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## **The Unconscious and Institutional Work**

### **Introduction**

Institutional work has been defined as 'purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 216). However, as yet there has been little critical consideration of how such action might be shaped by dynamics that are beyond reason or intent. There is increasing interest among institutional scholars in how institutions are 'inhabited' (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006) and in particular, 'the socially embedded, inter-dependent, relational and emotional nature of persons' lived experience of institutional arrangements' (Creed et al, 2014: 9). Such experiences are embedded both in institutional systems of meaning and in situated systems of emotional bonds. These bonds 'emerge as reactions to our perceptions of our social standing and that of others relative to norms and standards within social structure' (Creed 2014: 10). What has not yet been studied is the extent to which such emotional bonds may be the result of unconscious relations as well as conscious reactions; and how broader unconscious dynamics may infuse institutional systems of conformity and control.

Institutional work is focused on 'the relationship between institutions and the actors that populate them' and on the myriad ways in which institutionalization is 'enacted in the everyday getting by of individuals and groups who reproduce the roles, rites and rituals at the same time as they challenge, modify and disrupt them' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011: 56-57). The people who undertake institutional work are seen as 'reflexive, goal-orientated and capable' (Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2011: 1024) and their agency is embedded in the very sets of social-symbolic structures it is aiming to affect (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012; Styhre, 2014). In this paper I argue that what people bring to their institutional work is not only purposive, that there are likely to be aspects to purposiveness that are unconscious and unwitting, that are shaped by individual and

social defenses, and that are active despite being hidden from awareness. In addition, I argue that people's agency can be embedded in *institutional illogics*, which are constructed in the ongoing interplay between unconscious fantasy and domination.

My contribution to knowledge highlights two areas of theoretical development in institutional work. First, I build an argument for considering the interconnection of unconscious dynamics and purposive action in order to expose the emotional and political complexities of maintaining, disrupting and creating institutions. These include the defensive effort, symbolic violence and purposive inaction of maintenance; the disruptive and maintaining effects of unconscious dynamics that are at the same time both hidden and active; and the creative and disruptive potential of fantasy and interpretation in public. Second, I have coined the notion of institutional illogics. These are created under an illusion of stability and sustained when people act *as if* institutions are the stable containers of coherent underlying logics (even when these logics are conflicting) (Vince, 2002); when people pretend not to know about disavowed beliefs and assumptions that form the background of public values ('unknown knowns') (Baum, 2011; Žižek, 2004); or in emotionally and politically complex situations where shared fantasy seems to be preferable to truth (Žižek, 1999). I bring these specific elements together in Table 1 (below) as a representation of the unconscious in institutional work and I provide examples to illustrate and to further develop these interconnected ideas. In the conclusion to this paper I discuss the consequences of the ideas I have presented both in terms of research and practice. My starting point is to define what I mean by the term 'the unconscious'.

### **What is the unconscious?**

In order to address the question what is the unconscious, we have to consider what the unconscious is not. 'The unconscious is not a storehouse for unused thoughts; indeed it is not a place at all. It refers, rather, to a type of idea, one which is hidden from awareness yet still active (dynamic) pushing for release' (Frosh, 2002: 13). Therefore, repressed material does not remain dormant but 'has a life of its own, with its own build-ups and releases of tension' (Frosh, 2002: 14). The unconscious is a leap of faith because it 'is inferred from an analysis of features in human behaviour... which cannot be understood except on the hypothesis that there is an

unconscious' (Easthope, 1999: 4). In addition, 'there is no data that can establish the truth of the unconscious because the unconscious ruins the possibility of actual knowledge – it calls everything into question' (Frosh, 2002: 12). My position in this paper is that the unconscious is important because it can help us to recognize that 'the truth of what is being talked about is not *necessarily* important (original emphasis) – the fantasies, dreams and imaginings... do matter, and *they enable the growth of understanding*' (my emphasis) (Craib, 2001: 23). This raises a question concerning how the unconscious might be revealed in ways that enable the growth of understanding, or at least contribute to ongoing negotiations about how to understand things within their particular emotional and political context.

The unconscious can reveal itself in several ways. For example, it is identifiable in *language slips*; through *unconscious defenses* both individual and social; and as *underlying institutional dynamics* that are bound up with the reproduction of social structure and with systems of domination (Voronov and Vince, 2012). A good illustration of the unconscious power of language slips took place on the 6th May 1983 when George Bush, then the U.S. Vice-President, was addressing a College in Southern Idaho and talking about his relationship with the then U.S. President, Ronald Reagan. He said: 'for seven-and-a-half years I've worked alongside him, and I am proud to be his partner. We've had triumphs, we've made mistakes, we've had sex... (*audience laughter*) setbacks, we've had setbacks' (quoted in Easthope, 1999: 14-15). It would be nonsense to take this slip literally, but it is not difficult to imagine that it is an unconscious expression of a desire for power, a desire for the role of President.

Unconscious defenses are an ordinary aspect of organizational life. It is very common in the 'everyday getting by of individuals and groups' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011: 56) for the bad feelings that one has about oneself at work to be unconsciously transferred onto others. This defensive mechanism, called projective identification, protects the ego from anxiety by 'splitting' repressed emotions into good and bad objects. Good feelings are retained to maintain self-esteem, whereas bad feelings are packaged and unconsciously projected onto others. For example, a leader might project his or her 'unwanted self' (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012) onto a subordinate, thereby transferring failings that are unacceptable to the self onto another. Through unconscious

defenses, hated aspects of the leader's self can be made to belong to someone else, who can then be punished for them (Vince and Mazon, 2014).

Defenses are also social in the sense that they are an unconscious aspect of the structures, practices, policies and authority relations that characterize a system. Their purpose is the collective management of anxiety (Bain, 1998; Krantz and Gilmore, 1990). For example, one of the first studies to identify the functioning of defenses against anxiety in an institutional system was Menzies' (1960) study of nursing services in a general hospital. She found that organizational approaches to scheduling, decision-making and work assignment 'created a depersonalized and fragmented pattern of care. Coupled with infantilizing management practices, the system promoted dependency, ritualistic work, impersonal relationships with patients, and other characteristics that had the effect of shielding nurses from the painful anxieties stimulated by close and intimate contact with patients and their families' (Krantz, 2010: 193). While practices, policies and authority relations exist to facilitate work, they also provide opportunities to eliminate situations that expose people to anxiety-provoking activity and to insulate people from the consequences of their actions. Social defenses undermined task accomplishment and have a negative impact on the developmental potential contained in effective work arrangements (Krantz, 2010). Such dynamics are a reflection of the 'social unconscious' that 'ties people together into collective emotional and political relations of which they are largely unaware' (Weinberg, 2007: 308). The idea of the social unconscious implies that there are social bonds between self and other that are not solely based on what people do together, but also on who we are together, what we mean for and with each other. We may adopt or fall into patterns of relating that (e.g.) represent aspects of our early childhood; that project unwanted parts of self onto others; that assist in the avoidance of fears; or that give rise to fantasies that shape both individual and collective desires.

There is a continuous interplay between emotions and power relations within organizations. Emotions and power relations are intertwined because emotions are integral to the constant process of negotiating systemic order (Voronov, 2014). For example, Baum (2011) explores how social institutions mobilize unconscious desires and anxieties in ways that create social inequality and then shape policies that do little to reduce it. His essay relates specifically to US planners,

and their approaches to planning related to issues of poverty. He considers the role of unconscious emotional interests in shaping public policy. The political problem he outlines arises from the tension between planners' ethical position based on 'the fair and honest treatment of colleagues and clients in the process of planning' (Baum, 2011: 112) and their positioning of 'the poor as a discrete group, isolated from the economically successful, as if poverty were somehow caused by the poor themselves, or at least as if it could be reduced by changing only the poor' (Baum, 2011: 117). This produces a fantasy relationship where planners believe that they are 'doing good' while 'they fail to analyze housing land use, employment, income and other issues realistically or act in ways that affect these problems very much' (Baum, 2011: 119).

These examples suggest that there is potential for an additional relational view of agency alongside the one outlined by Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013: 1279-1280) who situate institutional work 'in the practical work through which individuals encounter contradictory institutional practices, negotiate adaptations that facilitate task accomplishment, and reconstruct their underlying institutional logics'. An interest in the unconscious and institutional work suggests that we could also situate institutional work in the fantasy work of self-other relations, through which people and groups encounter tensions in how institutions are inhabited, establish social defenses against unwanted emotions, and perpetuate underlying institutional illogics. This implies that the idea of distributed agency (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011) would not only apply to the coordinated and uncoordinated efforts of large numbers of actors, but also to the unconscious dynamics that tie small and large groups of people together into defensive patterns of relating and into fantasies that are as integral to negotiations around maintaining, disrupting and creating systemic order as 'reflective purposefulness' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) or 'goal-directed effort' (Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013). I explore the issues associated with the unconscious and institutional work in some detail in the following section.

### **Connecting the Unconscious and Institutional Work**

Table 1 (below) represents an initial explanation of how unconscious dynamics are connected to institutional work.

Table 1: Connecting the Unconscious and Institutional Work

	<i>Maintaining</i>	<i>Disrupting</i>	<i>Creating</i>
<b>Institutional Work:</b> ‘Purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions’	Justification, repairing, enacting institutional stability, decoupling, ‘shaping the change trajectory’	Undermining the existing institution, an ongoing process of subversion of beliefs and norms	Joint social action, voice, improvising, public reflection, attempting to renew the institution from within
<b>The Unconscious and Institutional Work:</b> The interconnection of unconscious dynamics and purposive action	(Unconscious) defensive effort, symbolic violence and purposive inaction	Unconscious <i>dynamics</i> – hidden from awareness yet active (‘the unconscious... calls everything into question’)	Active interpretation, social dreaming, the creative potential of fantasy
<b>Institutional Illogics:</b> The interconnection of fantasy and domination	‘Imagined stability’ (organizations are ‘taken in by their own fantasies’) and embodied conformity (interpellation)	‘Unknown knows’ (‘The disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about even though they form the background of our public values’)	The political effects of fantasy (‘A shared lie is an incomparably stronger bond for a group than the truth’)

*Institutional Work*

In the first row of the table, I summarize key terms from research on institutional work, attaching these terms to the typology of creating, maintaining and disrupting. While these ideas are separate visually in the table, it is important to acknowledge a degree of overlap between the institutional work of maintaining, disrupting and creating. For example, Styhre’s (2014) research,

into gender equality and institutional work within the Church of Sweden represents both institutional disruption and creation.

Purposive action aimed at maintaining institutions has been seen to involve a range of strategic and political work. For example, Clark and Newell (2013) identify strategies to *decouple* formal policies from actual internal practices and routines within US capital markets as a form of institutional maintenance. The ability to *shape the change trajectory* offers powerful actors the opportunity to both maintain and enhance continued professional dominance. In their study of elite professionals in the NHS, Currie et al (2012) identified how these professionals were able to mobilize the concept of risk as a way of touching the underlying concerns and anxieties of healthcare policy makers and the generally risk averse environment in which they work. Mobilizing fears about risk helped to maintain actors' professional dominance in the face of external threats to their privileged position. In other words, risk was used as 'a persuasive concept to promote institutional maintenance given societal and policy emphasis upon its management' (Currie et al, 2012: 958).

Taupin (2012) has studied the *justifications* produced by stakeholders in the credit rating industry. He revealed three interconnected mechanisms that lead to institutional maintenance: confirmation work through repetition or reformulation of existing regulatory arrangements; qualifying objects according to the existing concepts of regulation; and a circularity that sustains controversy and maintains an inability to resolve issues. He refers to this circularity as a 'self-feeding logic'. Therefore, 'maintenance results not from the soundness of the agreement reached through the justification process but from the justification process itself, which prevents the debate from ending... thus leading to perpetuation of the status quo' (Taupin, 2012: 547). The focus of justification work is on sustaining controversy in ways that support the continuation of the foundations of legitimacy. In this way, incommensurable, opposing views can produce a maintenance process, a 'discordant accord' (551).

Institutional disruption involves *undermining* the mechanisms that lead people to comply with existing institutional dispositions. For example, Cascio and Luthans (2014) discuss how political prisoners imprisoned at Robben Island were able to transform the abuse and subjugation of their experience by separating existing rules and practices from their moral foundations, to emphasize

the shared roles from all racial groups in South Africa within a future democratic society. This was achieved through undermining the costs and penalties associated with subverting taken for granted assumptions. Similarly, Styhre (2014) describes the ways in which female ministers became accepted as legitimate servants of the church as ‘a continuous and ongoing activity (of disruption) with no clearly defined end points’ (Styhre, 2014: 115) and ‘stressing agency as the distributed and collective capacity to question established beliefs and norms’ (105).

Institutional creation has tended to be associated with the work of institutional entrepreneurs (Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013). However, purposive action aimed at creating institutions might involve, for example, attention to the creation of communication spaces that enable voice (Burns et al, 2014). In this example, Burns et al (2014) research the mistreatment of older people in care homes. They show how the dominant representation of older people as being vulnerable and passive has meant that their perspectives on living in care homes have largely gone unheard. In addition, established work routines limited the ability of staff to provide quality care, so that residents were ‘subject to and constrained by institutional practices restricting potential to care and be cared for’ (Burns et al, 2014: 136). Similarly, the idea of public reflection (Raelin 2001 and 2008) recognizes the connection between the problems experienced by people in organizations and the social and historical context within which they are embedded (Raelin, 2008). Public reflection is a process of institutional creation because it reconfigures notions of accountability as an everyday part of work roles and relations, and because it encourages open interpretation in situations where there is often an underlying fear of speaking out. “Sophisticated work occurs where people can learn publicly, risking personal exposure in the service of developing shared understanding, and collaborating in such a way that vulnerability is neither hidden nor pathologized” (Krantz, 2010: 198). These ideas emphasize the importance of distributed agency, which is to say that ‘institutional work is joint social action, and the social accomplishments derived from successful institutional work can not simply be linked to individual events and occurrences’ (Styhre, 2014: 117).

### *The unconscious and institutional work*

In the second row of Table 1, I summarize the ways in which the typology of creating, maintaining and disrupting can be related to unconscious defenses and dynamics. Once again, although these ideas are separate visually in the table, there is a more pronounced degree of overlap (represented in the grey shading in Table 1) between maintaining and disrupting than in the first row. Indeed, when we get to the third row of the table, I argue that there is little or no distinction between maintaining, disrupting and creating in the context of institutional illogics.

Unconscious defenses are likely to inform both maintenance and disruption. While individual (psychic) defenses against anxiety are an important aspect of individual action and help to ‘ensure that what is unconscious remains so’ (Hinshelwood, 2009: 513), peoples’ purposive action to create, maintain and disrupt institutions is set in the context of social defenses. Social defenses against anxiety refer to defensive dynamics that characterize whole systems (Menzies, 1960); that are representative of professional domains (Bain, 1998); or that express defenses necessary to create politically expedient organizational distinctions (e.g.) between the roles of manager and leader (Krantz and Gilmore, 1990). Social defenses are distinct from psychic defenses. They are unconscious dynamics that become attached to (e.g.) structures, practices, policies and authority relations and are used for the purpose of collectively managing anxiety. ‘They eliminate situations that expose people to anxiety-provoking activity altogether or they insulate people from the consequences of their actions’ (Krantz, 2010: 193). The effect of social defenses can be to maintain ‘ineffective, unsatisfying and dispiriting work practices... for the added purpose of managing primitive emotion rather than for facilitating competent work’ (Krantz, 2010: 194). Attempts to change (to disrupt) structures, practices, policies and authority relations may undermine the social defence system and weaken support for individuals’ psychic defenses. ‘The prospect of change, then, is accompanied by the prospect of frightening emotional experience coming to the surface. This, in turn, stimulates resistance to change. This insight deepened our understanding of why so many reorganizations fail, regardless of how sensible they might be’ (Krantz, 2010: 194).

A person or persons' actions to maintain and disrupt institutions may be unwitting as well as purposeful. The idea of purpose is associated with resolve (the determination to act), with reason (that there is a rationale), and with intention (that there is a deliberate aim or objective). However, our purposive actions in institutions are not solely connected with reason and intent, they are also bound in 'passions and desires (that) are not reducible to the pursuit of rational interests' (Voronov and Vince, 2012: 59). Passions and desires may draw people into action despite themselves, thereby losing sight of their original intent and resolve. For example, Eshraghi and Taffler (2012) consider the role of the unconscious in investment decision-making, particularly hedge funds, that touch a potent underlying desire for wealth. 'Some high-profile hedge funds were transformed, in the minds of investors, into objects of excitement and desire, with their unconscious representation dominating their original investment purpose... the excitement of investing in what hedge funds represented became divorced from the anxiety associated with the potential consequences of taking excessive investment risk' (p. 1245).

Unconscious maintenance is also achieved through symbolic power and symbolic violence. The concept of symbolic power 'enables an understanding of how unconscious and embodied processes operate to reproduce the social order, illustrating how domination takes place with the active (and passive) consent of the dominated, but *not* with the conscious intention of the dominant' (Dick and Nadin, 2011: 307, original emphasis). Dick and Nadin's (2011) research in the private care sector shows how the psychological contract between employers and employees is bound up with the interests of power holders. Using Bourdieu's notion of 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 2000) they consider 'how such interests come to be recognized as legitimate ends, whose achievement is in the interests of all... It is this embodied aspect of social structure that is at the heart of the operation of symbolic violence: the process through which social advantages and disadvantages are understood to be the consequence of one's own choices and dispositions' (p. 296-297). Power arises from contestations over legitimacy 'and those contestations occur through subjection at the level of unconsciousness' (Nightingale and Ojha, 2013: 30) and through the reproduction of dominant interests. For example, in their study of (public service) leadership development as symbolic violence, Tomlinson, O'Reilly and Wallace (2013) suggest that leadership development helps to 'reproduce the interests of those *who lead* by appealing to the interests (and related value sets) of those *who are led*. This operates through almost tacit forms of

*misrecognition* among the victims of symbolic violence – in this case, leaders and other professionals who are its recipients’ (Tomlinson, O’Reilly and Wallace, 2013: 86, original emphasis) allowing leaders to strengthen their positioning within established fields. Similarly, Robinson and Kerr (2009) highlight the emotional components of symbolic violence used by leaders to establish ‘a culture of togetherness’ and create emotional attachment to leadership initiatives.

One example of the involvement of the unconscious in institutional creation can be found in the notion of ‘social dreaming’ (Baglioni and Fubini, 2013; Gosling and Case, 2013; Lawrence, 2003). This perspective understands ‘the role of dreams as social rather than individual phenomena and suggests that as such they may serve as resources for future imaginings’ (Gosling and Case, 2013: 705). The thinking behind this approach departs from ‘Freud’s theory that dreams exist to disguise wishes and conceal needs on the part of the individual dreamer’ (Lawrence, 2003: 610) and connects with Bion’s idea that the outcomes of the creative process of dreaming are embodied in the culture of society. By concentrating on the dream and not the person who dreams it, the cultural context of dreaming can be addressed (Lawrence, 2003). Social dreaming is ‘a method in which organization or community members gather formally in a “social dreaming matrix” to recount their dreams (i.e. those that occur during sleep – not wishes and hopes). In this context dreams express aspects of psychological experience of a world that is shared by all members; bringing a dream to the matrix is a way of holding up a fragment of experience that might connect to others, and in doing so help to make sense of social life’ (Gosling and Case, 2013: 715). Individual dreams may produce ‘associations among the participants that lead to the matrix becoming a multi-verse of meaning. Individuals can use their authority to pursue or reject new thinking that emerges’ (Lawrence, 2003: 610). Some dreams are elaborated to include examination of the social context of the dream and the symbolism it evokes. For example, Gosling and Case (2013) suggest that social dreaming can provide ‘sources of non-rational insight’ into the increasing dangers of climate change.

## *Institutional Illogics*

In the final row of Table 1., I highlight a range of unconscious dynamics that defy the distinction between maintaining, disrupting and creating institutions, and I characterize these dynamics as institutional illogics. If institutional logics are ‘broad structures of meaning that are taken-for-granted and organize actively’ (Hallet and Ventresca, 2006: 214) then institutional illogics can be understood as resulting from the continuously disruptive effects of the unconscious, and in particular, unconscious fantasy. Fantasy is ‘the name given to the endless materializations of unconscious life... the mind is always active, constantly generating unconscious ideas, and it is through the lens provided by these ideas that reality is perceived’ (Frosh, 2002: 51). Because the unconscious is always potentially disruptive, because it calls everything into question, fantasy has political effects. Žižek (1999) captures a powerful example of these effects when he states that ‘a shared lie is often a stronger bond for a group than the truth’ (p. 99). To put it a different way, ideas that are personally or politically expedient hold people together in groups and help to define how peoples’ inner worlds are connected to institutional systems of conformity or control. These dynamics both defy logic and become an aspect of institutional logics.

For example, Levine (2003), in exploring organizational commitment to diversity, identifies a ‘fantasy of the organization as the peaceable kingdom. In this fantasy, cultural differences and the group identities through which they exist do not foster bias-related behavior. The organization becomes the community of the diverse, the place where they live together peaceably. In the peaceable kingdom, ethnic, racial, gender, religious and class differences do not promote bias-related behaviors, as of course they have through much of human history’ (Levine, 2003: 283). In this way, the fantasy of a peaceable kingdom imagines an organizational community brought together by a diverse (and therefore creative) workforce – despite, or perhaps because of, the evidence of ‘human history’. It is a fantasy that discourages the idea that differences are integral to group identities and that such differences are often implicitly mobilized in the service of the institution.

Similarly, Ekman (2013) identifies a fantasy of ‘limitless potential’ in an institution, which has emotional and political effects on both managers and employees. The idea of persons’ limitless potential arises from increased relational intensity in response to the personalization of expectations. These expectations work both from above and below. Managers exploit relational intensity to try and increase employees’ productivity and consent. Employees exploit it in an attempt to promote idealized images of work, where each person can be shown to be striving to do their best for the institution. Through a fantasy of limitless potential, both ‘managers and employees alike have become deeply attached to their own domination. As a consequence of this attachment, they take turns trying to seduce and control each other...’ (Ekman, 2013: 1177). A fantasy of limitless potential endures because it creates ‘intense recognition’ in the place of ‘concrete expectations about responsibility’ (Ekman, 2013: 1160).

It would not be appropriate to see the fantasy of a ‘peaceable kingdom’ or a fantasy of the ‘limitless potential’ of people within institutions as distorted perceptions. It is not that these fantasies are (completely) a defense against the difficulties and complexities of institutions, or that they represent a wish or an ideal concerning what the institution could or should be. Rather, for the study of the unconscious and institutional work it is important to connect with the structuring effects of fantasy, with the fact that the fantasy of a ‘peaceable kingdom’ or of ‘limitless potential’ shows us how desire and control are linked in institutions. Fantasy is not a distortion of experience; it ties together the inner world of individuals with social and political dynamics generated in institutions, and with power relations that underpin institutional actors’ purposive action and purposive inaction.

The notion of an organization as a ‘peaceable kingdom’ is not solely a fantasy in the sense that it helps to avoid differences arising from (e.g.) race and gender, and the potential conflicts that might arise from them. Fantasy here is also a process that controls difference; thereby ensuring that ‘peacefulness’ becomes a dominant disposition, a mechanism to control what difference means, as well as defining expectations in relation to social bonds and relations. While subjects interpellate institutional dispositions, this does not remove individual or collective feelings of resentment or resistance, or the ability of interpretations to explain, undermine or reinforce the fantasies that institutions come to rely on. The political effects of such fantasies work in ways

that both reinforce the connection of subjects to dominant dispositions and open possibilities for institutional disruption.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have engaged with a key question for institutional work: how might purposive action – the intentionality and effort that is integral to institutional work – be shaped by dynamics that are beyond reason and intent? I have argued that there are aspects to intentionality and effort that are connected to unconscious dynamics; and that it is important to consider the purposive *inaction, unintentionality and institutional illogics* that can arise from unconscious relational and institutional dynamics. There are various ways in which an interest in the unconscious can help with research and practice in institutional work. First, an appreciation of unconscious dynamics helps to engage with the emotional complexities of how institutions are ‘inhabited’ (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006), with the ‘emotional nature of persons’ lived experience of institutional arrangements’ (Creed et al, 2014). Second, an appreciation of unconscious dynamics can offer a different understanding of distributed agency. ‘Distributed agency invites researchers to explore how individual actors contribute to institutional change, how those contributions combine, how actors respond to one another’s efforts, and how the accumulation of those contributions leads to a path of institutional change or stability’ (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011: 55-56).

Consideration of the unconscious would suggest that agency is distributed because it happens in the context of unconscious dynamics (e.g.) social defenses, politically expedient fantasies, and freedoms of unintentionality that contribute both to change and stability. Finally, it is unhelpful to imagine that the fantasies institutions come to rely on are informed only by logics. The idea of institutional illogics allows researchers to engage with the interconnection between emotion and control, to examine the political effects of fantasies and defenses, as well as how they may be connected to imagined stability and to embodied conformity.

*(Note to the reader: post-EGOS, I plan to develop these areas in more detail, make use of the feedback at the conference, and discuss the implications for research and practice. If you have any thoughts, comments and suggestions then please do email me at [r.vince@bath.ac.uk](mailto:r.vince@bath.ac.uk)).*

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