POSITIVE INSTITUTIONAL WORK: EXPLORING INSTITUTIONAL WORK THROUGH THE LENS OF POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

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Despite its emancipatory ambitions and its rich portraits of agency, the institutional work literature has been criticized for its limited engagement with questions of normative social purpose. Synthesizing the literature on institutional work and on positive organizational scholarship, in this article I define positive institutional work as the creation or maintenance of institutional patterns that express mutually constitutive experiential and social goods. This synthesis expands existing theories of institutional work in three ways. It introduces the concept of experiential legitimacy and suggests that experiential surfacing may be a foundational aspect of positive institutional work. It offers collaborative inquiry as a largely overlooked solution to the paradox of embedded agency and explores such inquiry as a primary mode of positive agency. And it argues that positive institutional stability rests upon work aimed at making group boundaries and material practices more inclusive. Taken together, these three themes suggest new theoretical and practical directions for further inquiry into the relationship between institutional work and social purpose. They also contribute to the positive organizational scholarship literature's implicit institutional ambitions by articulating a more socially embedded vision of positive organizational practices.

Pressed to describe the kind of architecture conducive to human freedom, Michel Foucault responded, "Men have dreamed of liberating machines. But there are no machines of freedom by definition" (1999: 136). He cautioned against the search for fundamental, structural explanations of the lived-in experiences of specific human beings in a specific time and place. "I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom" (1999: 135).

Foucault reminds us of the stubborn fact that our highest social aspirations and deepest human yearnings are experiential. They have a lived quality that emerges as our subjective states interact with the subjective states of other people and with wider meaning systems. The "experiential turn" is key to understanding positive phenomena related to fulfillment, optimal

functioning, and what is involved in living a good life (Rathunde, 2001: 140). Social purposes like freedom, community, health, and justice cannot be reduced to observable structures of behavior, language, and association. Such structures may at times seem to support those experiences, but they cannot guarantee them.

The experiential nature of social purpose poses a puzzle in institutional theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001), which is, in a sense, the study of social guarantees. If an institution is a set of practices reliably reproduced across social space and time (Giddens, 1984), can a social purpose that is fundamentally experiential be institutionalized at all? Can the lived experience of freedom or compassion, say, come to be as socially widespread and resilient as the observable practice of bureaucracy?

The chief difficulty in trying to answer such a question is that experience is inherently specific and contextual and institutions are not. Selznick (1984a,b, 1992) wrestled with this problem. Developing his institutional perspective in sociology and organization studies, he pursued a normative path (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Heclo, 2002; Krygier, 2002) that emphasized the "primacy of the particular in moral experience"

(Selznick, 1992: 357), always returning to the subjective and the mundane: "What counts is how people experience the everyday life of the institution" (Selznick, 1992: 310). "Responsive" institutions have a role to play in nurturing elusive but discoverable experiential goods, strengthening what Selznick called "moral well-being" or "fellowship" (1992: 32). At the same time, Selznick stressed the need for moral realism in confronting "the problem of maintaining ideals amid grubby organizational realities" (Heclo, 2002: 296). Reflecting on the principle of equality, for example, he wrote, "The more attention we pay to *experienced* inequality, as it affects the whole person and many aspects of life, the more demanding the ideal becomes" (Selznick, 1992: 383).

Because responsive institutions have an experiential orientation, they are inherently precarious. The work required to create and maintain them is more complex and opaque than the work needed to uphold blunter protective laws and regulations. Understanding such work requires rich theorizing about institutional agency. Insofar as he focused on agency at all, Selznick emphasized values-based leadership. New institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), however, with its focus on cognitive legitimacy and embedded agency (Seo & Creed, 2002), has revealed a more diverse and complex portrait of institutional agency—from the substantial literature on institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; DiMaggio, 1988) to the more distributed conceptualizations of agency arising out of the broader institutional work literature (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011).

The concept of institutional work synthesizes and expands upon theories of institutional agency by applying a practice lens to institutional creation, maintenance, and disruption (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009, 2011). Institutional work research focuses on situated, intentional activity (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). It explores

> the efforts of individuals and collective actors to cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play, and which give them their roles, relationships, resources, and routines (Lawrence et al., 2011: 53).

Sparked by critiques that the initial development of new institutional theory offered little room for change and agency (DiMaggio, 1988), institutional work researchers have revealed a dynamic social landscape where even apparently routine institutional reproduction is sustained by complex and purposive interaction. The range of strategies and practices explored in the institutional work literature is wide, diverse, and growing. It includes bridging (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011), mobilizing (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Wijen & Ansari, 2007), partaking and convening (Dorado, 2005), bricolage and breakthrough (Garud & Karnøe, 2003), boundary work and practice work (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), embodied identity work (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010), narration (Zilber, 2007), discourse problematization and translation (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), repair (Heaphy, 2013; Micelotta & Washington, 2013), resistance (Marti & Fernandez, 2013), and much more.

One hope underlying new theories of institutional work is that they might prove emancipatory (Lawrence et al., 2009)—that a deeper understanding of institutional intention and effort can free people to "step out of their established roles" to become more conscious and effective participants in their institutional worlds (Lawrence et al., 2011: 56). But a number of institutional scholars have argued that this hope is still unrealized and that institutional theory remains removed from its moral underpinnings and implications (Cloutier & Langley, 2013; Creed et al., 2010; Kraatz, 2009; Marti & Fernandez, 2013; Willmott, 2010). "In the management literature, institutional change and agency are most often discussed without reference to their underlying moral or political vision" (Creed et al., 2010: 1360). Researchers have yet to fully demonstrate "compelling practical and humanistic reasons for attention to institutional work" (Kraatz, 2011: 60). The kind of situated, experientially informed moral purpose that Selznick saw as essential to healthy institutionalized life plays little part in the current conversation, exacerbated perhaps by the sharpness of the distinction between old and new institutionalism in the literature (Selznick, 1996).

In this article I propose that for institutional work research to realize its emancipatory potential, scholars must more fully engage with the experiential nature of normative social purpose. Philosophically, institutional work scholarship is a natural place for such an exploration, since it

seeks explicitly to reconnect institutional theory with "the lived experience of organizational actors" (Lawrence et al., 2011: 52). To date, however, the research focus has been on the experience of doing institutional work itself, rather than on the kind of work involved in pursuing experiential institutional end goals.

Research from the domain of positive organizational scholarship (POS) can help expand the institutional work conversation in this experiential direction. This pairing may seem strange. POS theories have not emphasized social embeddedness, and there has been little explicit encounter between the POS literature and the institutional theory literature. POS theorists have, however, begun to develop an integrative framing of the "positive" that is both experientially and socially normative. And research informed by this framing points toward several new, if implicit, strands of potential inquiry into social structuring and embedded agency.

POS weaves together the work of researchers interested in unusually virtuous, energizing, and life-enhancing organizational phenomena (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, & Wrzesniewski, 2003). Critics of POS argue that POS researchers have not adequately defined "positive" in a way that differentiates POS from traditional organizational studies frameworks concerned with ostensibly positive constructs (George, 2004; Hackman, 2009). And, in fact, POS theorists *have* been wary of unifying definitions of "positive" in POS, preferring to see the term as a loose boundary staking out a territory of related themes (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012).

There is, however, an unremarked convergence in POS that differentiates POS more clearly from previous streams of research. Most of the core constructs in POS have in common an unusual duality. They are subjectively fulfilling—experienced as energizing, pleasurable, and intrinsically good. But, at the same time, they are rooted in extrinsic systems of meaning that transcend the organization itself. That is, they are informed by superordinate moral, social, and/or spiritual conceptions of the good, from the vantage point of both the theorist and organizational participants. Thus, the positive in POS is at once subjectively, experientially positive and objectively positive in some larger, more abstract, culturally shared way, and these two dimensions are mutually constitutive.

For example, theorists who explore organizational virtues (Cameron, 2003; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Cameron & Winn, 2012) see them as "good to and for human beings" (Cameron, 2003: 49); they are moral/cultural categories that contribute to the good of society, but they are also personally fulfilling.

> Well-being is not a consequence of virtuous action but rather an inherent aspect of such action . . . Fulfillment is part and parcel of the actions that manifest virtue. For example, when a work supervisor fairly adjudicates a dispute between two workers, the act of adjudication does not cause her or him (or the workers) to feel satisfied at some later point in time; being satisfied is an inherent aspect of justice in action (Park & Peterson, 2003: 38–39).

Other examples abound. Vitality is framed at the experiential level as "physical or mental vigor that creates the capacity to live, grow, and develop" and as "a positive feeling individuals will try to sustain or enhance" (Feldman & Khademian, 2003: 344). But it is also framed at the social level as an attribute of empowerment and a resource that can "cascade" from the organization out into larger social domains, contributing to civic engagement and healthy democracy. Similarly, both thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005) and energy (Spreitzer, Lam, & Quinn, 2012) involve experiences of aliveness and learning, but they are also connected to broader "positive meaning resources" (Spreitzer et al., 2005: 544). Authentic leadership is expressed by leaders who act in alignment with the genuine self, experiencing positive internal traits and virtues like confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Verbos, Gerard, Forshey, Harding, & Miller, 2007). But authentic leaders are also "guided by a set of end-values that represent an orientation toward doing what's right for their constituency" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003: 248). Positive identity includes a sense of self-worth and efficacy but is heightened by using personal strengths to make "generative contributions to society" (Roberts & Creary, 2012: 80).

The positive in POS, then, is related to both personal fulfillment and the "long-term sustainability of people, organizations, society, and the environment" (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012: 1037). This duality mirrors the subjective/objective duality at the heart of institutional theory. It distinguishes POS from well-established strands of research in organizational behavior that focus on

ostensibly positive subjective phenomena like values, commitment, job satisfaction, and job involvement but that rarely inquire into the broader social impacts and meanings of these phenomena. It also distinguishes POS from research on socially focused topics like corporate social responsibility via stakeholder engagement; traditional approaches emphasize the processes and social impacts of such engagement but do not typically explore the positive subjective experiences of organizational leaders and members as they pursue it (e.g., see Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010).

Applying the experiential perspective of POS to the construct of institutional work, we can define positive institutional work as *the creation or maintenance of institutional patterns that express mutually constitutive experiential and social goods*.

In the ensuing sections of this article, I propose that a theory of positive institutional work requires the expansion of current theories of institutional work in at least three ways: incorporating experience into evaluations of legitimacy, recognizing inquiry as a powerful form of institutional agency, and exploring the role that inclusion plays in stabilizing positive institutions. I first introduce the concept of experiential legitimacy, arguing that institutional work research has focused largely on symbolic modes of legitimacy—the way that *observable* practices index onto legitimated regulations, norms, and beliefs. Positive institutions would also need to rest on evaluations of the way the internal *subjective* experiences of field members do or do not reflect legitimated regulations, norms, and beliefs. I then present shared inquiry as an underexplored solution to the paradox of embedded agency, arguing that because positive goals are experiential, and not scarce resources, the dialectical, interest-based model of agency that prevails in the current literature does not adequately explain how agency can be applied to positive institutional work. A dialogical model in which actors catalyze institutional work by recognizing and inquiring into their own shared embeddedness offers an alternative path to understanding positive agency. I next explore inclusion as positive institutional strategy, arguing that while clear group boundaries and routinized material practices are typically associated with institutional stability, such enclosure may actually destabilize positive institutions. Working to make groups and material

practices more inclusive may be the primary strategy for fostering the kind of continued experiential inquiry that stable positive institutions depend on.

Taken together, the three themes frame a portrait of institutional work that differs markedly from the types of institutional work considered in the literature to date. I illustrate each theme by showing how it is implicitly buttressed by existing research in POS. At the same time, POS itself could become a more powerful social change paradigm by more explicitly engaging with dimensions of social embeddedness such as legitimacy, embedded agency, and the institutional nature of roles, boundaries, and practices. Each of the three themes offers a doorway to such engagement. I conclude the article with a discussion of potential future research directions.

SYMBOLIC LEGITIMACY VERSUS EXPERIENTIAL LEGITIMACY

The notion of legitimacy in institutional theory captures the evaluative dimension of social structuring (Suchman, 1995).[1] Social fields are organized by shared understandings of what types of practices are legitimate and what types of practices are not (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Giddens, 1984; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Evaluation may be regulative (a practice adheres to rules), normative (a practice is right), and/or cognitive (a practice makes sense; Scott, 2001). Legitimacy work—changing, reinforcing, or disrupting the criteria by which people evaluate practice—is a fundamental aspect of institutional work.

Symbolic Legitimacy

Despite the intersubjective roots of institutional theory and the recent emphasis on experience in the institutional work literature, explorations of legitimacy work have focused largely on how forms of behavior are evaluated for their *symbolic* appropriateness. Scholars have paid little attention to how *experience* might be incorporated into evaluation. Suchman's frequently used definition conceptualizes legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity

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[1] Suchman himself distinguishes between the evaluative and cognitive dimensions of legitimacy, but in a broader sense cognitive legitimacy still rests on a kind of evaluation—of not what is right but what is comprehensible.

are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (1995: 574). Note that it is observable "actions" that are evaluated for appropriateness and that appropriateness rests on how those actions correspond to various kinds of social meaning.

Legitimacy in this light is rooted in "post hoc accounts" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 27) that "specify and justify social arrangements and behaviors" (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007: 958). That is, relationships and behaviors are evaluated as signals. They are understood not in terms of how they are experienced but as implied expressions of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. Legitimacy from this perspective is a "symbolic value to be displayed in a manner such that it is visible to outsiders" (Scott, 2001: 59).

Empirical studies have taken up this symbolic conceptualization of legitimacy, with an emphasis on how visible behaviors and structures map onto regulative, normative, and cognitive frameworks of appropriateness. Two well-known and representative examples illustrate this point. Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, and Scott (1993) looked at the development of explicit personnel practices, such as salary classifications, job descriptions, and performance evaluations, in response to ambiguous new civil rights laws as organizations worked to signal legitimacy to potential judicial reviewers. Barley (1986) explored ways that institutionalized interaction patterns reflecting authority and status differences between radiologists and technicians were disrupted by the introduction of new medical imaging technology. New observable patterns of communication (e.g., direction seeking, clandestine teaching, etc.) provoked and reflected shifts in previously legitimated power structures.

In both cases—and in virtually every example of empirical institutional research in organization studies—legitimacy is understood to be a function of the way actors evaluate visible forms of behavior and relationship, not subjective experiences of behavior and relationship, even though institutionalization is defined in the literature as inherently intersubjective. Lawyers and regulators evaluate the racial dynamics of firms based on the adoption of particular policies, not on how people subjectively experience racial relationships at those firms. Radiologists and technicians base their judgments of appropriateness on what is being said and how it is being said, not on the underlying intentions, emotions, and understandings of their colleagues. Clearly, in both of these cases there are many experiential factors at play. For example, Barley (1986) described the emotional reactions of hostility and anxiety that radiologists and technicians felt in response to shifting communication patterns. But in terms of legitimating (or delegitimating) dynamics, it is actors' evaluations of explicit behavioral and linguistic forms that structure the institutional spaces in question. And, therefore, it is those forms that are being reproduced or challenged.

Explorations of institutional work have largely maintained this understanding of legitimacy as a symbolic phenomenon. Institutional agents may work directly at the level of norms, beliefs, and definitions, but then those norms, beliefs, and definitions must be linked to (or delinked from) visible forms of behavior, relationship, and language (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). For example, Tracey et al. (2011) describe the way institutional entrepreneurs developed and linked a new "template of practices" to a new institutional logic in order to legitimate "social enterprise" as a new organizational form. Descriptions of institutional work also emphasize translation—linking familiar forms to new meanings or new forms to familiar meanings (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Colomy, 1998; Zilber, 2002, 2006).

Broadly, we can think of this kind of institutional work as *encoding* (or, in the case of institutional disruption, *dis-encoding*). Encoding involves the establishment and reinforcement of links between meanings and visible forms of behavior, relationship, and language. Once established, these links can be enforced through symbolic management (Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995) and mythologizing (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), with the emphasis on demonstrating cultural fitness (Kraatz, 2009). Institutional agents may embed and routinize forms and their linked meanings through repetitive practices and documented rhetoric, while valorizing specific examples of those forms and demonizing counterexamples (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Symbolic legitimacy leads to a kind of institutional work rooted in *display*. In Fligstein's (1997) discussion of the types of social skill involved in institutional work, what is important is not how institutional agents actually think, feel, or act but how they are perceived. Strategic actors "present

themselves as neutral," "appear" to be "selfless" and "open to another's needs," "keep [their] preferences hidden," or "convince people [they hold] more cards than they do" (Fligstein, 1997: 400-401).

Experiential Legitimacy

We can imagine an experiential alternative to symbolic evaluations of legitimacy. Suppose an organization belongs to a field that is institutionally committed to a value like participation. Various behavioral forms signaling participation will undoubtedly be encoded. Perhaps during meetings it is a practice to go around the room and hear from each person in turn. One day Harry, despite the fact that he has had his turn to speak, says that he doesn't feel he has been allowed to participate fully—he hasn't truly been listened to and heard. If participation is evaluated symbolically, Harry will receive social feedback that he has legitimately participated, just like everyone else. If participation is also evaluated experientially (i.e., if one of the institutional dynamics at work is a commitment to the subjective experience of participation), Harry's participation will not be seen as fully legitimated, and his concern will be taken seriously and responded to in one way or another. In the first case, forms of participation will be structuring the field, and it is those forms that will be reproduced or institutionalized. In the second case, experiences of participation will also be structuring the field, opening up the possibility that a shared experience of participation may be reproduced over time.[2]

The distinction between symbolic and experiential evaluation is not merely academic. It may be tempting to assume a stable correlation between the symbol in form and the experience in fact. But counterexamples are plentiful. For example, feminist organizations have been among the most consciously experimental social movement organizations in terms of form (Martin, 1990), as well as among the most committed to changing lived, subjective experiences (Chafetz, 1997). Working toward broad social goals of

inclusiveness and participation, feminist organizations have developed various organizational models (e.g., rotating leadership) meant to distribute power and voice to all members equally (Calas & Smircich, 1996). Despite these experiential commitments, legitimacy processes in feminist organizations have often tilted toward the symbolic. Polletta describes the way feminist organizations' emphasis on forms—the words used, the roles played, the procedures adopted—often led to a dispiriting disconnect between form and experience:

> When former activists talk today about their lives in the movement, pride mingles with hurt, nostalgia with bitterness. Activists remember the joy of newfound political agency and solidarity with women too long viewed as competitors. But they also remember being denounced by fellow activists for exercising initiative or leadership and being "trashed" for trying to take a feminist message to the wider public. With some puzzlement they describe what had seemed a worthy antiauthoritarianism coming to require a leveling of all talents and what had seemed an admirable collectivism producing a censoriousness that discouraged anyone from voicing a dissenting opinion. They describe feminist collectives imploding in anger and mutual recriminations that left some members traumatized for years (2002: 149-150).

This is not to criticize feminist organizations—which have been singularly innovative in terms of organizational practice and strongly committed to deep, experiential institutional change—or even to suggest that the pattern described above by Polletta is universal within the movement. It is merely to illustrate how fraught the experiential ambition is and how easy it is to revert to symbolic modes of structuring that end up diverging from, or even directly interfering with, the sought after shared experience.

Khan, Munir, and Willmott (2007) provide another compelling example of this difficulty, exploring the effects of institutional entrepreneurship focused on eradicating child labor from the hand-stitched soccer ball industry in the Sialkot region of Pakistan during the 1990s. Sparked by intense media coverage, various players from the social sector, government, and industry worked together to shift soccer ball production out of private homes and into centralized stitching centers that could be monitored. By 2003 95 percent of soccer ball exports from the region were child labor free, signaling a successful institutional shift, in alignment

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[2] Lest the idea of experiential legitimacy be thought fanciful or beyond our institutional capacities, consider common legal approaches to murder or libel. An accused person's emotions and state of mind, not simply his or her physical behavior, are a determining part of our deeply institutionalized regulative, normative, and even cognitive evaluations of criminality.

with presumed underlying shared values like child development and family well-being.

Despite this symbolic success, however, the experience of stitcher families was something different.

> The end of the project saw accolades being showered upon the participants in this "exemplary" collaborative venture. That the benefits for children were questionable, and that the majority of women stitchers had to drop out of the workforce, plunging their families into deeper poverty, were details that went virtually unnoticed in all official narratives (Khan et al., 2007: 1056).

Although a multitude of voices contributed to the project, scant attention was paid to the voices of the stitchers themselves. Their experiences before and after the institutional shift were never part of the evaluative forces put into play. By their own testimony, many of the children and their families ended up considerably worse off both psychologically and materially. The authors are quick to point out that this case should be seen not as an apologetic for child labor but as a call for deeper inquiry into overlooked and hidden aspects of institutionalized power.

It is clear that if we evaluate social structuring only for what it apparently means (symbolic legitimacy) rather than also for how it is actually experienced (experiential legitimacy), it may be difficult to consistently reproduce positive relational patterns. It is easy to turn experiential values into abstractions: smiles mean friendliness, voting procedures mean participation, nondiscrimination policies mean inclusiveness. But the actual experiences of friendliness, participation, and inclusiveness are more elusive and must be evaluated in their own right if the goal is to create and maintain robust experiential patterns.

Experiential Surfacing

A certain type of institutional practice naturally follows this line of reasoning. If experiential evaluation is to be a social structuring mechanism, people have to have *access* to each other's experiences. If something is socially invisible, it can't be socially evaluated. So a key dimension of positive institutional work must involve surfacing and sharing the inner experiences of field members.

Institutional scholars have not generally emphasized this kind of surfacing as an aspect of institutional work, but the POS literature offers considerable support for the idea that creating and sustaining positive phenomena requires the regular sharing of interior states. High-quality connections, for example, depend in large part on routinized experiential surfacing. They are marked by a high emotional carrying capacity—they express and sustain a greater variety and intensity of emotions than do typical workplace interactions (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012). A general hallmark of many forms of positive deviance is other focus (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003) and perspective taking (Williams, 2012), which entail genuine empathy and the ability to see and understand the experiences of others in a noninstrumental way. "Humanistic" relational organizational capabilities rely on expressions of "work feelings" (Wooten & Crane, 2004), and organizational resilience and capacities for healing depend on such expressions (Powley & Piderit, 2008). Patterns of organizational compassion, for example, involve "collective noticing" and "collective feeling" (Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, & Dutton, 2004).

The kind of experiential surfacing that enables positive phenomena requires multidimensional, extrarole interactions. Organizational values of "holistic personhood" (Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2012: 280) or "bringing one's whole self to work" (Rothbard & Patil, 2012: 59) feed story-suffused, "textured" forms of communication (Carlsen, Hagen, & Mortensen, 2012: 292). Positive identities are expansive, moving beyond immediately salient roles to make room for a more complex and visible interplay of one's multiple affiliations and associations (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Roberts & Creary, 2012). These rich interactions can create an intersubjective experience of "felt mutuality" (Stephens et al., 2012: 386)—a feeling of "seeing and being seen" (Kark, 2012: 424).

Unlike previous understandings of institutional work that focus on display, POS perspectives emphasize authentic communication. Whereas display entails only the exterior expression of a particular value or quality, positive relationships are rooted in authenticity (Davidson & James, 2007)—genuine alignment between that exterior expression and one's interior state (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) so that people are not only seen but known (Kanov et al., 2004).

Although rarely using explicit institutional terms, POS scholars hint at two general institution-like

effects of experiential surfacing. First, experiential surfacing allows positive experiential patterns to diffuse across social space. The sharing of positive interior states creates a kind of experiential mimesis; positive emotions and virtues have a contagious, amplifying effect that can propagate through self-reinforcing spirals (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Cameron et al., 2004; Cameron & Caza, 2002; Frederickson, 2003; Rhee & Yoon, 2012; Walter & Bruch, 2008). Second, experiential surfacing creates a legitimating dynamic that allows positive experiential patterns to stabilize over social time. Experiential surfacing can lead to shared experiential evaluation, which, in turn, can lead to institutional maintenance work with an experiential dimension. Once actors have access to each other's interior states, they "feel the rightness and wrongness of their mutual creation and try to adjust it toward ways that make it feel more right" (Quinn, 2002: 20; quoted in Cameron & Caza, 2002: 36).

Experiential surfacing may be particularly key to positive institutional *maintenance*. When form and experience diverge over time, what appears to be institutional consistency may, in fact, be institutional change. Zilber's (2002) case study of an Israeli rape crisis center illustrates this divergence. The center was founded on feminist values. Structures and behavioral routines that were understood to reflect those values emerged during the center's early years. Many of those structures and routines remained in place over time, even as new members shifted the center's orientation away from a feminist ethos toward a therapeutic ethos. That is, outwardly consistent observable practices were infused with altogether new interior meanings. Forms stayed the same, but subjective experiences of those forms changed. Zilber's study emphasizes the shift in ascribed meanings, which, of course, are part of subjective experience, but other aspects of experience changed too. In the early years of the center, members subjectively encountered feminist values of nonhierarchy in a lived way. They describe having had feelings of equality, connection, and participation in their day-to-day interactions. Later, feelings of hierarchy grew, even though the organization's structure and basic procedures had not markedly changed.

In summary, because positive experiences do not index neatly onto unitary forms, experiential surfacing seems to be an important dimension of positive organizing with institutional implications. Broad experiential goals are unlikely to be institutionally maintained unless legitimacy is both defined and monitored experientially.

The picture is far from neat, however. Institutional work research cautions against too straightforward an interpretation of experiential framing in POS. From an institutional perspective, experience itself is socially embedded and morally fraught. To make sense of and share their experiences, people draw heavily on institutionalized vocabularies (Schildt, Mantere, & Vaara, 2010) that are shaped by established logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) and cultural narratives (Zilber, 2009). Thus, experience is institutionally constituted in such a way that it refracts the broader patterns of belief, association, voice, and power inherent in a given institutional landscape. In experiential research into the psychology of legitimacy, for example, scholars have explored why people who are materially disadvantaged by particular institutions nevertheless often evaluate those institutions as legitimate (Jost & Major, 2001), emphasizing that legitimacy depends not only on instrumental evaluation but also on internalized evaluation of relational status and moral appropriateness (Tost, 2011), as well as a generalized motivation to see the systems one lives in as legitimate (Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001).

Experiential surfacing is constrained by "feeling rules" and "emotion-display conventions" (Fineman, 2006a: 675) specific to different institutional fields (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Callahan examined the way "emotion rules, emotion resources, and emotion systems" interact to contribute significantly to social structuring (2004: 1438). Similarly, Voronov and Vince (2012: 64) argue that "emotions, desires, and fantasies" are "more or less automatically produced" in a way that is specific to an individual's position in a given field.

> Through unconscious behavior, groups of people cocreate emotional scripts, displays, defenses, and assumptions that connect to and reinforce (Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Brown & Starkey, 2000) the structure of a particular field and agents' different positions in it by virtue of their differential access to the capital of the field. Consequently, a key manifestation of the institutional order in a particular field is the taken-for-granted and unquestioned codification of the emotional displays and emotional experiences that are valid and valued within it (Voronov & Vince, 2012: 63).

From any subject position, experiences are "complicit with the work of maintaining, disrupting, or creating institutions" (Voronov & Vince, 2012: 61). Experience is not a response to institutions. It is an expression of them.

This embeddedness means that subjective experience is, for good or ill, another kind of institutionalized resource. Fineman notes that emotion narratives are a "social and moral currency" (2006a: 690) that can be controlled, wielded, and politicized by particular "stakeholders or guardians" (2006a: 689). As such, experience can be used in the pursuit of some interests at the expense of others. Rules about who is allowed to speak in what manner about what kinds of experiences in what contexts may privilege or marginalize different social groups. More generally, experience can be instrumentalized into a kind of labor (Hochschild, 1983) wherein experiential surfacing is less an authentic expression of whole personhood than a way of fulfilling a particular organizational function. Employees might be required to display certain emotional states to "manage their own and customers' feelings—in order to sustain customer loyalty and maintain maximum throughput" (Fineman, 2006a: 677). Experiential surfacing, thus, can be a cover for manipulation or opportunism. And even institutional work sincerely intended to maintain positive experiences can slip into a kind of form trap. For example, overemphasis on the behaviors or language associated with compassion can lead to counterproductive pressure. "Such pressure may be especially intense in settings in which compassion has been institutionalized, where it may become another form of emotional labor, leading to resentment, alienation, or burnout" (Lilius et al., 2012: 282).

The socially embedded nature of experience complicates positive institutional work, but it is not a fundamental barrier to it. In fact, *this embeddedness is actually the reason experiential surfacing can be understood as a form of institutional work in the first place*. Because experiences are not entirely personal and idiosyncratic, surfacing and sharing experiences is, in effect, surfacing and sharing institutions. Emotions, intuitions, beliefs, hopes, and fears are clues to underlying, often subconscious, institutional patterns.

In this vein, Creed and colleagues (2010) showed how GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) ministers in two main line Protestant denominations explored their own internalized experiences of contradictions between their institutionalized religious roles and their institutionalized GLBT marginalization. Working with and sharing these experiences provided them with institutional insight and helped trigger forms of institutional agency that were nuanced and appropriate to their respective contexts. Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully (2010) examined institutional activism within the Catholic Church around the issue of sexual abuse. They found that people became activists in part by engaging in experiential dialogue with each other in a way that allowed them to develop a split institutional identification. The activists maintained their embeddedness within the normative structure of the Church while disrupting their identification with its organizational structure. Experiential sharing again provided both the insight and the "emotional fuel" for their activism.

> "We started as a group of heartbroken people who needed to talk," observed one attendee . . . "Part of the magic in the early days [was that] people could say anything [they] wanted to. And that's what it was, literally listening to the voices of the faithful," recalled one interviewee (Gutierrez et al., 2010: 683).

Similarly, in Bangladesh the nonprofit intermediary BRAC pursued institutional work to create more gender-inclusive markets in part by building different kinds of interactive spaces for women to engage in dialogue with each other and with elites (Mair, Marti, & Ventresca, 2012).

Experiential surfacing can be both intrainstitutional and interinstitutional. People are members of multiple institutional fields, and the degree to which they are able to express within a given field experiences related to their lives outside of that field may have an impact on the moral development of the organization. Sharing broader life experiences can help deinstrumentalize organizational values, since people connect more immediately to the fact that they are not simply their organizational roles and that organizational objectives are not ultimate objectives in a moral sense. While recognizing the importance of instrumental values for organizational effectiveness, Selznick argued that "a fundamental tension exists between instrumental rationality and moral reason" (1992: 321). For an organization to become a moral institution, people must be able to look past the assumptions and goals that frame it.

[Instrumental rationality] tends to narrow perspectives and limit responsibilities. Moral reason, by contrast, makes goals problematic and broadens responsibility. It asks: Are the postulated ends worth pursuing, in the light of the means they seem to require? Are the institution's values, as presently formulated, worthy of realization? What costs are imposed on other ends and other values? (Selznick, 1992: 321).

While the potential role of experiential surfacing as a dimension of positive institutional work is clear, institutional theory challenges the POS perspective on experience in at least three additional ways. First, the kind of transparency associated with authenticity may not always be desirable. A fundamental assumption of institutional theory is that decoupling outward display from inward action can serve an important protective purpose. This importance can be seen at the macro level when organizations adopt socially legitimated structures that are disconnected from the technical demands of their work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It can also be seen at the micro level where "everyday hypocrisies" shape social interaction in a useful way: "skills at masking and dissembling are a necessary civilising process, crucial to social communication and order" (Fineman, 2006a: 676). More normatively, resistance to institutionalized oppression can involve creating hidden personal and group safe spaces in which people can secretly reconnect to aspects of their own humanity that are proscribed by institutional rules (e.g., see Marti & Fernandez, 2013, on institutional resistance during the Holocaust).

Second, the potential power of experiential legitimacy negates neither the importance of the symbolic nor the necessity for blunt-force protective regulation in the service of positive social outcomes. Selznick is eloquent on this point:

In our preoccupation with subtle forms of oppression and with high aspirations for fairness and wellbeing, we may forget that resistance to domination must begin with the obvious and the unsubtle. Arbitrary power is all too often blunt and crude; the pain it inflicts is readily apparent; there is no need for a guide to suffering, no need for consciousness-raising. Rather we require elementary constraints on the abuse of power. When these are discounted—as "mere structures" or as "liberal legalism"—people are left unprotected where protection is most urgent. This posture often signals a failure to appreciate the gains other generations have won and that are now taken for granted (1992: 263-264).

Sources of legitimacy are not monolithic. They may compete with each other (Trank &

Washington, 2009). To be effective, experiential legitimacy work would need to take account of both tensions and complementarities among multiple types and sources of legitimacy in a given social space. Sources of experiential legitimacy would only be part of the picture.

Third, the experiential categories "positive" and "negative" are at least to some degree socially constructed and mutually constitutive (Fineman, 2006a). They cannot always be separated from each other either institutionally or psychologically. One way of unpacking the social embeddedness of POS constructs more fully is to explore the role of the negative in the positive, and vice versa. Some POS scholars have begun this exploration. For example, hope has "a shadow of despair and risk. . . . [It] is not an undifferentiated positive experience but rather a positively charged quality of experiencing that may be heightened by the totality of what is at stake" (Carlsen et al., 2012: 296). Even in research into the emblematic POS practice of appreciative inquiry, a practice rooted in the power of attending exclusively to positive experience, scholars have begun to recognize the plasticity of positive and negative framings and to explore the ways that experiential shadow can feed the long-term positive (Bushe, 2012).

AGENCY AS POLITICAL CONTEST VERSUS AGENCY AS INQUIRY

An experiential approach to legitimacy calls for an expanded understanding of institutional agency. Institutional researchers have almost exclusively portrayed agency as dialectical, seeing conflict between institutional logics as the "core generating mechanism of change" (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006: 878) as agents compete in political contests to further their own interests. Shared experiential goals, however, may not lend themselves to this kind of interest-based contest. Instead, positive institutional agency may be less dialectical than dialogical, rooted not in contest but in inquiry.

Agency As Political Contest

The dialectical view of institutional agency derives naturally from prevailing solutions to the problem of embedded agency. Embedded agency is the puzzle of how people come to think and act in intentional, socially novel ways within

institutionalized systems that cognitively delimit what it is possible to conceive of in the first place (Garud et al., 2007; Seo & Creed, 2002). How do actors develop counterinstitutional intentions, given that interests, goals, identities, and even one's very sense of subjectivity—of being a "self"—are themselves institutionalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Taylor, 1989; Willmott, 2010)?

Answers to these questions generally have revolved around the presence of conflict within and among institutions (Clemens & Cook, 1999). Institutions contain inherent contradictions—internal fault lines that cause conflict and reveal alternative possibilities for thought and action (Beckert, 1999; Seo & Creed, 2002). Marriage, for example, is both a romantic commitment and a legal contract. These two aspects of the institution may at times be in opposition, provoking questions about the nature and meaning of marriage and surfacing cognitively submerged norms and beliefs. Institutions also coexist and compete with each other (Battilana et al., 2009; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002). People who occupy boundary positions can be exposed to different institutional fields with alternative logics, thereby problematizing previously taken-for-granted frames and practices (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

From this dialectical perspective, the first moment of institutional agency is reflexivity—"actors' self-awareness or critical understanding of social conditions in which their needs and interests are met" (Seo & Creed, 2002: 230). Reflexivity is driven by exposure to institutional contradictions and misalignments, and this exposure opens up space for action.

> Transformative action is possible because institutional contradictions may not only trigger a reflexive shift in actors' consciousness, but also provide alternative meanings, logics of action, and psychological and physical resources allowing actors to mobilize, appropriate, and transpose cultural logics and meanings to frame and serve their interests (Creed et al., 2010: 1338).

The focus in the literature on dialectical conflict leads to a view of agency that is essentially political (Lawrence, 2008; Tracey et al., 2011). Institutional agents use "binary cultural codes" (Weber, Heniz, & DeSoucey, 2008) to create or maintain institutional patterns that privilege their interests over competing interests (Beckert, 1999; Garud et al., 2007; Pacheco, York, Dean, &

Sarasvathy, 2010; Townley, 2002). They struggle over "stakes" in a game-like fashion (Bourdieu, 1984). Although the institutional agent's understanding of his or her own "interests" has been treated relatively unproblematically (Hwang & Colyvas, 2010; Thornton et al., 2012), interests are understood both to motivate and to orient institutional agency. They can be seen as the very fabric of agency, in that institutional "agency can be defined as the process through which actors render practical consciousness discursive and make sense of their political interests" (Hensmans, 2003: 358). The conflation of interests with agency means that institutional benefits are typically framed as scarce resources. They accrue to individuals or groups at the expense of other individuals or groups, and resource scarcity drives institutional change (Sherer & Lee, 2002).

Institutional work, then, involves the design and execution of institutional "projects" meant to forward interest-based goals (Colomy, 1998; DiMaggio, 1988). "Interdependent partisan agents" (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006: 868) adopt discursive and symbolic strategies (Elsbach, 1994; Green, Li, & Nohria, 2009; Maguire & Hardy, 2006, 2009). They use social, political, and cultural skills (Fligstein, 1997; Suddaby & Viale, 2011) to mobilize and engage in framing contests (Battilana et al., 2009; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002; Tracey et al., 2011; Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). They "articulate, sponsor, and defend" the particular practices they seek to put in place (Lawrence, 1999: 163). They acquire power by "leveraging normative resources into coercive authority" (Rojas, 2010: 1272) and by defining, populating, and regulating new social spaces (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). They maintain power by defending those spaces (Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Recent research on institutional work shows that dialectical contests are not necessarily defined and enacted only through dyadic competition. Institutional work researchers take the experience of embeddedness seriously (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Garud et al., 2007; Seo & Creed, 2002), emphasizing that agency emerges (Lawrence et al., 2011) within a tangled, often opaque (Dorado, 2005) landscape of multiple logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen, & Van de Ven, 2009) and unintended consequences (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006;

Lawrence et al., 2009; Marti & Mair, 2009). Agency is less often heroic than distributed, "something accomplished through the coordinated and uncoordinated efforts of a potentially large number of actors" (Lawrence et al., 2011: 55). Institutional work often involves partaking and/or convening (Dorado, 2005; Perkmann & Spicer, 2008) via interacting social groups (Kaghan & Lounsbury, 2010). Distributed agency is particularly likely in the domain of social problems that are "too many-sided and complex for any one single individual or organization to handle" (Dorado, 2005: 386).

This expanded view of distributed agency has led to a more nuanced understanding of the dialectical process. Different institutional logics do not necessarily compete simply to defeat each other. They also exist in productive, interdependent tension (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006, 2009). In some sense they create and maintain each other (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the picture remains political at the micro level of this complex, distributed space, since institutional agents still generally focus on exploiting tensions to further their interest-based goals or to advocate for their own framings (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). For example, van Dijk, Berends, Jelinek, Romme, and Weggeman (2011) explored the way actors in high-tech firms can forward radical innovations even in the face of a legitimacy crisis (i.e., the potential innovation is perceived as illegitimate by significant constituencies). They found that actors can exploit institutional heterogeneity, multiplicity, and ambiguity to find or create affordances—spaces within the organization where they can continue to pursue the innovation.

Agency As Inquiry

If the institutional goal is positive—that is, if institutional work is aimed at a shared experience of a social good—it is hard to see how interest-based contest can be the main dynamic of agency. This is true for two reasons. First, the interest in question is a public interest. The institutional goal is not a social arrangement meant to serve one person or group at the expense of another. Goals like virtue, freedom, engagement, or authenticity are not seen as scarce resources. They could, in theory, apply to everyone in the institutional field. This perspective

does not imply that personal or sectional interests will not impinge—surely they always do—but they are beside the point here in that the agentic intention is not merely personal or sectional.

Second, the institutional goal is experiential. What would an experiential contest look like? What meaning could it have? Observable forms of behavior can be structured directly, but inner lives are more slippery. We can alter behavior and language to conform to prevailing institutional patterns, but we do not have the same kind of control over the stuff of experience: emotions, physical sensations, the deepest cognitive frames. From the perspective of institutional work, then, what sort of "intelligent situated action" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 219) can shape experience in a certain way or respond to an experiential breach of an institutionalized pattern? For example, if we are intentionally working to institutionalize compassion, and someone experiences an uncompassionate interaction, what kind of agency might we have, particularly in the case where the form of the interaction meets symbolic criteria for compassion (e.g., someone offers words of comfort), even though the subjective experience has fallen short? It is far from clear that the kinds of rewards, sanctions, norms, and mimetic processes typically described in the literature will have the desired effect on inner experiences. And, in fact, direct attempts to manipulate or suppress emotion may result in the opposite of the intended effect. If a social system denies the validity of an uncompassionate experience, it may become even more difficult for people to experience compassion (e.g., see Callahan, 2004).

Furthermore, from whose perspective is the experience to be evaluated? If two people do not experience their interaction as compassionate, is it something the first person has done? The second person? Who and what exactly is it that needs to change? In a sense, the locus of evaluation has shifted away from the individual and toward the relationship itself. It is not the behavior of an entity that is being evaluated but the intersubjective experience of an interaction. An actor has not breached institutional rules, norms, or beliefs; a relationship has. How is agency brought to bear on a relationship? How do institutional actors respond to the case where together they "feel the rightness and wrongness of their mutual creation and try to adjust it toward

ways that make it feel more right" (Quinn, 2002: 20; quoted in Cameron & Caza, 2002: 26)?

One alternative solution to the problem of embedded agency may open up a more plausible pathway for positive institutional work: an institutional agent can act not with the intention to realize interest-based goals but with the intention to seek to understand an institutional pattern (or breach) more fully. Inquiry can be a form of agency.

One could argue, in fact, that inquiry is a farther-reaching solution to the problem of embedded agency than existing solutions focused on dialectical contradiction. As Willmott (2010: 68) points out, contradiction-based solutions essentially "sidestep" the problem by privileging structure. If agency depends on structural conditions like institutional multiplicity, internal contradictions, or an actor's social position on a boundary, is it really full agency? Where would meaningful intentionality originate in the absence of these conditions? Inquiry, however, does not depend on unintentional, structural encounters with contradiction. It only requires a generalized awareness of cognitive and normative submersion. An actor's reflexivity begins not with consciousness of specific institutional conditions *but with consciousness of embedded agency itself*. That is, actors start with the awareness that they are not aware of all the different assumptions, values, and beliefs framing their institutional experiences. They catalyze agency not by understanding *how* their experience is institutionally constituted but by recognizing *that* their experience is institutionally constituted. And they express agency less through the development of projects focused on realizing particular institutional arrangements than through attempts to raise institutional conditions and possibilities into fuller consciousness. For example, inquiry-based agency may involve *seeking* contradictions by intentionally exposing oneself to diverse institutional fields or logics. It may involve dialogue, the purpose of which is to open up possibilities of new ways of thinking by surfacing previously hidden assumptions (Isaacs, 1999).

Inquiry might be a particularly important mode of agency in positive institutional work. The typical discursive and political techniques used to institutionalize (or deinstitutionalize) symbols, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs seem to be of limited experiential usefulness. Rules, norms,

rewards, and sanctions can be applied directly to observable forms of behavior and language, but they can have only partial and inconsistent effects on experience itself. Institutionalizing compassion, engagement, or high-quality connections might require acknowledging that we really don't know what those things will look like in practice in specific contexts, given their experiential nature. And if we do manage to arrive at some experiential version of them today, the forms of behavior and language that we have used may not serve us tomorrow. A consistent, mutual, ongoing inquiry into the experiential nature of those positive phenomena seems more likely to help maintain an experiential pattern over time. In the example above of evaluating an "uncompassionate" interaction as something illegitimate, there is no obvious, direct social response. Agency in that case would involve inquiry. Why was the interaction experienced this way? What might be done *this time* to move toward a more compassionate experience?

Selznick called this kind of inquiry "moral inquiry" and saw it as "a crucial component of moral competence" (1992: 36). It involves pursuing meaningful, long-term social goods with a collaborative spirit of respect, tolerance, openness, sympathy, and critical reflection. It demands flexibility and patience in the face of inevitable ambiguity.

> To determine the good requires an appreciation for particular circumstances, variable contexts, and competing values . . . And experience shows that many settings have roughly equivalent competing goods, such as alternative careers or lifestyles. This plurality makes choice difficult, and sometimes tragic, especially when painful tradeoffs are required (Selznick, 1992: 36).

Moral inquiry is not generic exploration; it enters into lived experiences, not abstract ideas. Nor is moral inquiry instrumental. It seeks not to confirm itself in the pursuit of fixed objectives but to confound itself by challenging its own moral assumptions.

One should not confuse the experiential *stance* of inquiry with just another institutional form. Forms of inquiry, like forms of anything else, can be institutionalized symbolically. Certain kinds of questions or processes may come to be strongly associated with inquiry. However effective such forms might be in general, though, at times they might be experienced as mechanical or artificial, closing down a conversation rather

than opening it up. Perhaps the form of inquiry that is experientially called for in a specific context is simply silence—an empathetic ear, not a routinized form of questioning. Or perhaps what is needed is to physically shift a conversational space to another, less fraught location, or to involve people who are not normally involved. From an experiential perspective, forms of inquiry must themselves be subject to recursive inquiry.

Inquiry runs strongly through the POS literature. Many POS scholars see inquiry as central to the overall evolution and patterning of human systems. "Inquiry is agenda setting, language shaping, affect creating, and knowledge generating . . . We live in the worlds our inquiries create" (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003: 235–236). Broad positive constructs like "thriving" are often developmental. They involve personal growth fostered by ongoing exploration and experimentation (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Positive change processes are driven less by expertise than by learning (Quinn & Wellman, 2012). And as people move away from displays of absolute independence and perfect competence and toward genuine inquiry and help seeking (including openness toward failure), the overall knowledge-creating capacity of an organization is increased (Lee, Caza, Edmondson, & Thomke, 2003). Consequently, humility can be seen as a "foundational virtue" in POS (Owens & Hekman, 2012: 801), orienting organizations (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2012) and social change agents (Christensen, 2012) toward openness and adaptability.

Positive inquiry is enacted by seeking exposure to a diversity of ideas, people, or fields and developing dialogic relationships that explore assumptions and potentials. High-quality connections depend on "a relationship's generativity and openness to new ideas and influences" (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003: 266). Virtues like hope can be seen not only as individual attributes but as collective accomplishments that, through interaction, provoke new ways of thinking and acting (Branzei, 2012; Carlsen et al., 2012). Building on Berlyne (1966), Harrison (2012) suggests that curiosity from a positive perspective involves an interplay between specific curiosity, which is discrete and oriented toward problem solving, and diversive curiosity, which is open, exploratory, and oriented toward encountering new information.

Inquiry-based relationships can foster positive identities that are not defined by the intergroup comparative and competitive dynamics usually associated with social identity construction (Roberts & Creary, 2012). Consequently, advocacy becomes a less important mode of agency. Losada and Heaphy (2004) found that high-performing teams exhibit more interactions based on inquiry than on advocacy, in contrast to low-performing teams, whose interactions are dramatically weighted toward advocacy. In a review of twenty cases of appreciative inquiry projects, Bushe and Kassam (2005: 170) found that in 86 percent of those projects deemed "transformational"—that is, involving a shift in the "state of being or identity of the system"—appreciative inquiry had been applied in a self-organizing, improvisational way. In contrast, in the majority of the nontransformational cases, a more linear, design-oriented form of implementation had been applied. Even institutional work like "issue selling" for social change that is ostensibly based on advocacy moves away from "artificially created binaries" when approached in a positive way:

> Instead of creating tension and using external standards that pit social interests vs. organizational interests, a positive perspective on issue selling illustrates how internal social change agents can foster generative dialogues that widen and enrich discussion about social change (Sonenshein, 2012: 64).

Seen as institutional agency, positive inquiry becomes not a discrete act but a continued practice. Sustaining positive deviance invokes paradox, tension, and ambivalence (Pratt & Pradies, 2012; Smith, Lewis, & Tushman, 2012). Positive moral agency requires broad participation in the ongoing "questioning of the hitherto unquestioned" (Moore & Beadle, 2006: 383).

The emphasis on distributed agency in the institutional work literature sets the stage for a fuller examination of inquiry as agency. Such an examination is necessitated by an increasingly relational paradigm in which agency is seen as fundamentally embedded in "a dialogical process by and through which actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within collectively organized contexts of action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 974). Dorado (2005) suggests that this kind of dialogue can be pursued intentionally through the institutional work of "convening," a particularly appropriate strategy in the face of complex and intractable social problems. And

there are examples with implicit inquiry dimensions in the empirical institutional work literature. In many cases the mode of inquiry revealed is instrumental and political, still in the pursuit of particular interests. For example, Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012) and Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) show how lawyers engage in joint improvisation in constructing constellations of logics in the face of cross-border complexity. Similarly, Malsch and Gendron (2013) describe the institutional experimentation pursued by auditors as they wrestle with tensions between commercial and professional logics. Something closer to moral inquiry can be seen in other studies. Helfen and Sydow (2013) explored "integrative bargaining" in the context of international labor standards negotiations, showing how a bargaining approach that includes inquiry into the "meta-rules" of the negotiation itself can lead to institutional change. The context of labor standard negotiations is at once interest based and more generally grounded in broader social purpose. In their study of GLBT ministers, Creed and colleagues (2010) describe a type of embodied, affective, reflective work that suggests a mode of moral inquiry that has received very little attention. In the context of the study, this inquiry is more personal than collaborative, however.

These and other studies hint at a wider landscape of distributed inquiry work (both instrumental and moral), particularly in complex institutional settings infused with multiple salient logics. They also offer a caution about how easily instrumental inquiry can be just another expression of political contest. POS research might develop a stronger institutional perspective by distinguishing more clearly between different types of inquiry.

ENCLOSURE VERSUS INCLUSION AS INSTITUTIONAL WORK

Institutions are made manifest through group boundaries and material practices (Thornton et al., 2012; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) that answer the questions, "Where can I go?" and "What can I do?" (Lawrence, 1999: 165). Institutional work aimed at stabilizing institutions generally has been found to involve reinforcing group boundaries (or adapting and reestablishing them) and routinizing material practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Both kinds of work can be thought of as "enclosure"—delimiting legitimate association and behavior.

There are two reasons enclosure may actually destabilize positive institutions in many cases. First, positive institutional goals are, at least in principle, unbounded. Normative experiential goals like freedom, equality, vitality, compassion, high-quality connections, and the various virtues share an underlying ethos of universality. They are not scarce goods to be contended for. The more they spread, the more they are strengthened. And when confined to particular groups—whether social classes, work roles, or members of a given organization or field—they are diminished. This is not to suggest that positive institutional goals cannot be constrained by group boundaries. Organization members may be compassionate toward each other but not toward the surrounding community, for example. But confining positive experiences in this way weakens them, because it contradicts the external moral framework undergirding them and reduces overall opportunities for experiential mimesis and elevation.

Second, since the experiential dimension of positive institutional goals does not index reliably onto specific material practices, routinization can interfere with the personal customization and contextual adaptation necessary to sustain those goals. Selznick called this problem "the tyranny of means" (1992: 330). He distinguished between process and procedure, the former rich and flexible, the latter narrow and rigid (though useful in its place).

> Unless form unites with substance, procedure becomes arid and self-defeating . . . Nor can process be reduced to a specific set of forms or rules. . . . The morality of process is not rule-bound. Meticulous concern for definite rules and clearly specified rights is surely justified in some contexts, and especially in legal systems. But even there, greater flexibility is required as issues become more person-centered or more complex (Selznick, 1992: 331–332).

Stabilizing positive institutions may rely instead on two types of "inclusion": opening up group boundaries and deroutinizing material practices.

Positive Institutional Work and Group Boundaries

From a sociological perspective, group boundaries are "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and

nonmaterial) and social opportunities" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002: 168). In their study of the British Columbia forestry industry, Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) describe several kinds of institutional boundary work. Boundary closure is associated with maintaining and defending institutionalized group categories (although it can also be used to create hidden, protected spaces for institutional innovation and prototyping). Boundary breaching is associated with attempted institutional disruption during conflict. And connecting across boundaries (in order to ultimately establish new boundaries) is associated with reestablishing stability after periods of conflict and change. Group boundaries are sustained by institutional work that defines, regulates, and polices them, as well as work that reinforces their normative and cultural underpinnings (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Social boundaries have both material and identity implications. Group boundary work can be used strategically to increase access to material resources. It can also be used to establish or reinforce differences of status and voice associated with specific social identity categories. Social identities are embedded in institutional relationships and logics (Creed et al., 2010; Thornton et al., 2012). The social psychology literature on social identity theory (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000) suggests that social categories are fixed via three psychological dynamics. Group members exaggerate intragroup homogeneity, exaggerate intergroup heterogeneity, and then elevate the relative status of their group by adopting a normative calculus that privileges the group's defining cultural features in contrast to outgroups (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1999). Group closure is a fundamental part of this comparative process. Without defined and controlled boundaries between ingroups and outgroups, there is no mechanism for intergroup normative contrast. Exclusion is a basic identity tool in the struggle over scarce resources (material or nonmaterial; e.g., status).

In contrast, positive identity from the POS perspective may be strengthened by inclusion. Dutton and colleagues (2010) delineate four types of positive identity: virtuous identity, evaluatively positive identity, developmentally positive identity, and structurally positive identity. Each is hypothesized to expand the number, type, and quality of connections an individual will have. For example, virtuous identity increases

"the number of relationships the individual will form with members of outgroups in the work organization" (Dutton et al., 2010: 277). Likewise, structurally positive identity suggests that "the more an individual's work identity structure contains complex, yet compatible facets, the more that individual will form relationships with diverse groups of people" (Dutton et al., 2010: 280). This understanding of positive identity suggests group boundary closure may destabilize positive identity and decrease the capacity for broader patterns of positive institutionalization, but much research remains to be done to more carefully connect the individual experience of positive identity to institutional work organized around normative social purpose goals.

This emphasis on increasingly inclusive group boundaries situates "positive institutional work"—as an institutionalized idea itself—within the array of institutions that structure our current understanding of liberal democracy. Rorty (1989) argues that ongoing expansion of identity and empathy is a hallmark of modern liberalism. He associates moral progress—historically contingent, from his point of view, but meaningful nonetheless—with the extension of "our sense of 'we' to people whom we have previously thought of as 'they'" (1989: 192). And, in keeping with the pragmatist, social constructionist roots of institutional theory, Rorty urges us to understand this kind of inclusion not as something fundamental or ordained but as something we have the dialogic power to create. Inclusion from this perspective is less important as a reified stance or belief than as a type of institutional work.

Positive Institutional Work and Material Practices

Institutions are also instantiated in material practices (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional work research has focused on the way that routinizing (or adapting and rerouting) practices contributes to institutional stability (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Stabilization of a practice is achieved in part by limitation and rhetorical closure (Gherardi & Perrotta, 2011). Institutional agents routinize practices by embedding norms and beliefs into them and by creating and enforcing rules and procedures (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). Conversely, agents disrupt practices by disassociating them from their moral foundations, undermining the

assumptions and beliefs that support them, and disconnecting them from established rewards and sanctions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011).

Positive institutional work, however, is intended to stabilize subjective experience and moral inquiry, not material practices. And since a given material practice is neither a reliable cause nor a predictable outcome of subjective experience and moral inquiry, practices may need to be deroutinized in the natural course of positive institutional work. That is, stable practices would be associated with unstable experience and moral inquiry, whereas stable experience and moral inquiry would be associated with unstable practices. Positive institutional work would emphasize not practice enclosure but practice inclusion—continual experimentation and customization of practices in the service of positive experiential goals.

The POS literature highlights the importance of inclusive practices. Sustaining positive deviance in organizations requires "design principles that can enable consistent inconsistency" (Smith et al., 2012: 802). Personal thriving and meaningfulness at work require individual autonomy (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003; Spreitzer et al., 2005)—the ability to alter the shape of the task, relational, and meaning boundaries that structure one's own work (Wrzesniewski, 2003). The expression of organizational virtue depends on structural plasticity. For example, organizational compassion (Kanov et al., 2004) and healing (Powley & Piderit, 2008) require that people have the autonomy to adapt and respond to the needs of others in an open way. "In an organization where job roles are flexible, responsibilities are broad, and members are empowered, employees are more likely to see and act beyond boundaries of their formal position and heedfully organize themselves in response to trauma" (Kanov et al., 2004: 820). In general, moral agency is reduced when people do not have this kind of extrarole autonomy (Moore & Beadle, 2006).

Positive phenomena are naturally generative. Consequently, they disrupt routine. Frederickson's (2003) work on the "broaden and build" theory of positive emotions demonstrates that positive emotions expand the "thought-action repertoires" that people have at any given moment. "Joy, for instance, creates the urge to play, push the limits, and be creative, urges evident not only in social and physical behavior, but also in

intellectual and artistic behavior" (2003: 166). Similarly, empowerment—loosening boundaries and fostering autonomy—does not just redistribute power; it creates new power—a new capacity to act and produce an effect (Feldman & Khademian, 2003). Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003: 239) state that in more than two decades of work with appreciative inquiry processes, as organizations move more deeply into those processes, "without exception" they have shifted "toward greater equalitarian relationships and self-organizing structures," even though that is not necessarily an explicit goal of appreciative inquiry.

Inclusion As Positive Institutional Work

It is true that research on institutional work is painting an increasingly dynamic picture of institutional maintenance, sometimes more reminiscent of Selznick than of new institutional theory. The recent literature on institutional work challenges the idea that institutional maintenance relies entirely on rigid boundaries and static routines. The "practical-evaluative" dimension of agency requires regular "judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 971). Consequently, institutional maintenance involves ongoing adaptation (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009), translation (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Maguire & Hardy, 2009), and even disruption and refinement by incumbents (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). There are always multiple logics at play within any organization or institutional field, and these logics in some sense cocreate each other (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009).

In most cases, however, such inclusive adaptation is portrayed as an instrumental strategy in the service of new forms of closure. Organizations and fields may expand membership boundaries to co-opt threats (Selznick, 1984a) and may absorb pluralistic logics to maintain stability and control (Singh & Jayanti, 2013). Incumbents may alter role and practice definitions in response to cultural or technological shifts. The intention in either case is generally to preserve old status and power arrangements within modified structures. For example, in their study of institutional work related to mainstreaming genetics in health care, Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, and Waring (2012) found that

geneticists more fully maintained their institutional status by flexibly experimenting with role boundaries around work processes and decision making rather than by placing themselves explicitly in the lead and adhering tightly to the status quo. Malsch and Gendron's study of the contest between commercial and professional values in the field of public accounting portrays a similarly instrumental type of boundary experimentation:

> The basic idea is that the field's boundaries are continuously subject to trials and tests by an aggregation of actors and organizations involved in a series of more or less connected endeavours to extend their work jurisdiction, while seeking to maintain and consolidate the traditional foundations of their jurisdictional legitimacy (2013: 889).

Positive institutional work, in contrast, would draw on inclusion not simply as an instrumental strategy to deal with periodic disruption and contestation but as a fundamental strategy for sustaining ever-fluid experiential moral purposes. Positive institutional stability would come from *delinking* rules, norms, and beliefs from group boundaries and material practices so that groups and practices might continually be adjusted around experiential purpose.

Institutional theory also suggests, however, that inclusion should not be overgeneralized or utopian (Selznick, 1984b). Closure may still be a useful, protective, positive tool to avoid domination (Selznick, 1992) and oppression (Marti & Fernandez, 2013) or to create sheltered space for institutional innovation (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). And inclusive approaches can themselves be co-opted in ways that undercut their moral premises, as when "flexibility" is used as a veneer for reducing worker protections and organizational accountability (Marti & Fernandez, 2013). But, ultimately, positive institutional goals demand that institutional agents, while remaining wary, be willing to run the risk of such cooptation in order to reduce institutional reliance on closure. "A morality of aspiration is not easily captured or readily cabined by rules and systems" (Selznick, 1992: 260).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article began with the proposition that institutional work researchers need to engage more directly with questions of experiential social purpose for institutional work research to realize its emancipatory potential. An institutional framework for such questions is available in the work of Selznick (1992), but that framework has yet to be developed in relation to more recent insights into the dynamics of institutional work and the nature of embedded agency. In contrast, while POS researchers have largely focused on questions of experiential social purpose, they have yet to consider such questions fully in the light of social embeddedness.

Synthesizing core assumptions of the POS literature and institutional work literature, I defined positive institutional work as the creation or maintenance of institutional patterns that express mutually constitutive experiential and social goods. This definition of positive institutional work suggests a number of new directions for institutional and POS research. First, institutional work research might more clearly distinguish between the different modes of work appropriate to different types of institutional goals, paying particular attention to potential differences between instrumental and experiential goals. Second, research into positive institutional phenomena could extend from the organizational level to the field level by exploring if, when, and how experientially legitimated institutional patterns diffuse beyond local boundaries. And, finally, POS researchers could take fuller account of institutional embeddedness by focusing on legitimacy work, by situating POS constructs and actors within institutional logics, and by taking a more diachronic approach to understanding the development of positive phenomena.

Positive Institutional Goals

A number of studies have centered on institutional work in the context of social or environmental issues, including the rise and fall of the pesticide DDT (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), sustainable forestry (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), feminist rape crisis counseling (Zilber, 2002, 2009), HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy (Maguire et al., 2004), child nutrition (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002), and microfinance (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Despite their empirical contexts, these studies have typically developed theory generalized to institutional work as a whole, rather than specifically to institutional work with a social purpose. There are exceptions. In their study of poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, Marti

and Mair (2009) explored qualitative differences in modes of institutional agency pursued by marginalized people and communities. Creed and colleagues (2010) examined the "embodied agency" of marginalized people—in this case GLBT ministers—who experience institutional contradictions internally and who use those contradictions as a source of personal and social transformation. In general, however, researchers have rarely explored possible differences in the nature of institutional work associated with different types of institutional goals.

This lack of differentiation may be particularly problematic in the case of institutional goals that are framed not by interests but by aspirational visions of the future meant to benefit whole populations. Post Selznick, institutional theory has made little explicit space for this kind of aspirational orientation. In fact, in terms of its psychological roots, institutionalization has largely, if tacitly, been portrayed as a defensive or protective phenomenon. Giddens, building on Schutz (1967), is one of the few institutional theorists to make these psychological roots explicit, singling out the control of anxiety as "the most generalized motivational origin of human conduct" (1984: 54). DiMaggio and Powell developed this line of thinking, arguing that the "cognitive turn" in new institutional theory "informs an emergent 'theory of practical action'" (1991: 22), one in which people allay their anxiety by reinforcing identity via interaction that promotes solidarity with certain groups and antagonism toward others. Institutionalization is, from this point of view, simply anxiety-driven mimesis. POS scholars argue that this defensive view is typical not only of institutional theory but of management studies as a whole (Ghoshal, 2005).

The defensive understanding of institutions may be responsible for the difficulty institutional theorists have had in developing prescriptions for positive action:

> The general effect of the [neoinstitutional] perspective is to delegitimate power, to expose hidden forms of domination, and to reveal fragmentation and hypocrisy in the actions of organizations and their elites. It says very little about how to govern, reform, or productively improve any given existing social institution (Kraatz, 2009: 86).

It is possible to accept that the anxiety-driven portrait of institutions is an accurate one without accepting that it is exhaustive. To develop applied and purposeful theories of institutional work, it would be helpful to know more about if, when, and how aspirationally motivated institutions occur. One research strategy could be to develop comparative case studies contrasting institutional work in social purpose organizations or fields with institutional work in organizations or fields dominated by more instrumental business logics.

Explorations of aspirational institutional goals might also benefit from action research methods. Dover and Lawrence (2010) argue that, despite its academic richness, institutional theory has never adequately demonstrated its practical relevance. They charge institutional theory with being "largely unknown to managers and inconsequential with respect to the management of organizations" (2010: 305), and propose that for institutional theory to develop a closer connection to practice, the next wave of institutional research should focus on exploring institutional work through participatory action methods. They see action research as particularly appropriate for the study of institutional work because the two traditions share an emphasis on heterogeneous agency, practice, and situated knowledge, although this similarity rarely has been exploited. Positive institutional work may be especially fruitful terrain for action research. Like POS, action research is oriented toward "worthwhile practical purposes," with an overarching ethos of democracy and participation (Reason, 2006). New forms of action research are emerging in "third generation" organization development (Benn & Baker, 2009; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004), which can be seen as fundamentally institutional in that it works to transform not just organizational assumptions and practices but broader systemic paradigms, such as the "industrial mindset" (Benn & Baker, 2009: 386). Positive institutional action research might combine institutional theories of structure and agency with change practices rooted in third generation organization development.

Experiential Diffusion

Positive institutional goals are not just aspirational; they are experiential. A full theory of positive institutional work will include rich descriptions of experiential legitimacy work at the field level. How do experientially legitimated patterns diffuse across time and space?

The study of sustained patterns within an organization is, at best, microinstitutional research. Such research can be revealing and suggestive, but an institution is not fully an institution until it has diffused across a wider, more differentiated social space. Studies of the diffusion of institutional innovation generally have focused on the diffusion of new forms (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006) and logics (e.g., Malsch & Gendron, 2013). Institutional work related to diffusion has emphasized linguistic framing and/or collective action of various kinds, such as mobilization or partaking (Battilana et al., 2009; Benn & Baker, 2009; Dorado, 2005; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007, 2008).

It is less clear how experiential legitimacy can be diffused at the field level. Symbols, by their nature, are portable. If voting procedures signal democracy, one merely needs to diffuse that signal (that definition) across wider cultural bands. One can judge a democracy legitimate or not simply by the presence or absence of valid voting procedures. If, however, democracy is understood to involve both certain socially agreed upon forms like voting procedures *and* a subjective experience of meaningful participation and collaborative agency, how can such a complex mode of legitimacy be evaluated and imitated? Experiential legitimacy requires detailed contextual knowledge of the people enacting a given practice. Can experientially legitimated practices truly be transmitted across significant physical and cultural boundaries? If so, what are the mechanisms of diffusion, and do they differ from symbolic mechanisms?

Two related research strategies suggest themselves. At the field level, many studies highlight the importance of institutional work across boundaries as actors discover, adapt, translate, and spread institutional innovations. Consequently, scholars have paid much attention to the social positions of actors (e.g., Battilana, 2006; Maguire et al., 2004) and the kinds of transboundary political and interactive spaces they can create, particularly in response to complex social problems (Dorado, 2005). But researchers have focused on the fact and structure of cross-boundary interaction rather than on the experiential quality of such interaction. Exploring differences in the relational quality of cross-boundary work might be one research doorway. Diffusion of an experiential norm might depend not only on the discursive or political skills of cross-boundary actors but also on how authentic, energizing, or compassionate, say, their cross-boundary relationships feel.

At the organizational level, an approach might be to track attempts to scale social innovation when the social innovation in question has an experiential dimension. From an institutional perspective, social innovation can be defined as "a complex process of introducing new products, processes, or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs" (Westley & Antadze, 2010: 2). Social purpose organizations often attempt to scale social innovations from the organizational level to the field level. When the innovation is at least in part experiential, such scaling may have experiential goals as well as programmatic ones. For example, social innovation in a school might involve programmatic innovations in curricula and in pedagogical processes and structures. But it might also involve experiential innovations in the quality of the relationship between teachers and students or in the nature of staff engagement. Often, these experiential innovations are assumed to be the result of the programmatic innovations, in which case scaling would simply be a programmatic effort, with the assumption that if other schools adopt the curriculum/structure/process in question, they will experience similar experiential shifts. Scaling strategies could, however, be experiential as well, focused on exposing people directly to the kinds of experiences organization members are having. Historically, many churches have taken this approach, mixing the programmatic with the experiential in their attempts to grow. Other kinds of organizations have done so less frequently, but many modern social purpose organizations have deeply experiential missions like youth engagement or community building. Such organizations seem ripe for research into experiential scaling.

An Institutionally Embedded Approach to Positive Organization

POS scholars have taken several approaches to exploring the question of how positive phenomena are embedded in organizations, including a *cultural* approach, in which positive modes of organization are transmitted through norms (Brockner & James, 2008; Walter & Bruch,

2008), symbols (Golden-Biddle & GermAnn, 2007), narratives (Carlsen, 2008), or explicit value statements (Walter & Bruch, 2008); a *design* approach, in which positive modes of organization are facilitated by structural features like participative decision-making processes (Feldman & Khademian, 2003), job redesign (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), or boundary spanning (Gittell, 2003); and a *leadership* approach, in which positive modes of organization are catalyzed by individuals who have particular traits (e.g., the ability to energize others [Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003]), who set principled examples (Worline & Quinn, 2003), or who "evangelize" (Golden-Biddle & GermAnn, 2007).

These modes of positive organization, however, typically have been studied in isolation from the institutional environment. Scant attention has been paid to the way that positive phenomena are (or are not) embedded in broader social structures. For example, researchers have not explored positive organizational symbols and cultures as expressions of more diffused cultural meanings. Similarly, researchers have not typically studied positive leaders in relation to the professions or management education systems, except in the most general sense of their willingness to deviate from some established practices. There are several ways that a more institutionally embedded POS research agenda might be pursued.

First, POS researchers could take up the concept of institutional legitimacy in general and experiential legitimacy in particular. While POS research highlights the importance of experiential surfacing in creating and maintaining positive phenomena, we know little about how specific experiential norms are institutionalized. What kinds of legitimacy work embed an experiential norm, as opposed to a symbolic norm, in organizational life? Under what conditions, if any, do experiential norms need to be explicitly articulated and acknowledged, as opposed to simply experienced? The most revealing approach might be to explore responses to experiential "illegitimacy." When people have experiences not aligned with institutionalized POS constructs, what kind of work is involved in identifying, evaluating, and repairing such breaches? I have suggested that legitimacy work focusing on relationship as the unit of agency might offer more positive institutional leverage than work focusing on individual behavior.

Second, POS researchers could focus on the way institutional logics and roles interact with positive organizational phenomena. Thornton and colleagues (2012) have identified several predominant institutional orders of logics: family, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation. Each order has its own root metaphor, sources of legitimacy, sources of authority, sources of identity, basis of norms, basis of attention, basis of strategy, informal control mechanisms, and economic system (2012: 56). Logics also exist at the field level—for example, an editorial logic and a market logic in the higher education publishing industry (2012: 148). Researchers could examine the ways POS constructs express, challenge, or combine different logics. Do some POS constructs have their own logics? How do aspects of a given logic enable or constrain experiential surfacing, inquiry, and inclusion? Researchers could also examine actors in light of their institutionalized roles. How do positive institutional actors express or challenge the logics associated with their roles—as, say, members of specific professions, managerial orders, or social classes? And what roles are played by collective institutional actors, such as industry groups, professional associations, or government agencies, in positive institutional work?

Studying the ways in which positive actors are embedded in institutional logics and roles might help POS researchers more explicitly unpack assumptions about the kind of moral realism Selznick emphasized (Krygier, 2002). Moral realism recognizes that "some transgressions [are] dynamic and inescapable. They can be depended on to arise, in one form or another, despite our best efforts to put them down" (Selznick, 1992: 175). For Selznick, these transgressions are attributable to both psychological and institutional forces. In either case, it is the role of institutional work to engage with them in organizational life. Institutions must include protections against individually motivated opportunism and exploitation. And institutional agents must also confront and address the way institutionalized roles and norms themselves can lead to repressive or destructive behavior. POS has been critiqued for avoiding this kind of moral inquiry (Fineman, 2006b; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011) and obscuring the "hidden tyranny of positive narratives" (Fineman, 2006b: 287). Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2011) have countered that POS research is deeply concerned with the negative

experiential and social conditions of modern organizational practice. Of their own research assumptions they write, "We understand that organizations are replete with hardship, pain, and toxic behaviors" (2011: 428). They see POS and positive practices as a potential paradigmatic strategy for addressing such problems, not as a way of avoiding them. They also highlight the importance of resistance in POS (cf. Marti & Fernandez, 2013, on the role of resistance in institutional work). By using a more institutionally embedded lens, POS researchers can develop insight into the ways positive practices constrain, or sometimes reinforce, negative organizational experiences and social outcomes.

Finally, researchers could take a more diachronic approach in POS empirical work. Institutions evolve and develop over time, and their history is sedimented within them (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This temporality is a characteristic of both institutional fields and institutionalized organizations themselves. At the field level, institutional work research has often been diachronic. At the organizational level, it has been more frequently synchronic (Kraatz, 2009), focusing on organizational episodes rather than the longer arcs of organizational histories, although there are exceptions (e.g., Zilber, 2002). POS researchers have taken an even more firmly synchronic path, looking for drivers of positive phenomena in generalized organizational and personal characteristics, without exploring how those characteristics might develop over time. In some POS studies researchers have looked at certain periods in an organization's history, but chiefly in response to specific events like a fire (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006) or a shooting incident (Powley & Piderit, 2008), or in the context of specific interventions like appreciative inquiry (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

A more general diachronic approach would allow POS researchers to consider sedimentation, process, and development in positive institutional work. If an organization has developed an institutionalized pattern of experiential surfacing or moral inquiry, for example, one might look at how the institutional work constituting that pattern evolved temporally. This approach could uncover the relationship between current positive practices and previously institutionalized practices. It might also reveal potential differences in the kinds of institutional work involved at different stages of the organization's moral and experiential development.

CONCLUSION

In developing the construct of positive institutional work, this article yields three theoretical contributions. It introduces the concept of experiential legitimacy and suggests that experiential surfacing may be a foundational aspect of positive institutional work. It offers collaborative inquiry as a largely overlooked solution to the paradox of embedded agency, framing collaborative *moral* inquiry as a primary mode of positive institutional agency. And it argues that positive institutional stability rests on institutional work aimed at making group boundaries and material practices more inclusive.

The study of institutional work has transformative potential. While institutional theory has helped us to understand the obdurate, inertial "facticity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 37) of institutions, institutional work research has enabled us also to recognize their plasticity. Insights into the nature of institutional work offer a way of "living forward" (Creed et al., 2010: 1360):

> The great promise of the concept of institutional work, in my view, is that it puts people back into the institutional picture and provides a way to make institutions (once again) into vehicles for the realization of human purposes rather than alien devices of social control. It suggests that institutions might serve people rather than the other way around (Kraatz, 2009: 87).

POS, a discipline with explicitly transformative intentions, offers a similar promise. And in some ways POS can be understood as a nascent institutional project itself, in ambition if not in vocabulary. POS researchers understand organizations to be "the mediating institutions that basically create most of what society needs" (Bernstein, 2003: 271). The various practices explored in POS are intended to "refract and magnify our highest human strengths outward into society" (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012: 737). Recent work has begun to connect POS even more directly to social change (Golden-Biddle & Dutton, 2012) and environmental and social sustainability (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012; Roberts, Creary, Hoffman, & Haigh, 2012).

My hope is that an ongoing conversation between POS and institutional research will enable institutional work insights to be more frequently and purposefully applied in practice and POS insights to be applied on a wider, more robust institutional scale. Selznick writes, "The spirit of

a practice or institution is intrinsically elusive; it can seldom, if ever, be easily specified. But it is not ineffable or mystical" (1992: 333). He encourages us to press ahead in the shared pursuit of deep, experiential values, while recognizing that those values are always vulnerable to erosion. But while no institution is impermeable to change, exploring the concept of positive institutional work may help us imagine a world where it would be just as difficult to change a happy organization as it is now to change an unhappy one.

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