An understanding of decoupling in complex institutional fields remains elusive. In such fields, a multiplicity of logics engenders many possible institutional intentions as well as the likelihood of the co-occurrence of decoupled and coupled practices. In this study, I adopt Weick's dialectical view of loose coupling and integrate it with theory on institutional logics and vocabularies of motive to posit that the meaning of the decoupling (and coupling) of practices when a formal program is adopted in a complex institutional field can be found in the connection(s) that the (de)couplings have with the various available institutional intentions for such adoptions. I used the fuzzy-set approach to comparative case analysis to explore this issue among 28 business facilities that adopted an environmental management system. I found very different systematic connections between the coupling and decoupling of expected environmental management system program practices and the multiple institutional intentions given for the environmental management system adoptions. Moreover, these connections showed that the decoupling of certain practices were pivotal to understanding the meaning of the program adoptions.

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