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Sociology and the Unintended

Robert Merton Revisited

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Edited by Joanna Kurczewska and Yasuko Shibata

Polish Studies in Culture,
Polish Studies in Culture
Polish Studies in Culture,
Polish Studies in Culture,

PETER LANG
Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

Polish Studies in Culture, Nations and Politics

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www.peterlang.de

Unintended Consequences of Institutional Work

Mikołaj Pawlak

After the so-called *practice turn* in the new institutional studies of organizations, a large body of literature was published on how social actors (individuals or organizations) intentionally create institutions. Such actors were called *institutional entrepreneurs* (a controversial and oxymoronic – Czarniawska 2006, 6 – term, criticized from many perspectives) or – in the latest proposals – actors performing *institutional work*, such as, for example *proto-institution sponsors* (Zietsma and McKnight 2009).

The intentional actions of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions can be theoretically grasped in the concept of institutional work as introduced by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 215). The authors depart from the classical understanding of the notion of an institution as shaping and superior to action, and focus on how actions affect institutions. Lawrence and Suddaby are particularly interested in analyzing how actors create institutions in accordance with their values or interests, as well as in how these values and interests are important for actors acting purposively with the aim of maintaining or disrupting institutions.

This theoretical approach – highlighting the intended institutional arrangements – leaves room for analyzing the institutionalization of practices, technologies or rules which escaped the control of social actors or became institutionalized as an effect of either competitive convergence or collaborative co-creation of actors with various goals (Zietsma and McKnight 2009, 155-156). This means that the final arrangements are dissimilar to their initial designs, yet this path of analysis was not followed by the creators of the notion.

This paper discusses how to implement the problem of unintended consequences into a coherent theoretical framework of institutional work. I propose a typology of unintended consequences of institutional work comprised of the following: *institutional failures*, *institutional compromises* and *constant reinstitutionalization*. The aim of the paper is that by building this typology one can better respond to the problem of unintended consequences in the conception of institutional work. As matters currently stand, these unintended consequences are often swept under the carpet, only appearing in papers discussing institutional work as digressions. Although this problem is framed as very important, it does not seem to be central for the authors I am going to discuss below. This aim however cannot be fully achieved, because in the case of unintended consequences a classification is impossible to be built. Therefore, I propose to think rather in terms of a continuum of possible unintended consequences and about one separate type lying beside this continuum. I intend to think about this typology as a way of measuring the success of actors performing institutional work, and also as a contribution to the neoinstitutional sociology of organizations' perspective on constructing institutions.

The notion of institutional work

The notion of *institutional work* was proposed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 215) with the aim of grabbing in one theoretical frame studies of institutional entrepreneurship and deinstitutionalization.[1] This conceptual approach is deeply embedded in the paradigm of neoinstitutional sociology of organizations founded in the seminal papers of Meyer and Rowan (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The new institutionalism appeared at the turn of 1970s and 1980s as a theoretical attempt to explain the behavior of individual and organizational actors that is "not derived from the calculated self-interests, [...] nor from the imperatives of instrumental functionalism. [...] the institutional explanation emphasizes that organizations seek legitimacy and survival not efficiency, and highlights the role of cognition and obligation, not self-interest" (Greenwood et al. 2008, 7). The core concept of the theory is an institution defined in different ways. The most widely employed or relevant to this study are the following definitions of institutions:

• these are "humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws and property rights)" (North 1990, 97) or simply put: set of rules of the social game (North 1990, 5);
• these are a "pattern of social action strengthened by a corresponding social norm" (Czarniawska 1997, 43);
• these are "relatively widely diffused practices, technologies, or rules that have become entrenched in the sense that it is costly to choose other practices, technologies, or rules" (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips 2002, 282);
• these are "comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott 2008, 48).[2]

The questions of institutional change and institutional formation lie at the very center of new institutionalism paradigm. At the beginning of its development, the change and formation of institutions was usually seen as an effect of broader processes such as, for example, "isomorphism" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 149). With the succeeding advancement of new institutionalism, more attention started being paid to the role of actors in changing and creating institutions. Institutional work is one of the latest conceptualizations of this research problem.

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1 The authors reviewed the neoinstitutional literature on deinstitutionalization and institutional entrepreneurship calling it – anachronistically – literature on institutional work – a term given by them. Some authors referring to Lawrence and Suddaby tend to repeat this practice.
2 The critique of new institutionalism put forward by Portes (2010, 69) is worth recalling here. The author indicated that the "complexity of social life cannot be captured by one single concept" and that the notion of institution is nothing new as it is in fact what one hundred years ago was introduced to sociology by Émile Durkheim as norms (Portes 2010, 49).

According to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 215), institutional work is defined as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions". The inclusion of *purposiveness* renders institutional work distinct from other forms of social action that always have impact on institutions through reproducing or reformulating them.[3] In the sense employed by the definition, an actor expects to acquire a certain effect on an institution. As always when sociologists consider the *purposive* there appears room for what is unintended, undesired or unexpected by the one taking up the action. In this initial paper titled *Institutions and Institutional Work* that gave the definition of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 219) have only mentioned the possible theoretical problem of unintended consequences of institutional work when applying the practice perspective as a theoretical framework of discussing social action. Accordingly:

> a practice perspective highlights the creative and knowledgeable work of actors which may or may not achieve its desired ends and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in unintended and unexpected ways (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, 219).

Surprisingly, the above quote is the extent of what this paper had to say about the possibility of unintended or unexpected outcomes of institutional work. Still, the remark does point to theoretical ways of dealing with the problem. The authors, applying the theoretical achievements of sociology and anthropology of practice (see Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1993; de Certeau 1984; Giddens 1984), frame the institutional work conception in the so-called *practice turn* within neoinstitutional theory (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, 218-219). The practice turn is described by Schatzki (2001, 2) as a shift in theory from the focus on systems, structures and dichotomy of subjects and objects to the focus on "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding". This perspective is one of the attempts to resolve the key problem of sociological theory: the *paradox of embedded agency*.

The paradox of embedded agency is crucial for social theory and, especially, theories of action. It reflects the tensions between the free will of an actor and the structures determining his/her actions and him/her as an entity. In the context of institutional theory, the paradox to be solved is the relation between an actor and an institution (this has to be understood as the key structure of this theory). The neoinstitutional theory in organizational studies has always been presented as one of the approaches taking into account the structure/agency tension. The critique of the rational actor approach which applies a strictly free-will conception of the actor was at the roots of neoinstitutional sociology of organizations. In this respect, the development of neoinstitutional theory may be characterized by the emancipation of an actor from the determinism of institutions (Federowicz 2004, 141). The question of embedded agency is especially important when we pose an inquiry into institutional work as a kind of action which aims to change or maintain its institutional constrains (for detailed discussion on the paradox of embedded agency in context of institutional work see Battilana

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3   Of course action is always purposive but institutional work is an action purposively aimed to shape social institutions. Then, institutional work might be termed meta-action, because it is intended to set rules for future actions for other actors.

and D'Aunno 2009). Here the purpose of an actor undertaking institutional work is to influence the actions of other actors by determining the shape of an institution regulating their actions.

Let's come back to the relation between the institutional work and its possible unintended consequences. More attention was paid to the problem of unintended consequences of institutional work in the introduction to the book, *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*, which is devoted to the concept of institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca 2009). Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009, 11) – the editors of the book – have indicated that in many studies of actors' effects on institutions, the "unintended consequences" were often neglected. Instead, the attention in such studies was usually paid to the actors who succeeded in their institutional work. In this context, once more, the practice approach should be highlighted – this time for the reason that, as we will see below, the practice framework focuses on the processes, and not on the effects of the processes.

In the definition of the concept of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 215) used the continuous form – i.e. "creating, maintaining and disrupting". As the authors claimed, the usage of continuous form represents the shift from the understanding of institutional change as *a linear process* to its depiction as *effects of practices*. Therefore, when talking about institutional work one should focus instead on "a set of activities", and not on "a set of accomplishments" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca 2009, 10). For the present study, this stipulation is of crucial importance because "a consequence" appears as an accomplishment. According to the conception of institutional work we cannot talk about accomplishment because institutional change cannot be conceptualized as a closed process. On the contrary, it always remains open, as institutions are always dynamic. Thus, when talking about the unintended consequences of institutional work we should also understand them as practices, and not as accomplishments – as something still being transformed rather than something concluded.

Another important aspect to be taken into account is Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca's understanding of the notion of *intentionality*. The authors proposed to frame intentionality from a relational view of agency (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca 2009, 12). They drew much from the so-called New York School of Relational Sociology (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998). In this approach, agency (and the intentions of the actor) is to be understood in relation to the social situation of the actor, especially taking into account the temporal relation. While the iterative dimension of agency and relation to the past could be connected with maintaining institutions, the projective dimension and relation to the future could be connected with disrupting and creating of institutions (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 975, 983). When the influence on the practices of others is not perceived by actors as something situated in future, as a possibility, a project to put into practice, then the institutional work is to be understood as finished by actors.

In the conception of institutional work, the actor – in connection to his/her intentionality – is understood as aware, skilled and reflexive. The reflexivity of the actor is an ongoing practice of monitoring the relation between the assumed ends of action and the achieved ones (Giddens 1984). In this sense, we can understand actors as entangled in never-ending processes of goal setting, acting, encountering the consequences – that are often unexpected and unintended – and of modifying the goals and course of ac-

tion. Giddens (1984, 12), although agreeing with Merton (1936) that "the study of un-intended consequences is fundamental to the sociological enterprise", has developed his argument on the topic in opposition to Mertonian functionalism. In the present paper, drawing from the branch of sociological theory that is based on methodological individualism and a focus on action, the Mertonian analysis is considered to be irrelevant.[4]

In this study, I propose a typology of possible developments of events that take place after institutional work is undertaken. It is a rather essayistic attempt to highlight an issue which in the recent literature on institutional work usually appears in the form of a side remark or digression. When discussing institutional work, I find the concept of *proto-institution* to be extremely useful. This is defined as "practices, technologies, and rules that are narrowly diffused and only weakly entrenched, but that have the potential to become widely institutionalized" (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips 2002, 283). Its relevance for studies in institutional innovations has been demonstrated by Boxenbaum (2004) in her analysis of implementation of new type of management. Pawlak (2010) has also used the notion of proto-institution when studying how officials and social workers react to the new situation and try to implement modes of action suitable to solve new problems. Furthermore, in the context of institutional work, the concept of proto-institution[5] has been employed by Zietsma and McKnight (2009).

Zietsma and McKnight (2009, 164) have noted that institutions are often created in processes of negotiation involving multiple actors. The institutions are co-created as an effect of competition, collaboration or, in fact, as a mixed outcomes of the two – collaborative co-creation and competitive convergence (Zietsma and McKnight 2009, 156). The actor developing and promoting the new proto-institution is called a "proto-institution sponsor" (Zietsma and McKnight 2009, 150). *Sponsors* act in a given institutional context (i.e. organizational field or environment) in relation to their competitors, who are either sponsoring other institutions or maintaining institutions which are in opposition to the *sponsored proto-institutions*. This idea captures an important issue regarding the process of institutional work – the creating of new institutions is simultaneous to the disrupting of other ones. And, as there are often actors who wish to maintain these other institutions, they start disrupting the competing proto-institutions in order to defend them.

When discussing the problem of institutional construction, Pierson (2004, 109-122) – in his critique of actor-centered functionalism – enumerated six kinds of limitations in the design of institutions. Pierson's typology is recognized as very useful by Scott (2008, 96) but authors of the institutional work conception do not refer to it – probably because it is written in the language of achievements (effects) not activities. The limitations listed by Pierson are the following:

(1) institutional arrangements might have multiple effects;

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4   For a critical analysis of Giddens' theory of actor and agency in the context of the conception of institutional work stating that it is excessively subjectivist see Battilana and D'Aunno (2009, 43-44).

5   It is worth mentioning that both proto-institution (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips 2002) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006) are concepts co-authored by Lawrence.

(2) actors designing institutions might not act instrumentally but according to the norms of appropriateness (see March and Olsen 1989, 38); or, for other reasons, they might not be able to fit their designs to the current circumstances;

(3) actors designing institutions have shorter time horizons than the long-term effects of institutions constructed by them;

(4) institutional effects may be unanticipated – this limitation is perceived by Pierson to be the most significant one;

(5) the institutional continuity and environmental change (and the interests around these) are subject to change;

(6) actors' discontinuity (actors attached to institutions come and go) (Pierson 2004, 109-122).[6]

To what extent can we apply the above typology to the case of maintaining and disrupting of institutions as well? In my opinion, all six propositions do pertain. Both the maintaining and disrupting of institutions might be limited by the multiple effects and complicated aims. Institutional work might not be instrumental – how many times did the work on maintaining a valued institution not cause unintended effects resulting from changes of the broader institutional or economic context? Institutional work might be aimed in the short perspective – how many times did attacks on relatively small institutions not cause an avalanche of institutional revolutions, or a provisional set of rules did not petrify and become a corner stone of a complicated and long lasting institutional system? Unanticipated effects in this typology are usually caused by the complicated world of current social and economic interactions which disables actors from fully anticipating the consequences of their actions. Institutions have distinct effects in different broader institutional environments and these may change. Actors with different motifs and interests under the similar institution tend to perform different practices and then to reshape this institution.

The situations (4), (5) and (6) envisaged by Pierson (2004, 115-122) are crucial for the perspective of taking into account the set of activities, and not the set of accomplishments. The changing of the conditions of institutional work influence the actors and their intentions. But, as stated above, actors are able to monitor the conditions and reflexively modify their intentions. The limitations (3), (5) and (6) are connected to the temporal dimension of institutional work. The time horizon of actors and the passage of time is crucial for their sense of what is being created, maintained or disrupted. When analyzing the design of political institutions – i.e. in relation to type (3) – Pierson (2004, 117) underlined that these are the effects of negotiations of multiple actors willing to achieve many different goals. Therefore, the political institutions are usually taking the shape of mélange.

The typology of unintended consequences of institutional work that I am proposing is a working one. It is given from the point of view of the actors who perform institutional work and of their intentions regarding the shape of these institutions. The typology depicts three analytically separate situations: consequences of the creating,

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6   It needs to be noticed that in his typology Pierson mixes up unanticipated consequences with unintended ones.

maintaining and disrupting of institutions. The given separation is only analytical (or depending on the perspective of the actor), because in empirical cases – as stated before – consequences of institutional change processes are often the results of the actions of many different actors who had different intentions regarding the worked institutions. According to the practice perspective, one actor cannot set "objective" institutional constrains on another actors. The institutionalized patterns of practices are produced and reproduced in interactions of actors.

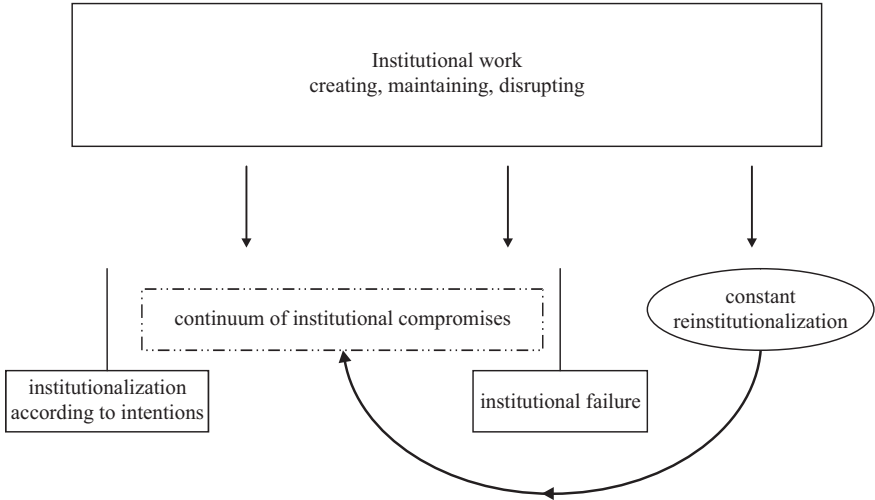*Figure 1:   Unintended consequences of institutional work*

Figure 1 depicts the typology of unintended consequences of institutional work. Possible scenarios are presented. The *continuum of institutional compromises* is limited on the left side by the *institutionalization according to the intentions,* which is a rare and – one might say – impossible side of the continuum. Further, the *continuum of institutional compromises* is limited on the right side by the *institutional failure –* which is a mirror reflection of institutionalization according to intentions (to be discussed in the following section). An institutional failure is a total abandonment of what was intended to be created, disrupted or maintained. The circle in the right depicts the last and also distinct type of the *constant reinstitutionalization.* This represents the situation when, after the institutional work has been triggered, the institutional setting is not reaching the state of relative balance. The bended arrow connecting the constant reinstitutionalization with the continuum of institutional compromises symbolizes the fact that, usually, the vicious circle is broken and the institutional setting eventually becomes relatively stabilized.

Institutional failures

I define institutional failure as a proto-institution which was sponsored and supported by certain actors but did not *finally* get established in a given institutional field. In the previous sentence, the word *finally* should be treated with caution. What is *final* in a process of institutionalization is socially defined. Therefore, the most important aspect of institutional failure is that actors came to the opinion that they had not succeeded and thus have abandoned the attempts to set the new institution. Without this stipulation, sooner or later all institutions might be considered as an institutional failure as all institutions sooner or later will fail.

In the purest sense, institutional failure seems to be the consequence of the creating of an institution. The actor (individual, organizational, or coalition of actors) has worked on creating an institution, yet due to different reasons he/she did not succeed. The reasons for failures might be the following: lack of material resources needed to support the proto-institution; incoherence with the institutional context in which the proto-institution was intended to be set – the notion of institutional logic is very useful in analyzing this phenomenon (see Thornton and Ocasio 2008); proto-institution might not fit the dominant institutional logic in a given field; sponsored proto-institutions are contradictory to the interests of other actors who work against their institutionalization. In this last case, we witness the conflict over the creating and disrupting of institutions, which is won by the actors willing to disrupt the new structure. The situation's lack of coherence within dominant institutional logic might also be the case of a conflict with actors working on maintaining the institutions, which at present dominate in a given field.

Taking into account that the institution might be in the midst of maintaining or disrupting, the institutional failure also appears in situations when actors *finally* realize that they are unable to achieve the desired destruction of an institution or they are unable to defend an institution.

The concept of institutional failure shows how hard it is to abandon the mode of thinking to which we are accustomed – that is one in terms of accomplishments, and not of open processes. In this study I treat failure as perceived by actors, and one cannot refute that many actors understand the world in terms of accomplishments. The moment when actors *finally* start to perceive an attempt as a failure is also set by the temporal relation of an actor to his intentions. In the situation of institutional failure, the actor quits his/her orientation for the future which is essential for the projective dimension of human agency. The actor realizes that he/she is not able to make real his/her goals, plans, objectives, dreams, wishes, desires, anxieties, hopes, fears or aspirations (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 984). By accepting this fact, the actor admits that he/she has failed in his/her institutional work. Then he/she limits himself/herself to the aspects of agency oriented to the past or present.

Another element regarding institutional failure is that it is the *purest* type of unintended consequence of institutional work. For sociologists looking for interesting, complex cases it is also the dullest one. An actor had intended something but he did not manage to achieve it. So the failure is one end of the continuum of the possible course of institutional change. The opposite one would be the successful institutional

work, after which actors are able to say: *yes we have accomplished what we have in-tended*. These two situations are only useful as ideal types (Weber 1949) employed when analyzing empirical situations of institutional change influenced by actions of actors of different and even opposite intentions.

Institutional compromises

Briefly speaking, institutional compromises consist of all the unintended consequences of institutional work which are placed in the continuum limited by the intended consequence of institutional work on one side, and by the institutional failures on the other side. Such a definition is of course unusable from the analytical point of view. Hence, I propose the following one: the institutional compromise is the relatively institutionalized practice or rule of technology initiated by institutional work, which during the course of social process took a form which was unintended by the actor performing institutional work. This term depicts all modifications of rules negotiated with other engaged actors. The process of negotiation should be understood metaphorically as bargaining between actors engaged in a given institutional field and as an effect of repeated modifications and attempts to conform with certain rules.

When employing the term I defined as institutional compromises, it is also revealing to apply the notions proposed by Zietsma and McKnight (2009) who studied how the proto-institutions are sponsored. The authors showed how final institutional arrangements were the outcome of competitive convergence or collaborative co-creation between actors of dissimilar goals (Zietsma and McKnight 2009, 155-156). Some of these actors were working on creating institutions and parallelly disrupting other ones, while others were working on maintaining existing institutions and trying to disrupt the new proto-institutions.

Simply put, *negotiations* between actors performing institutional work with actors who do not have any intentional aim at creating, disrupting or maintaining institutions are also important. In this sense, negotiations mean attempts to recruit other actors or to influence their routines. Using different measures, the actors performing institutional work persuade other actors to change or keep to the practices to which they are accustomed. Such negotiations do not have to be direct. Sometimes they consist of strengthening the sanctions for undesired practices or increasing the pay-outs for desired ones. Following Portes (2010, 56), these negotiations can be understood as actions of rational actors which turn out to have unexpected consequences because of their social embeddedness.

If one understands "social institution" following North (1990, 5) as the rules of the social game, the simplest case of institutional work would be the setting of new formal rules in legal acts by the policymaker. But as all studies on the phenomenon of decoupling[7] show, it is often the case that the informal rules of the social game are not

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7   Decoupling was defined by Meyer and Rowan (1977, 356-357) as performing activities which are believed to be effective but are inconsistent with the legitimized structure formally adopted by the organization.

changed as much as the policymaker had desired, because there is no means of influencing the routines supported by the interests of actors. It is often the case that the informal rules of the social game are not changed as much as the policymaker had desired, because there is no means of influencing the routines supported by the interests of actors.

In studies of institutional work we find some examples of what I have depicted as institutional compromises. Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen (2009) showed how the intention to build a stronger connection of Scandinavian scholars with American academic centers – where institutional theory has been developed – led to the establishing of the so called *Scandinavian Institutionalism*. This is currently recognized (maybe sometimes it is a bit of sectarian exaggeration) as a separate school of thought in social sciences. Indeed, Scandinavian scholars from the field of organizational studies have developed some new ideas and their own institutions of knowledge exchange and production (i.e. conferences, journals). This example of a sociology of sociology illustrates the simple and common process of an institution that started *living its own life* and developed into something bigger than its founders intended and expected. This would be an example we should place near the intended consequences of institutional work. The establishment of the school of Scandinavian institutionalism was something which simply transcended beyond the short time horizon and imagination of its initiators.

In Marti and Mair's (2009) study on how weak and dominated actors are able to influence institutions, one of the examples given is the institution of microcredit programs in Bangladesh dedicated to female borrowers. One of the effects of the program was the increase of the violence against the females who received the loans (Marti and Mair 2009, 103; conf. Wahed and Bhuiya 2007). In this case, the effects of the newly established institution worked against the ones to whom it was intended to help in bettering their life conditions in the first place. I would place this example close to the institutional failure side of the continuum. Although the institution still exists, some of its effects are 180 degrees in the opposite direction to the intention of its creators. This example also points to the meaning of the noun *compromise* in the proposed type. Institutional compromise is a resulting effect of actions – some of which were intended to work on institutions and some of which were not meant to be dedicated to the purpose of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions.

I would also interpret from the perspective of the unintended consequences of social action Michels' (1949) classical study on the transformation of goals of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. In the course of its development and institutionalization, this organization had to abandon the goals intended by its founders. Such studies were also conducted in USA in the 1950s and 1960s by the so-called Selznick's institutional school (see Scott 2008, 23). The institutionalization of an organizational form which serves different goals than those assumed by its creators might be treated as an example of institutional compromise. It is resultant of the actions of organization participants (intra-organizational processes), of interactions of the organization with its environment – i.e. the organizational field (inter-organizational processes, or field-level-processes) – and of broader changes of social conditions effecting the organiza-

tion (macro-processes). After the passage of a certain amount of time, the accomplishments are beyond the control of the initial creators.

When studying the consequences of institutional work, I find it highly relevant to employ the metaphor proposed by Czarniawska (2006, 23) in her analysis of the creating of London School of Economics as an institution. According to her work, an institution is an anthill not a pyramid. The pyramid is the perfect realization of a design, whereas the anthill is the effect of the cooperation of multiple actors who are triggered by the general idea, but also reshape it depending on the available resources. The actions of these actors are more or less coordinated, sometimes thanks to negotiations or translating the individual interests are transformed into one common interest, but the final shape is never equal to the initial intention.

To conclude, to state that nearly all institutions are institutional compromises might be perceived as a fairly banal remark. In this study I only focused on the institutional compromises which were "worked", yet all the institutions occurring as an effect of negotiations, divergent aims, motifs and interests are compromises – i.e. results of practices performed by actors with different (and sometimes opposite) purposes, motifs, interests, desires or beliefs regarding what is appropriate.

Constant reinstitutionalization

Constant reinstitutionalization is a special case of unintended consequences of institutional work. It is a somehow paradoxical case, if one takes into account that institutions are (at least to some extent) stable structures. *Reinstitutionalization* was defined by Jepperson (1991, 152) as an "exit from one institutionalization, and entry into another institutional form, organized around different principles or rules". Constant reinstitutionalization depicts the situation in which the field has exited from one institutional form but has not yet entered the new one, or the one in which – because of the shaking off of one institutional order – the kaleidoscope of new successive institutional orders appears, but such a kaleidoscope, in fact, is not an order but chaos.

In reference to the findings of numerous studies on deinstitutionalization (see Olivier 1992) which inspired Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 217) to propose the concept of institutional work that binds problems of creating and disrupting of institutions, I look at the hypothetically possible situation when the cycle of settling of the new institutional order is not being closed. I am also building on Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings' (2002, 60) conception of non-isomorphic institutional change. This perspective proposes six stages of change: precipitating jolts, deinstitutionalization, preinstitutionalization, theorization, diffusion and reinstitutionalization. On this basis, I put forward the argument that one of the types of unintended consequences of institutional work would be the scenario of the impossibility of closing the cycle – in another words, the never-ending spin of the cycle.[8]

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8   When talking about constant reinstitutionalization, I imagine a picture of a hamster in a spinning wheel.

I define constant reinstitutionalization as a state of an institutional field in which after triggering institutional work the institutional setting does not reach relative stability. Again, stability should be perceived from the perspective of actors. In the model of change proposed by Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002, 60) or the one proposed by Jepperson (1991, 152) – i.e. stages of institutional formation; institutional development; deinstitutionalization; and reinstitutionalization – reinstitutionalization is an accomplishment, the end of the process. I claim that institutional work may deregulate institutional order in a given setting to the extent that none of the actors will be satisfied with it.

A classical and extreme example of constant reinstitutionalization could be the French Revolution in 1789 or the Russian Revolution in 1917. These are cases where the small changes of institutional arrangements led to an avalanche of consecutive changes. The revolutions finally finished with the establishment new regimes (Napoleon's regime in France and the consolidation of communists' power in Russia). These eventual completions give us a hint that, usually, the spin of constant reinstitutionalization gets stopped at some point. This evolution is symbolized in *figure 1* by the bended arrow connecting the *constant reinstitutionalization* with the *continuum of institutional compromises*. Than again, it is important to keep in mind that when observing continuous processes, two factors are of great importance. These are the moment of the evaluation of the level of institutionalization, and the perspective of the actor who might perceive the situation as more or less stable – his/her temporal relation. The moment of research should be seen as the reverse side of the actors' perspective. From a different time perspective, a stable institution seems to be emerging from the spinning wheel and the institutional chaos might appear as order.[9]

A less extreme example of constant reinstitutionalization could be the phenomenon of *legal inflation*. Changes of legislative acts could be perceived as institutional work. Changes of acts or ordinances cause reactions of the actors who need to adjust to them. Some of these reactions might be considered as unintended consequences from the point of view of the law-giver. Thus, new amendments appear. Modern legislative processes illustrate very well how institutions are being "negotiated". Sometimes this is due to formal lobbying, other times to the decoupling of actors being subjected to the legislation. Solving social problems by legislation is like cutting off the heads of Hydra – nine new heads always grow in place of each one cut, presenting new problems.

Viewed from this perspective, it seems possible that constant reinstitutionalization might appear after actors attempt creating or disrupting institutions. The maintaining of an institution seems to be acting in the defense of the institutional order. Hence, the problem of the social order (see Hechter and Horne 2009) brings again to the fore the issue of the actors' and researchers' perspective. What is the relation of the subjective opinion of actors about lack of order to the research outcomes proving that, while they studied people claiming to be in state of total chaos, they follow the routines and insti-

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9   This situation could be illustrated by a joke about the Chinese historian asked about the consequences of the Great French Revolution. The answer was: "it is too early to estimate the consequences". The time horizon of the Chinese historian was the very long history of the Chinese civilization.

tutionalized patterns of action? I will leave this question open, because this paper is not the right occasion to start discussing this crucial sociological matter. Another important remark suggests that the situation of constant reinstitutionalization is impossible. Even the conflict over institutions must be carried out according to some wider institutional rules.

Conclusions

One problem that stands out, when analyzing unintended consequences in the context of institutional work where the actors reflexively monitor their actions, is the ongoing reformulation and reinterpretation of the actor's intentions and his/her temporal relation to them. When looking at the shape of institutions in the making from the perspective of the actor, we have to bear in mind that analogue to all social process, his or her intensions are being reshaped as well. To what extent are we able to compare the intentions of the actor from the moment of time A to his/her intentions from the moment of time of B is therefore a methodological question. It is always a matter of interpretation of his/her own interpretations – the crucial problem of interpretive understanding [*Verstehen*] in sociology. When analyzing organizational action we have access to empirical sources such as documents, which might be interpreted as objectifications of actors' intentions at the moment. Still, these quite often leave room for interpretation. As we know from studies on the construction of autobiographies (see Denzin 1989), people constantly reinterpret their lives, add new meanings to past events, and reinterpret intentions. Therefore, in institutional analysis we are never sure if the moment of the process we are grasping is in accordance with the intentions of the actor when he/she triggered his/her actions, or with the reformulation of his/her intentions at the moment of carrying out the observation. And the opposite also presents a problem: if the actor came to the consensus that what is going on (the outcomes) are contradictory to his/her intentions, to what extent can we be sure that this it is not a matter of reinterpretation of intentions?[10] These questions are not going to be answered with certainty, and the application of new notions like institutional work is not going to help either. The best answer to this dilemma is to think about institutional work in terms of the metaphor of the anthill proposed by Czarniawska (2006, 23), where the shape of construction is resultant of constant modifications of multiple actors' activities, not a perfect realization of one fixed plan.

In this paper I put forward a working typology of the consequences of institutional work. The proposed types of institutional failure, institutional compromise and constant reinstitutionalization do not seem to provide us with much order or solve the crucial sociological problem of unintended consequences. Yet, I consider that the typology might be useful when evaluating the possible development of institutional change after the institutional work is triggered. Estimating where to find the outcomes of creating, maintaining and disrupting on the continuum of the institutional compromis-

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10   That set of research problems are intensively studied by the social psychology and explained for example with usage of notions like rationalization (see Festinger 1957).

es might give the measure of the success of an actor with the possibility of constant reinstitutionalization as a warning for everyone who starts applying *institutional engineering.*

Trying to analyze the problem according to the directives of the practice approach I have also pointed to the difficulties that appear when talking about consequences. In the language of activities – and not of achievements – the consequences need to be understood as processes. Yet while consequences seem to be an outcome of empirical peregrinations many social actors understand them as achievements. What is to be recognized as an unintended consequence is a social construction that also depends on the time horizon of an actor. The temporal relation of actor to what is supposed to be the consequence of institutional work is decisive when socially classifying a consequence as an institutional failure, success, something between the two ends of the continuum, or a situation of constant reinstitutionalization.

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