the investigator who worked on the case, will realise that this is how or what is supposed to be written. But because of the powers that be, somebody might influence or bully you or his way through, **forcing the report to be changed.**”*

Frontline supervisor with core safety job

# Regulatory practice as an institutional constraint

At the organisational level:

*“I think the system they are creating is that, **over here, procedures and rules are the most important** and we, the workers, should follow them always. Even if you have a good way of doing things, you should forget it and go by what the rule say.”*

Frontline worker without core safety job

At the individual level:

*“Look, the last time one superintendent was telling me that **there is not a place to be trying things;** we do things strictly according to the procedure.”*

Frontline worker, incident victim

# Social identity as an institutional constraint

At the societal and organisational level:

*“Let me also add that **the whole idea of whistle blowing is something we have not embraced as Ghanaian**. You see, sometimes you will see a colleague engaging in something unsafe and dangerous, which endangers him and the whole team. But you can’t say it. You just have to be quiet. Because if you say it, you will be tagged as a chucker or gossip and **people will start calling you names.**”*

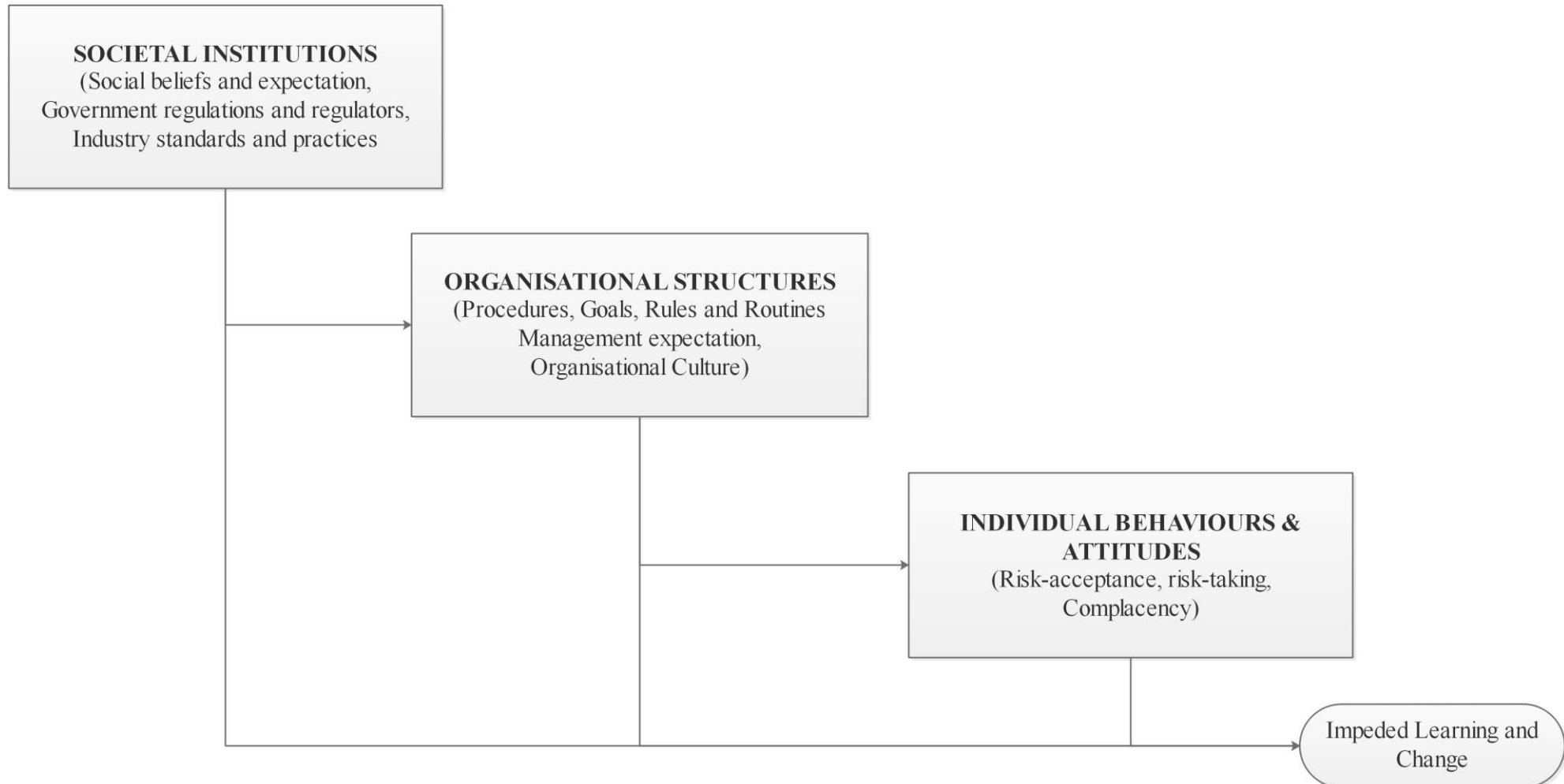
Frontline supervisor with core safety job

At the individual level:

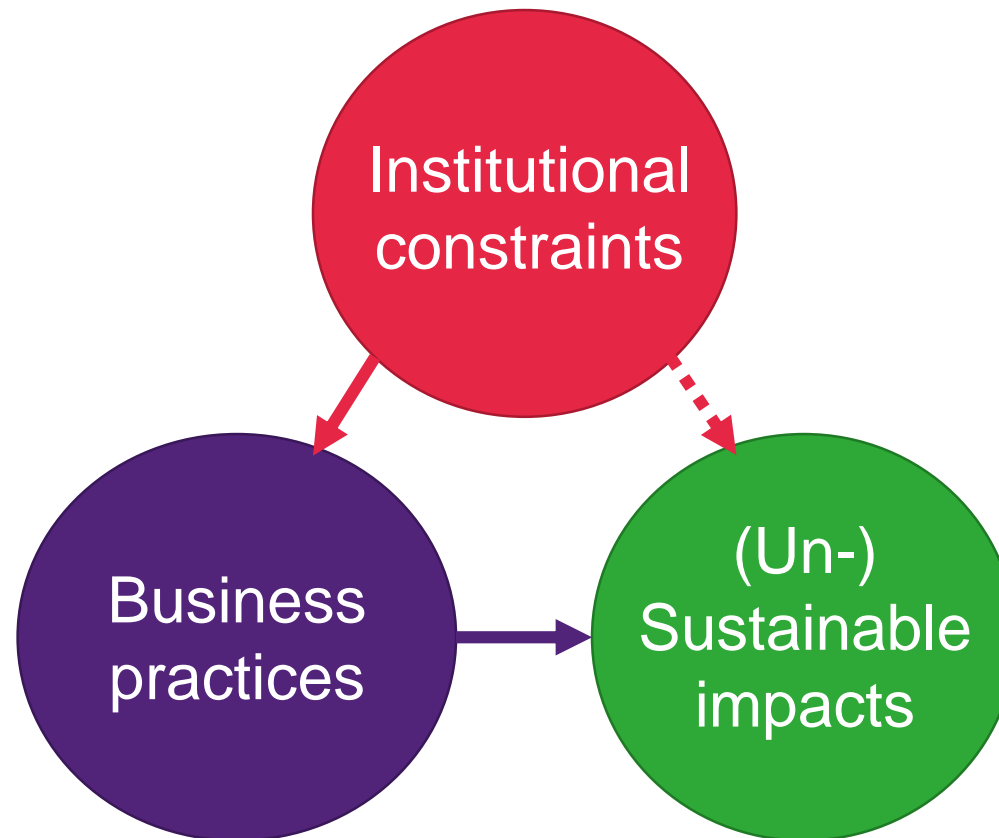
*“Sometimes, too, you know that ‘mba ha akye’ [I’ve been here for long] things. You see people doing the wrong thing. You tell them to stop and they will ask you: ‘when did you come here?’ They will say, they have been here for long time and that is how things are done here, and that they have been doing things that way for a long time and nothing bad has ever happened. So, in that way, **I was forced to do same, to join the masses, keep quiet, and be part of the crew.**”*

Frontline supervisor without core safety job

# How institutional constraints affect changes for sustainability



# Implications: Triangulation of performance evidence



→ Without changes in societal institutions guiding social behaviour, attempts to change business practices and the utility of impact assessments will remain constrained

# Conclusion

- ❑ While unfolding at the societal macro-level, institutional constraints affect business practices at organisational and individual levels of analysis
- ❑ Institutional constraints are numerous and can be context dependent
- ❑ Change interventions and impact assessments will have to **evolve** to enable the development of practical change theory based on how business practices relate to outcomes and impacts
- ❑ Change interventions and impact assessments will have to **expand their foci** if aiming to address societal foundations of unsustainable practices





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# Thank you

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