

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Unlearning refers to the intentional and often challenging process of discarding outdated knowledge, assumptions, and institutional routines that no longer align with evolving circumstances.

Institutional logics are socially constructed patterns of symbols, material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms that guide organizational behavior.

RESEARCH DESIGN

QUESTIONS

1. How does organizational logic explain the introduction, importance and abolition of the BRIC program?
2. Does BRIC demonstrate evidence for unlearning at FEMA?
3. How does organizational logic interact with unlearning?

METHOD

Paradigmatic case study | Content analysis

EARLY FINDINGS

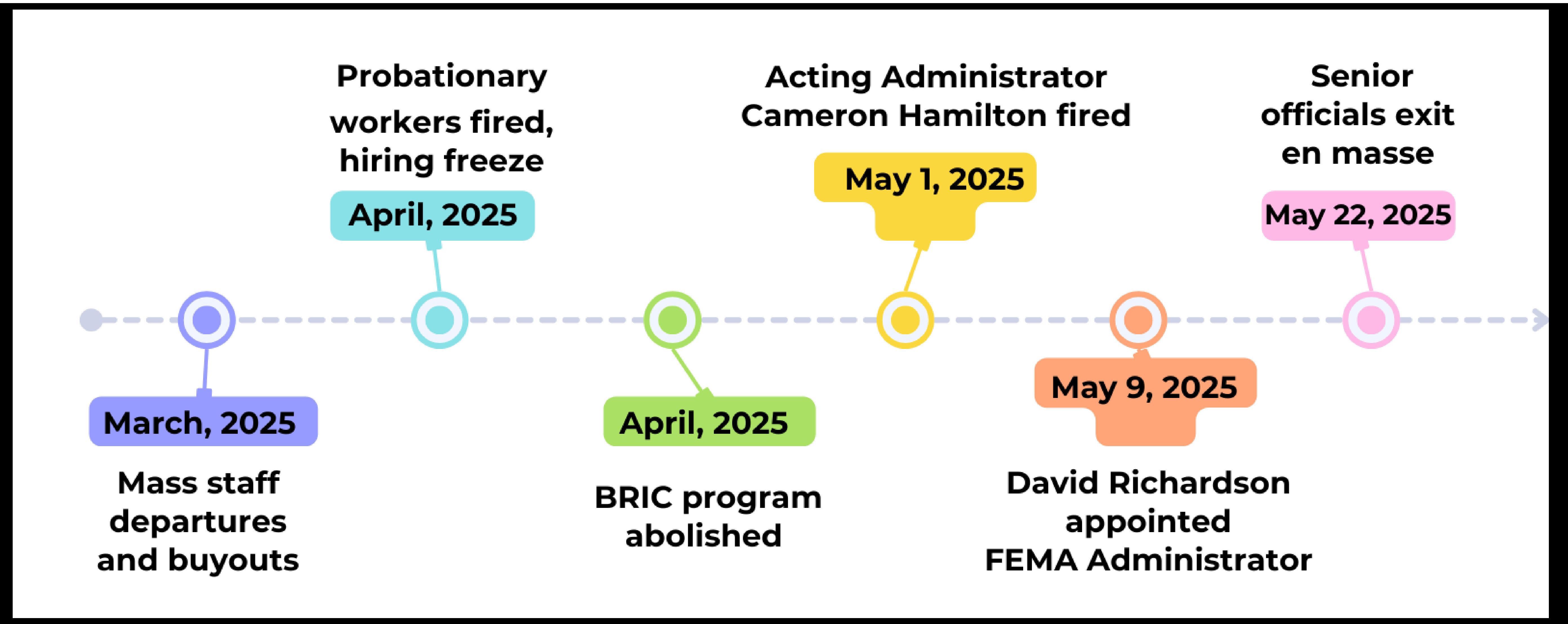
React-Recover Logic

Prioritizes emergency response and recovery and state leadership.

Resilience-Prevent Logic

Emphasizes pre-disaster mitigation, preparedness and Federal leadership.

BRIC’s design—emphasizing innovation, equity, and climate resilience—intended to institutionalize the resilience-prevent logic, yet its implementation encountered resistance from actors and structures aligned with the react-recover paradigm.



Key staffing events and policy reforms at FEMA in 2025.

KEY INSIGHTS

LOGIC SHAPES ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: Emerging logics may coexist with, not replace, entrenched ones. Organizations need to proactively recognize, measure and manage logic multiplicity and conflicts.

UNLEARNING AND LOGIC INFLUENCE EACH OTHER: There emerges a complex, reciprocal relationship between institutional logics and organizational unlearning. The dominant logic hinders the capacity and willingness to unlearn established practices.

UNLEARNING IS A STRATEGIC NECESSITY: Courageous leadership and adaptive governance are essential to let go of outdated practices and align with changing risk landscapes.

| BRIC FEATURES | UNLEARNING | RATIONALE |
|---|---|--|
| Shifting from Post-Disaster to Pre-Disaster Funding | Discards reactive practice | BRIC reoriented FEMA's funding structure by prioritizing investments before disasters occur, disrupting the entrenched model. |
| Prioritizing Future Risk and Climate Projections | Triggered by environmental change | BRIC introduced criteria that considered projected future risks like climate change and demographic shifts. |
| Valuing Nature-Based and Community-Led Solutions | Replaces engineering-centric traditions | Shift toward ecological interventions challenged FEMA’s preference. |
| Redesigning Eligibility and Fund Allocation | Discards historical norms on eligibility and geography | BRIC revised funding eligibility, incorporating broader temporal and spatial risk assessments. |
| Emphasizing Equity in Program Design | Challenges technocratic objectivity in cost-benefit logic | BRIC embedded social equity by prioritizing disadvantaged communities, redefining how FEMA evaluates project worth. |