

## Call for Papers

# An International Conference on Institutions and Work

June 17-19, 2010  
Simon Fraser University,  
Vancouver, Canada

### Organizers:

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### Aims of the Conference:

The notion of *institutional work* was introduced to embody and extend several streams of research on institutional processes. Defined as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215), the idea of institutional work reflects a shift in focus from isomorphism to change (Dacin et al., 2002), deterministic effects of structures to actors’ power and agency in manipulating and even transforming the institutional order (Battilana et al., 2009; Greenwood et al., 2008), and large scale, macro-level inquiries which concentrate on structures and practices to an interest in micro-level ideational dynamics (Zilber, 2008). The concept of institutional work also holds promise by connecting to a broader range of analytical tools and methodological avenues than have traditionally been employed to consider institutional dynamics and effects (Lawrence et al. 2009).

In this second international conference on institutional work, our aim is to revisit this concept by critically exploring new directions to develop (and problematize) it. In particular, our focus is on *the relationship between institutions and work*. Two sets of questions in particular motivate this conference:

- **The consequences of applying the concept of work to the study of agency and institutions.** The concept of work invokes notions such as effort, intentionality, coordination, roles, resistance, context and time. We aim to explore the implications of this metaphor for understanding the relationship between agency and institutions by addressing such question as: What is institutional work? What are its limits? How does it interact with that which is not workable? On which institutional levels does work take place and how do they interact? Can “institutional work” be performed toward any sort of institution, including those so naturalized that they are ‘taken for granted’, and if so under which conditions? Most generally, what are the costs and benefits of employing work as a metaphor to understand the relationship between agency and institutions?
- **The relationship between institutional work and other forms of work, and discussions and treatments of “work” in other contexts and disciplines.** Work has been a central topic of scholarly concern for a long time and across a broad range of disciplines and approaches. We encourage research that leverages and contributes to those traditions. How, for example, do ideas such as identity work (e.g. Alvesson et al., 2008) and emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983)

connect to the concept of institutional work? What can we learn from such literatures as labor process theory (Braverman, 1974; Knights & Willmott, 1990), critical studies of work and resistance (Jermier et al., 1994), studies of the experience of work (Terkel, 1974), or gender studies and the treatment of reproductive/maintenance work and how gender as an institution is reproduced across life domains (e.g. West & Zimmerman, 1987), for example through discursive work (Butler, 1993)? Can research on institutional work learn from insights gained by looking at concepts close to the notion of work such as bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1966)? Exploring the relationship between institutional work and others forms of work might also lead to question what is distinctive about institutional work, and to which extend it can be distinguished from other kinds of works and practices.

We welcome empirical research, as well as theoretical and methodological discussions that touch upon the potential of institutional work to reinvigorate institutional theory. We also encourage efforts to use the notion of institutional work to bridge institutional theory with other literatures and theoretical concerns within the discipline of Organization Theory and beyond.

### **Conference Structure**

The conference is intended to provide the opportunity for high quality discussion and feedback for presenters. To achieve those ends, it will be structured as a set of parallel streams, with a set of plenary talks and panels connecting the streams. All presented papers will be given reasonable time slots to allow for meaningful discussion and development of ideas.

### **Participants**

The conference is intended to host approximately fifty participants for intensive mutual discussions. Our aim is to secure participation from around the world and to give equal opportunity to newer as well as more established scholars.

### **Doctoral student workshop**

Prior to the conference, we will hold a one-day workshop for doctoral students with the participation of leading scholars in the field. Any students interested in participating, whether or not they are submitting a paper for consideration at the conference, are encouraged to contact us.

### **Venue**

Vancouver, Canada, ([www.vancouver.ca](http://www.vancouver.ca)) provides an extraordinarily beautiful and cosmopolitan setting for the conference. Bordered by the Coast Mountain Range and the Pacific Ocean, Vancouver is consistently recognized as one of the world's most beautiful and livable cities in the world. Its downtown is flanked by beaches and one of the largest urban parks in the world. The conference will be held in the outstanding facilities of the Segal Graduate School of Business ([business.sfu.ca](http://business.sfu.ca)), in the heart of downtown Vancouver, a few minutes walk from the ocean, Stanley Park and historic Gastown.

### **Submissions**

If you are interested in participating, please email an extended abstract (500-1000 words) of your proposed paper to the organizing committee by **January 31, 2010**. Please include contact information: name(s), affiliation(s) and e-mail address(es) of all authors. We also ask that you indicate who will attend the conference if your paper is accepted. PhD students who wish to participate in the pre-conference workshop should note this clearly on their submission. Authors will be notified on **February 28, 2010** whether their paper is accepted for presentation. Full papers should be submitted by **May 31, 2010**. Following the conference we will consider possible avenues for publication.

## References

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