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HOW DO PRIVILEGED INSIDERS BECOME CHANGE AGENTS? A STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL VOLITION

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ABSTRACT

While we have a sense of why institutionally marginalized individuals or dominant actors become change agents, it is less clear what motivates *privileged insiders* - those who have reaped advantages from existing institutional arrangements because of their education, their socio-economic background, their citizenship, their gender, or their race. I combine a symbolic interactionist perspective on social conduct with a structural perspective on frames to explore the process of institutional volition and the conditions under which privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work to address societal issues. Institutional volition is the reflective process leading people to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements. My study reveals variances in the institutional volition of privileged insiders that explains why some of these actors engage in work to repair institutions, while others engage in work to transform them, either disrupting or creating institutions. My study draws attention to the distinct role of feelings rather than emotions in determining whether and how privileged insiders engage in institutional change work. It also suggests that these actors commit to transformative change when they acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of institutional injustices. Finally, I show that privileged insiders need to reframe their role in order to use it as a resource to engage in institutional disruption or creation work.

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DECLARATION

I know that plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty. I have read the document about avoiding plagiarism, am familiar with its contents and have avoided all forms of plagiarism mentioned there. Where I have used the words of others, I have indicated this by the use of quotation marks. I have referenced all quotations and properly acknowledged ideas borrowed from others. I have not and shall not allow others to plagiarise my work.

I, Cecile Feront, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I authorise the University to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The need to address pressing societal issues such as climate change and social inequalities has led to a renewed focus on the role of individuals in institutional change (Barberá-Tomás, Castelló, De Bakker, & Zietsma, 2019; Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2020; DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, 2020). Recent research has highlighted the efforts of individuals who purposefully affect social and symbolic elements of their context (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) and has shown how micro-level dynamics can potentially lead to significant institutional changes (DeJordy, et al., 2020; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Van Wijk, Stam, Elfring, Zietsma, & Den Hond, 2013).

Research investigating the antecedents of individuals' engagement in institutional change has pointed to the experience of a reflective shift (Seo & Creed, 2002), identity work (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010), and emotional dynamics (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Yet, scholars have tended to focus their investigations either on institutionally marginalized actors who may stand to gain from change (Creed, et al., 2010; Martí & Mair, 2009) or on institutionally dominant actors (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006) who engage in institutional change to protect or reinforce their own interests (Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

In contrast, we know less about what motivates institutionally *privileged insiders* - those who have reaped advantages from existing institutional arrangements because of their education, their socio-economic background, their citizenship, their gender, or their race. Privilege insiders may not be dominant actors, but they are beneficiaries of institutional arrangements. Through their participation in institutional processes, they have gained legitimacy and access to various forms of capital (cultural, social, material, symbolic etc.). It remains unclear why and how these privileged insiders may come to rise up and challenge the

institutional arrangements that benefit them and work to shift these institutions for broader societal benefit (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007).

To address these questions, I explored the volitional process leading people to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements in their context, a process I call *institutional volition*. Building on insights from research on agency (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Haidt, 2001), I combined a symbolic interactionist perspective on social conduct (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) with a structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974) to unpack the micro-level mechanisms or stages that underpin the process of institutional volition. This led me to conceptualize this process as self-directed, iterative and self-shaping over time.

To empirically explore how institutional volition is experienced by privileged insiders and may lead them to become actively engaged in promoting institutional change, I then undertook a constructivist grounded theory inquiry (Charmaz, 2011). I situated my investigation in different settings (finance, law, education, agriculture and business) and reached out to privileged insiders who were, in various degrees, engaged in change processes trying to address societal issues within their institutional context. Central to my investigation was understanding the *process of emergence* pertaining to how these privileged insiders departed from everyday routines, practices, or perspectives and came to engage in institutional change.

My empirical investigation led me to identify four volitional pathways leading privileged insiders to different forms of engagement with institutions. The first volitional pathway led some privileged insiders to default to *institutional compliance* rather than engage in change: they complied with the latest legal requirements or industry standards. The second volitional pathway led other privileged insiders to engage in *repair work*: they engaged in efforts to promote changes within the boundaries of existing institutions. The third and the fourth

volitional pathways led privileged insiders to engage in efforts to transform institutionalized beliefs and practices: they either extended their existing role to engage in *disruption work*, or transformed their role to engage in *creating work*.

My study makes several contributions to our understanding of why and how privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work. First, I propose a process model showing the conditions under which privileged insiders engage in purposeful work to either repair, disrupt or create institutions. Second, I point to a distinct role for feelings, revealing that individuals' active engagement with their feelings is a critical determinant in whether and how they engage in work to repair institutions or in work to transform institutions. Third, I demonstrate that privileged insiders commit to transformative agency when they acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of injustices. Fourth and finally, I show that role reframing is what enables privileged insiders to actively engage in institutional transformation work, either creating or disrupting institutions.

My dissertation proceeds as follows. In the literature chapter, I explore what we know about how and why people engage with institutional dynamics and establish theoretical foundations to start conceptualizing the process of institutional volition. In my methodology chapter, I explain how I engaged in the research process, including my assumptions and methodological choices, my sampling strategy, the different phases of data collection and analysis I engaged in, and the strategies I employed to improve my research. In my findings chapter, I share what I learned from my informants, describing archetypal journeys, unpacking how these journeys unfolded, and identifying key volitional pathways. My discussion chapter develops the different contributions I make to our understanding of why and how privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work. I also discuss the practical implications of my study and directions for future research before concluding.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

My literature review focuses on understanding how institutionally privileged individuals become change agents, engaged in purposeful efforts aimed at shaping or transforming the dominant beliefs, assumptions or established practices within their context or field of practice. Institutionally privileged individuals are "insiders" who benefit from existing institutional arrangements. Thanks to their education, their socio-economic background, their citizenship, their gender, or their race, they have gained legitimacy and access to various forms of capital (cultural, social, material, symbolic etc.) within an institutional context.

Contrary to institutionally marginalized individuals (Creed, et al., 2010; Martí & Mair, 2009) or peripheral actors (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007; King & Soule, 2007) who may stand to gain from change, it is less clear what would motivate privileged insiders to rise up and challenge institutional arrangements that have benefited them (Garud, et al., 2007). According to previous research, privileged actors are likely to experience high pressure to conform to dominant arrangements (Garud, et al., 2007). They are also less likely to be motivated by the idea of change as their interests are "aligned with current practices" (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 29).

Yet, most research exploring how and why privileged actors engage in institutional change has tended to focus on "dominant actors" - those who have comparatively benefited more than other non-marginalized insiders from institutional arrangements (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). For example, "big five accounting firms" have arguably benefited more from institutional arrangement relating to multidisciplinary practices than average public account firms (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). The concept of dominant actors has thus been associated with "institutional entrepreneurs" who have sufficient resources "to realize interests that they

value highly" (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). Accordingly, research has tended to assume that dominant actors would only become change agents if it allowed them to protect or reinforce their own interests (Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

The term change agent is often used generically to designate a broad range of actors that are engaged in efforts to engender change in their context (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). The term change agent has thus been used to describe institutional entrepreneurs who use their legitimacy, power and resources to pursue their own interests (Battilana, et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008), tempered radicals who are pushing for change through incremental actions (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), social movement activists who frame the need for change and motivate action (Van Wijk, et al., 2013), or institutional challengers who work to enable or amplify the disruption work of other actors (Bertels, Hoffman, & DeJordy, 2014). Despite its ambiguity, the term "change agent" captures the idea of actors engaged in "goal-directed effort[s] … to manipulate some aspect of their social-symbolic context" (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 225).

In this study, my focus is on understanding how institutionally privileged individuals become what Seo and Creed (2002) refer to as institutional change agents, actively engaged in promoting institutional change. My aim is to understand how these individuals - without being mandated or gaining an apparent benefit from it - become engaged in purposeful efforts aimed at challenging or breaking away from what is normal and legitimate in an institutional context (Battilana, et al., 2009). As such, I am not concerned with collective actors or organizations engaged in change processes (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Wijen & Ansari, 2007), nor am I concerned with people engaged in organizational change initiatives (Sonenshein, 2016; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2010).

To understand how privileged insiders become agents of change willing to engage their institutions, it is necessary to understand the process of *institutional volition*. Volition can be

understood as a reflective process "bridging the gaps between deliberation, decision or intentions and action" (Zhu, 2004, p. 252). As such, it designates the active and effortful activity through which individuals intentionally and purposefully commit to a line of action (Ginet, 1990; McCann, 1998; Zhu, 2004). More particularly, *institutional volition* refers to the volition process leading individuals to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements. For the purpose of this study, I focus on understanding how the process of institutional volition leads privileged insiders to become engaged in institutional change.

Understand this process requires an understand of people's motivation and ability to shape or transform institutions. It further invites us to examine the concept of agency and the mental processes involved as people commit to a line of action. My literature review is thus structured in two main parts. In the first part (section 2.2), I explore how people experience institutions, how they engage in institutional dynamics, and what we know about why people become involved in institutional change. In the second part (section 2.3), I establish some theoretical foundations to unpack the process of institutional volition. I situate institutional volition in relation to agency and I review the cognitive processes likely to affect people's engagement in processes of institutional change, before turning to explore micro-level dynamics that help explain how institutional volition might unfold. Concluding my literature review, I propose to conceptualize institutional volition as a self-directed, iterative and self-shaping reflective process that leads people to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements.

2.2 Institutions, people and change

Institutions can be defined as templates for action that are both generated and maintained by ongoing interactions between people (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Providing order and

meaning to social life (Scott, 2014), institutions constitute "the more enduring features of social life … giving 'solidity' [to social systems] across time and space" (Giddens, 1984, p. 24). As such, people tend to experience them as taken-for-granted constraints on their activities (Jepperson, 1991). By setting bounds on the opportunities and alternatives that people perceive, institutions increase the probability of certain types of behaviors (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), ensuring "the routinization" of interactions and the "seeming 'fixity' of institutions" (Giddens, 1984, p. 72). Institutions thus tend to be reproduced by people without much reflection, "treated as relative fixtures in a social environment and explicated (accounted for) as functional elements of that environment" (Jepperson, 1991, p. 147).

Traditionally, institutional theorists have emphasized the constraining and regulatory power of institutions over individuals and organizations, focusing their analysis on the institutional forces influencing actors (Meyer & Rowan, 1991). However, two perspectives have emerged that have given greater attention to people in institutions. These perspectives are inhabited institutions (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006) and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Both of these perspectives have sought to "bring people back in" institutional analysis, allowing for a greater understanding of how people influence processes of institutional stability or change.

2.2.1 Inhabited institutions

Scholars of inhabited institutions have emphasized that people are not only "carriers" but also "shapers" of institutions, as they negotiate meanings and lines of action (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). On the one hand, the dynamic interactions between competent and knowledgeable people generate the multitude of meanings which "ground" what institutions are and shape their becoming. On the other hand, the templates for action that emerge from this process become progressively taken-for-granted, shaping future interactions and negotiations

between actors (Jepperson, 1991). This process highlights what Giddens (1984) has called the duality of social structure, indicating how interactions between people shape social structures, which in turn shape people's subjective realities and actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

An "inhabited" approach builds on a symbolic interactionist lens to highlight the role of people, their social interactions and their meaning making processes in the evolution of institutions. It emphasizes the reflective capacity of people and the semi-autonomous trajectory of interactions to suggest that institutional pressures "partially constitute (but do not completely determine) how interactions unfold" (Hallett & Meanwell, 2016, p. 6). Processes of institutional stability or change depend on people who act, "at times in concert and at times in conflict," to influence their social context (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 214).

An "inhabited" approach thus moves people and their interactions to the center of the analysis and allows for a deeper consideration of the factors that underpin people's responses to their social context. On the one hand, it reconnects with prior research (Bourdieu, 1991; Giddens, 1984; Selznick, 1957) to emphasize the importance of attending to the flow of human behaviors, embodied experiences, values and individual biographies to understand how social action and the negotiation of meanings unfold (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016). On the other hand, it highlights the importance of not only considering how people interact with their immediate situation (micro- and meso-level), but also how they engage with broader social systems (macro-level) (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 231). Considering the mechanisms that link the micro to the macro-level of analysis is particularly important if we are to account for the material and symbolic elements through which rules, norms and beliefs arise, and which shape action.

For this reason, an "inhabited" approach provides a lens to analyze how people might experience and respond to institutional logics. Logics are defined by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) as "frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sensemaking, the

vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity" (2012, p. 2). Logics have been theorized as containing values and emotions that guide people's behaviors and provide meaning to their social reality (Toubiana, Greenwood, & Zietsma, 2017; Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). Logics capture the material, cultural and symbolic elements that shape the reasoning, beliefs and practices of people and organizations that operate in a particular institutional field (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutional fields are "identifiable arenas of social action" (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008, p. 601), such as financial markets, law or education, where diverse and interdependent individuals and organizations form a reference system and uphold the importance of certain activities, identities and behaviors (Scott, 2014). Each institutional field tends to be associated with a particular logic that is "brought to life" through people's interactions.

At times, multiple logics with divergent prescriptions can coexist in an institutional field, creating contradictions and tensions that people may need to confront (Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015; Thornton, et al., 2012). Contradictions can provide the context for meaning-making activities and the resources for people to challenge the beliefs or templates for action of a particular field (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Lounsbury, 2007; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). As such, they have been evidenced to function as triggers and enablers of endogenous change (Greenwood, Díaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010; Thornton, et al., 2012). Yet, even in a plural or contested environment, the presence of a dominant and well established logic can make it difficult for people to meaningfully engage with change processes, acting to suppress dissenting voices (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Friedland (2012) notes that challenging an institutional logic must be "willed" at the individual level in the form of subjective commitments.

The strength of an "inhabited" approach lies in its ability to shed light on the processes through which meanings are negotiated and enactments are embedded in institutions. While

institutions influence people's understanding of the world, people's feelings, values and interpretations matter as they shape the material and symbolic systems in which people interact. Despite being embedded in institutions, people can still affect and change their institutional context (Bechky, 2011). The next section explores what we know about how people shape institutions and the work that they undertake to do it.

2.2.2 Institutional work

The institutional work perspective is particularly helpful to gain insights into the purposive activities of people aimed at institutional stability or change (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Investigating actors' efforts - successful or not - to influence institutions, the "turn to work" in institutional theory (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012) represents a coordinated effort to open the "black box" of actors' agency by focusing on how actors' everyday efforts lead to creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions.

While the prior focus on *creating institutions* emphasized the visible actions of institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988), a focus on institutional work helps to also see the less evident practices. For instance, people have been shown to engage in political work to redefine rules and boundaries, actions aimed at reconfiguring relationships and identities, and activities that alter meaning systems or establish new templates for action (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

The work of *maintaining institutions* generally involves people "supporting, repairing or recreating the social mechanisms that ensure compliance" to existing institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 230). While it often focuses on the work of people to suppress change, institutional maintenance may also point to people's efforts aimed at coping with changing conditions and incorporating these changes into existing routines and practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Disrupting institutions takes the form of undermining or challenging assumptions and belief systems. The actions of people disrupting institutions can range from disconnecting sanctions and rewards from established practices, to challenging the appropriateness and legitimacy of certain practices, encouraging new ways of acting, or problematizing the boundaries of institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Rather than exploring outcomes of institutional processes, the study of institutional work is focused on investigating the activities that people engage in and which shape institutions. Institutional work has taken a practice perspective (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984), which sees "actors as knowledgeable and practical in their affairs," and working to achieve certain outcomes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 219). The aim of the work perspective is to reveal the ongoing movement of the social world. It shed lights on the recursive relationship between people's actions and institutions by studying the practices that occur within particular institutional arrangements and rely on available skills or resources. Critical to this perspective is the emphasis on work as a situated and intelligent activity "which may or may not achieve its desired goals and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in unintended and unexpected ways" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 219). Individuals and organizations are recognized as aware of institutional arrangements and engaging in intentional and skillful efforts to shape their context. Yet, though their efforts can potentially lead to the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions or routines, their actions always "occur within sets of institutionalized rules" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 220).

Bringing individuals' and organizations' actions to the center of institutional dynamics, scholars of institutional work have increasingly provided insights into forms of work that were "largely unknown or unexpected just a few years ago" (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 223). These new types of work include for instance value work (Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013), emotion work (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Voronov & Vince, 2012), identity work (Creed,

et al., 2010), cultural work (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011), practice work (Smets, et al., 2015), boundary work (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), or justification work (Taupin, 2013).

Interestingly, Lawrence and Phillips (2019) have pointed out that not all forms of work identified by scholars of institutional work focus on shaping institutions. Some types of work like practice work aim at shaping organizational life, whereas others, such as identity work or emotions work, focus on influencing a person's self. In summarizing the development of the "work" perspective, Lawrence and Phillips (2019) have thus brought forward the umbrella concept of "socio-symbolic work." This concept brings together the various forms of work and categorizes them according to the type of social-symbolic objects they target. The authors define social-symbolic objects as "discursive, relational, and material elements that constitute meaningful patterns in social systems" (p. 24). Socio-symbolic work examines how people engage in purposeful and reflective efforts to shape three broad classes of social-symbolic objects - institutions, organizations and the self (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Building on this distinction, Lawrence and Phillips (2019) have suggested that activities, such as such as identity work or emotions work, might be best described as *self work*, as they highlight the work actors do to intentionally and reflexively shape their self in relation to their context. The concept suggests that the self can be an object of one's thought, reflection, and action, thereby holding the potential for transformation. By extension, self work might influence actors' ability to engage in other forms of work. For instance, scholars have shown how people's moral inquiry may underpin their engagement in social purpose projects (Nilsson, 2015), or how people's capacity to regulate their emotions may influence their response to certain institutional norms or pressures (Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014; Lok, Creed, DeJordy, & Voronov, 2017; Voronov & Vince, 2012; Voronov & Weber, 2016). In this context, institutional volition may be understood as a process antecedent to or driving some forms of self work or other socio-symbolic work.

Challenging theoretical approaches that have tended to emphasize rule-following and cognitive constraints on the actions of institutional actors, the institutional work perspective – now brought under the umbrella perspective of socio-symbolic work - has shed light on the activities that actors intentionally and reflexively do to shape social dynamics. Scholars of institutional work have provided evidence that people "have volition" (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 2015, p. 96) and have shown *how* people use their multifaceted agency to shape institutions (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). What remains to be examined is *why* people become involved in institutional change.

2.2.3 Why people engage in institutional change

To explain why people engage in institutional change, research has often pointed to interests and power (Beckert, 1999; DiMaggio, 1988), social skills (Fligstein, 2001) and the enabling role of social positions (Battilana, 2006). People who engage in institutional change are able to mobilize resources, creativity and skills "to realize interests that they value highly" (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). However, this body of research has predominantly focused on explaining the "opportunity for action" and "enabling conditions" that exists at the field-level (Dorado, 2005) or at the organizational level (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), rather than the individual-level motivational processes leading people to engage in institutional change (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009). Research that has focused on individual-level motivational dynamics has mainly pointed to three processes, namely, people's experience of a reflective shift (Seo & Creed, 2002), changes in identity (Creed, et al., 2010) and emotional changes affecting people's sensemaking capabilities (Maitlis, et al., 2013; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Voronov & Vince, 2012).

2.2.3.1 The experience of a reflective shift

Seo and Creed (2002) have argued that people can become change agents when their experience of institutional contradictions triggers a reflective shift. The authors (2002) describe this reflective shift as the reshaping of institutional inhabitants' consciousness and "involving the critique of existing social patterns and the search for alternatives" (Seo & Creed, 2002, p. 230). Institutional contradictions arise when people experience an internal misalignment with social arrangements or when different institutional logics create a contradictory environment. Institutional contradictions create inefficiencies, tensions, incompatibilities, or crisis that may lead people to engage in a critical reflection.

Seo and Creed (2002) suggest that a possible outcome of a reflective shift is a process of institutional dis-embedding, through which people come to question "the perceived inevitability of institutional arrangements" (Seo & Creed, 2002, p. 234) and start developing alternative templates of action. The experience of a reflective shift enables actors to engage in transformative action (Seo & Creed, 2002). Alternative templates are unlikely to be totally new, but rather appropriated from existing belief systems available within the broader institutional context.

Seo and Creed (2002) predicted that people who have been marginalized or have less power within existing institutional arrangements would be more likely to experience a reflective shift and engage in the development of alternative templates for action. As such, it remains unclear what would trigger privileged actors – whose interests tend to be aligned with institutional arrangements – to experience a reflective shift and become "change minded" (Chung & Luo, 2008) . Uncertainties also persist regarding how the experience of a reflective shift may lead people to become committed to transformative agency. While the reflective shift may predispose people to engage in a critical reflection around institutional arrangements, it does not fully explain how they end up acting as institutional change agents. There appears to

be a gap between people's experience of a reflective shift and their engagement in transformative change agency.

2.2.3.2 The role of identity change

Building on Seo and Creed's (2002) research, Creed and colleagues (2010) suggested that identity change may be a precondition for individuals to engage in institutional change. Investigating the "antecedent microprocesses" that underpin how insiders "begin to see themselves as change agents," the authors (2010) argued that people embedded in a particular institution may need "to (re)create themselves in order to become effective change agents" (p. 1339). In a study focusing on individuals who have been marginalized by institutional arrangements, Creed and colleagues (2010) showed how gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) protestant ministers initially internalized unresolved institutional contradictions, denying their GLBT identities to appear consistent with the social identity prescriptions of the church. However, as they progressively accepted their marginalized identity, GLBT ministers engaged in efforts to reconcile their identity with their commitment to the church's institutions (Creed et al., 2010).

Creed and colleagues (2010) described these efforts as 'identity work,' a process by which a person's identity is established, maintained or transformed. Identity work helped the GLBT ministers "to claim and use their institutional roles in ways that challenge institutional prescriptions" (Creed, et al., 2010, p. 1356), hence becoming institutional change agents. The authors (2010) highlight how identity work can act as a mechanism to both resolve contradictions at the individual level and engender change at the institutional level. It is a form of self work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) that shapes how individuals understand themselves and their group memberships. Creed and colleagues'(2010) research further emphasizes how identity – "the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves" (Brown, 2015, p. 23) – can act as a lens through which people interpret and engage with macro-social norms.

Accordingly, identity change may be involved in the process leading people to engage in institutional change. Creed and colleagues'(2010) research also points to the notion of "role as resource" (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994) to explain how individuals are able to enact change. Marginalized insiders engage in transformative action by reclaiming roles that were denied to them (Creed, et al., 2010).

2.2.3.3 The role of emotions

Research looking at the link between rational and emotional processes has suggested that *how* people experience institutional contradictions may affect their capacity to engage in institutional change. For instance, Voronov and Yorks (2015) have argued that unless people "apprehend" both the rational and affective facets of institutional contradictions, they are unlikely to engage in a critical reflection around institutional arrangements. Pure rational recognition, for example when people identify a misalignment between their interests and existing institutional arrangements (Seo & Creed, 2002), may not be enough to initiate a reflective shift and may instead trigger defense mechanisms to reduce anxiety (Voronov & Yorks, 2015). A lack of affective apprehension of institutional contradictions may impede people's capacity to engage with them.

Beyond affective apprehension of contradictions, scholars have argued that people may need to become emotionally disinvested from existing institutional arrangement before being able to effectively engage in institutional change (Maitlis, et al., 2013; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Emotional disinvestment can occur when people experience negative or painful emotions (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Maitlis, et al., 2013; Voronov & Vince, 2012), and/or when they identify with a new understanding of reality (Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Voronov & Vince, 2012). In such instances, people are less likely to accept and navigate existing institutional constraints. Feelings of anger, injustice or shame can lead people to challenge the legitimacy of institutional arrangements (Voronov & Vince, 2012), make

moral judgments (Lok, et al., 2017), or want to adopt new templates for action (Ruebottom & Auster, 2018). Should people both rationally and emotionally disinvest from institutional arrangements, research suggests that "agents with lower access to capital are likely to disrupt the institutional order, whereas those with higher access are likely to create a new institution" (Voronov & Vince, 2012, p. 72).

In line with this body of research, scholars have suggested that the valence and intensity of emotions may shape people's reflective processes and engagement in action (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Maitlis, et al., 2013; Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). For example, Maitlis and colleagues (2013) have argued that people feeling moderately negative emotions in relation to an event are more likely to perceive the need for engaging in a reflective process, while the experience of higher intensity of emotions may be necessary for people to transcend their context and conception of self. Barberá-Tomás and colleagues (2019) also show that the triggering of strong negative emotions in people who are invested in the status quo may be necessary to persuade them that their own behavior is "wrong." The authors (2019) argue that emotions associated with guilt, sadness, rage or despair can get people to challenge their social programming and enact change.

Yet, the micro-dynamics underpinning how emotions affect processes of disinvestment and engagement in change remain unclear. Scholars remind us that, for people who are deeply enmeshed with the substance of institutions, to challenge or be at odds with an institution is both rationally and emotionally difficult (Friedland, 2018; Toubiana, et al., 2017; Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). As argued by Toubiana and colleagues (2017, p. 554), "it will feel wrong to them to act in any way that is inconsistent with these prescribed emotional registers." In such instances, people are likely to regulate their emotions, rather than engage in change (Voronov & Vince, 2012).

Emotional regulation has been described as a type of "emotion work" enabling people to discipline (regulate) their emotions in response to social norms and prescriptions (Hochschild, 1979; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019; Voronov & Weber, 2016). Hochschild (1979, p. 560) defines emotion work as "making a conscious, intended try at altering feeling," such as when people attempt to control a feeling or actively work to move past it (Toubiana, 2020). Emotional regulation has thus often been associated with emotional competence (Toubiana, et al., 2017; Voronov & Weber, 2016), which points to one's "capacity to belong to and inhabit an institutional order" by engaging in processes of "self-regulation and other-authorization" (Voronov & Weber, 2016, p. 457). In this context, emotion work primarily involves emotional regulation to display emotions that conform to the behavioral expectations of an institutional setting. Research by Creed and colleagues (2014) has also highlighted the disciplinary power of certain emotions, such as shame, especially when people fear not belonging or being rejected by an institution. In such instance, emotions can be used strategically to elicit renewed conformity and reassert institutional prescriptions.

While research highlighting the role of reflective shifts, identity work and emotional dynamics provide valuable insights into factors influencing why people become institutional change agents, it also leaves several questions unanswered. We still know little about how people who are not marginalized by an institution become "change minded" (Chung & Luo, 2008), how prospective institutional change agents become committed to transformative agency, and how rational and emotional dynamics develop into active involvement in institutional change. Indeed, current research does not adequately explain the process of *institutional volition*. To gain insight into the theoretical underpinning of institutional volition, I turn to the second part of my literature review, analyzing some key assumptions that underpin the concept of agency and examining what we know of the mechanisms affecting how people engage in action.

2.3 Conceptualizing institutional volition

Key to understanding the process of institutional volition and how it may lead people to engage in institutional change is situating this process in relation to the concept of human agency. Agency concerns people's ability to act and shape social structures, and has been the subject of ongoing debates (Heugens & Lander, 2009). Institutional volition refers to *how* people acquire the "reflective purposefulness" (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012) required to engage in efforts to shape or transform institutions. While research has established that people *have* volition (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 2015, p. 96), little has been done to situate volition in relation to agency, understand how it emerges, and explore how it may shape different forms of institutional work.

In this section, I first situate the notion of institutional volition within the concept of agency by considering key aspects of agency that have inspired the research streams related to inhabited institutionalism and institutional work, and that have helped explain how people come to affect some aspect(s) of their institutional context. I then review what we know about the cognitive processes that affect people's volition. Finally, I turn to symbolic interactionism and framing to help conceptualize the micro-dynamics involved in the process of institutional volition.

2.3.1 Situating institutional volition within agency

Both inhabited institutionalism and institutional work have been inspired by the work of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977, 1991), and have further relied on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work to conceptualize a relational and multidimensional understanding of human agency. While Gidden's and Bourdieu's conceptualizations of agency are most helpful to explain how agency and purposive action enable social reproduction and institutional stability, they provide less insight into how reflexivity and intentionality emerge. Emirbayer and

Mische's (1998) conceptualization addressed these limitations and therefore provides a better framework to situate institutional volition within the concept of agency. Yet their work sheds limited light on the *evolution* of agency, and thus how institutional volition *as a process* might emerge and develop in actors.

While Giddens (1984) attributes rationality, motivation and intentionality to actors, his emphasis is on how these qualities are expressed within "routinized" day-to-day social activities (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). For Giddens (1984), "[a]gency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place" (1984, p. 9). Thus, agency describes what people do, intentionally or not. In contrast, "purposive action" refers to activities "carried on in an intentional way, for certain reasons, within conditions of bounded knowledgeability," yet which can have unexpected or unintentional consequences (1984, p. 294). The knowledge of actors designates their understanding of the rules and tactics that constitute their social life. Even when constraints on action are extreme, Giddens (1984) argues that actors are able to use their reason and motivation to choose what to do. Yet, they can only do so within the bounds of their knowledge, which is largely limited to and shaped by the context in which they move.

Similarly, Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) conceptualization of agency as embedded in the *habitus* primarily sheds light on the habitual, repetitive, and taken-for-granted aspects of agency. The concept of habitus points to how people's past experiences and positions within society are incorporated into their present and future intentions and actions, influencing their identity, behaviors, judgment and practices. Accordingly, people's habitus creates often unarticulated or unconscious expectations about the future – a "system of dispositions" – that shape their perception of the world and how they behave in particular situations (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p. 27). People's habitus thus influences their relationships to social structures (compliance or opposition), how they interpret, classify or use information, and how they

interact with other actors. In this context, intentionality, creativity and improvisation are mostly associated with the selection of specific responses from a practical repertoire. Similarly to Giddens (1984), Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) conceptualization of agency provides insight on how actors participate actively in the reproduction of social structure. However, it does not explicitly explain how established perceptions can be challenged, amended or reformulated, nor how intentionality and change would emerge (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Trying to address the limitations of previous conceptualizations of agency, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) used a relational and pragmatist approach to capture the multidimensional aspects of agency and shed light on its "creative reconstructive dimension" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 984). The authors (1998) built on the work of Mead (1932) and his notion of "reflective consciousness" to articulate the constitutive aspects of agency. According to Mead (1932), people continually review their understanding of the past as they make sense of the future and respond to changing circumstances. As such, reflective consciousness emerges as people deliberate – alone or in interactions with others - their future conduct. It is driven by the "delayed and conflicting responses" a person might have to problematic situations, which encourages the consideration of a broader range of choices (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The concept of reflective consciousness is anchored in what Mead (1932) calls *sociality*, "the situatedness of actors in multiple temporally evolving relational contexts" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 969).

Thus, emphasizing the temporal embeddedness of social engagement processes, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) situate people's agency simultaneously in the past, future and present. Elaborating on the three interrelated dimensions of human agency, the authors (1998) describe how each element has a dominant temporal orientation. *Iteration* is informed by the past (through habits, routines and taken-for-granted knowledge), *projectivity* is oriented toward the future (through the conceptualization of possible alternative trajectories of action) and

practical evaluation is anchored in the present (analyzing past habits in the context of emerging demands or dilemmas). The analysis of people's agency through its constituent dimensions helps to identify the interplay between "the reproductive and the transformative" aspects of social action, highlighting "varying degrees of inventiveness and reflectivity in relation to action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973). This further positions people's actions as inter-subjective accomplishments and brings forward the importance of relational mechanisms. People's agency is directed *towards* something in ongoing interactions within a specific context.

The *projective dimension* of people's agency is particularly interesting as a conceptual anchor to situate institutional volition within the concept of agency. The projective dimension of agency ranges from the "strongly purposive" actions of people to their tentative aspirations as they negotiate their way into the future (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). It describes people's ability to conceptualize projects or futures that are - in various degrees - critical of or different from the present. Projective agency thus captures what Phillips and Lawrence (2012) called the "reflective purposefulness" of people who are able to critically examine taken-for-granted beliefs or practices, and to evaluate (potentially alternative) courses of action. Importantly, it involves people recognizing the non-immutability of social patterns and subjecting trajectories of action to renewed evaluations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). As people engage in projective agency, they pull elements of meaning apart and bring them together again in innovative and unexpected ways. Potentially, this may lead people to put to the test ideas that have a transformative influence upon social structures.

Although the notion of projective agency best helps to situate the purposeful outcome of institutional volition, the *practical-evaluative* dimension provides valuable insights into how institutional volition might emerge. This dimension of agency depicts people's capacity to pragmatically evaluate situations and make considered judgements as a result of deliberations

with others (and sometimes with themselves). Key aspects of practical-evaluation entail people recognizing a particular situation as problematic and difficult to characterize, and consciously deliberating among conflicting possibilities on how to best respond to it. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) emphasize the emotional as well as rational nature of such deliberations and resulting judgements. Building on pragmatist philosophy, the authors (1998) argue that resulting judgments or decisions are likely to be provisional, attached to unclear or emergent objectives, often generating new problematic situations down the road. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) further note that people are more likely to shift from the practical-evaluative dimension of agency to the projective dimension when they engage in self-reflective activities – directing their critical examination, deliberations and judgments towards themselves.

Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work helps to situate institutional volition within the concept of agency. Based on their work, institutional volition can be defined as the reflective process that leads people to engage in the more purposeful dimensions of agency. Institutional volition encompasses how "reflective purposefulness" (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012) emerges and how it potentially creates new trajectories of action.

However, focused on differentiating between the different constitutive elements of agency, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work sheds limited light on the *evolution* of reflective purposefulness, and thus how institutional volition *as a process* might emerge and develop. The authors (1998) do not unpack why and how – in similar circumstances – some actors engage in purposeful actions while other actors do not. They are also not focused on explaining what leads actors to shift from one type of agency to another, or what might lead them to become "change minded" (Chung & Luo, 2008). Moreover, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) analysis centers on rational and conscious cognitive processes, leaving the unconscious processes largely unaccounted for. To conceptualize institutional volition as a process, it

appears important to consider what underpins reflective processes. As such, I now turn to review what we know about the cognitive factors affecting institutional volition.

2.3.2 Cognitive factors affecting institutional volition

Research in psychology and social psychology has done important work to unpack how reflective processes unfold. Here, I consider three areas of research that have the potential to provide insights into factors affecting people's engagement in institutional volition: cognitive developmental theories, moral judgment models, and research on the role of emotions.

Cognitive development theories (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969) have been very influential in institutional research to discuss people's agentic inclinations (Mutch, 2007; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). Most cognitive development theories have built on the work of Piaget (1932/1965) to argue that people progressively develop the capacity for complex and reasoned thought. Throughout childhood and adulthood, people's development shapes their reflective capacity. As a result, people are able to perceive and reflect on the world differently, and only people having reached a certain stage of development are able to engage in reflective purposefulness. Yet, while helping to understand *who* might be more likely to engage in reflective purposefulness by categorizing people's volitional capabilities, research based on cognitive development theories uses a rather deterministic approach that provides limited insights into *how* institutional volition emerges and transforms into action.

For instance, research on *life course development* (Erikson, 1968) has focused on the temporal dimension of self-construction, highlighting specific trajectories and turning points in the life cycle of people to explain their orientation towards more purposeful types of agency. Research on *meaning-making mindset stages* (Kegan, 1982) has suggested that there are six mind-set stages, and each is associated with a different ability to make meaning out of contextual situations, to recognize the limit of one's knowledge and to perceive the potential

for shaping the social context. The progression from one mindset stage to another unfolds over a person's life but may stop at any stage. Only people with a self-transforming mindset (the last category and rarely found among study participants) can deliberate among competing value systems and transcend their own context. Similarly, though coming from a sociological angle, Archer's (2003) four categories of reflexivity have focused on describing people's different abilities to manage the interplay between their context and their personal concerns.

Theories pertaining to how people make moral judgments have also been used widely in organizational theory to understand the cognitive processes underlying decision making (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Dane & Sonenshein, 2015; DiMaggio, 1988). They offer insights into the mechanisms that may underpin the onset of a volitional process. From the 1960's until recently, such theories built on cognitive development theory (Kohlberg, 1969) to emphasize the dominance of reason over emotions and intuitions in cognitive processes (Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). Key to this approach was the idea that when people make judgements, they engage in an intentional, effortful, and controllable mental activity. As presented in Figure 1, in adulthood, cognitive mechanisms are considered conscious, and language based. Emotions and intuitions are mere inputs into the conscious thinking process. This approach inspired theories such as rational choice theory or bounded rationality (Simon, 1997) that have stressed people's goal seeking and purposive behaviors.

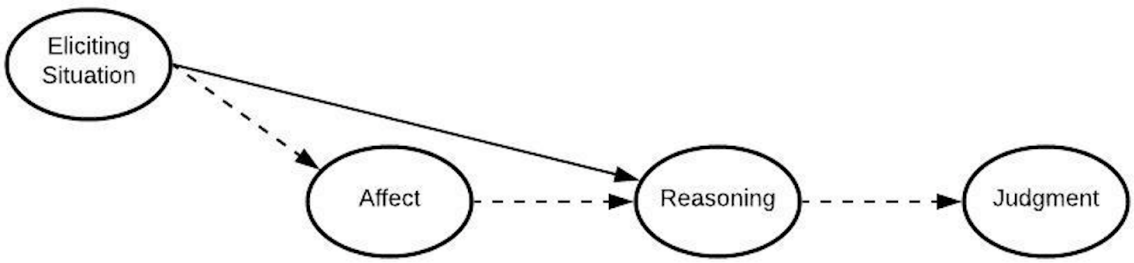

Figure 1: The rationalist model of moral judgment. Moral affects such as sympathy may sometimes be inputs to moral reasoning. After Haidt (2001).

However, subsequent research (Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2003) has stressed that reasoning, intuitions and the appraisals contained in emotions are *all* forms of cognition that influence how people make (moral) decisions. For instance, the social intuitionist approach to moral judgement (Haidt, 2001) presented in Figure 2, suggests that in most cases, people make judgments based on *moral intuitions* that are quick, effortless, and emotionally loaded (link 1 in the figure). Reasoning is used to retrospectively justify one's judgment (link 2). Once formulated, the reasoning is then verbally expressed to other people (link 3), subjecting it to social norms (link 4). While people may – on rare occasions – override with reason their own moral intuitions (link 5), it is primarily when *moral intuitions conflict* that a person's reasoning process is called upon (link 6). In such instances, the final judgment can either be determined by the strongest intuition or by consciously reasoning among alternatives (Haidt, 2001).

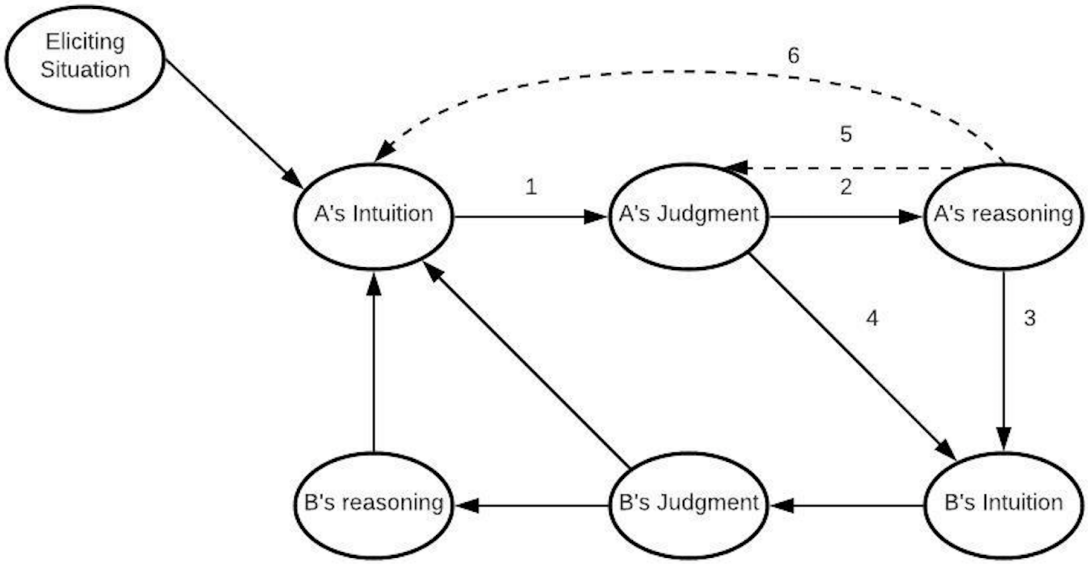

Figure 2: The social intuitionist model of moral judgment. After Haidt (2001)

The process whereby a person wrestles between conflicting moral intuitions echoes the practical-evaluative dimension of agency described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) – when actors recognize a particular situation as problematic and engage in a conscious deliberation

among conflicting possibilities to decide on the best way forward. As such, the social intuitionist model of moral judgment provides clues as to how institutional volition may emerge. This model suggests that the onset of institutional volition may be triggered by conflicting and emotionally loaded intuitions that force actors to take note of a problematic situation and deliberate their course of action. Thus, the social intuitionist model of moral judgment cautions against an overly 'rationalist' understanding of the process(es) involved in institutional volition.

Building on this point, the social intuitionist model of moral judgment brings to attention the role of emotions in cognitive processes and agency. Presented by Freud (1900/1976) as the drivers of people's judgments, emotions have been evidenced to create biases and to direct reasoning (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Haidt, 2001; Voronov & Vince, 2012). In psychology, research has suggested that although we do not always consciously recognize emotions, they affect voluntary behavior through various inner processes (Ekman, 2003; Lazarus, 1991). Telling us something about "how we are doing" in relation to certain inner needs or external situations, emotions such as fear, anger or enjoyment are likely to drive certain reactions or decisions that are important to our welfare (Ekman, 2003). Research has also suggested that emotions are often about how we deal with other people. For this reason, Lazarus (1966) used the term *core relational themes* to describe the universal emotions that appear across individuals and cultures, and the term *variations on themes* to describe each person's specific experiences.

Importantly, scholars have found significant variability in how different people and cultures experience emotions (Barrett, Gross, Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2001; Kirsch, 2020). This highlights how the experience of certain emotions may be conditioned through learning by the institutional context in which a person operates. Thus, while certain basic emotion such as anger may be relatively universal, more sophisticated emotions, such as indignation or

shame, may have a cognitive dimension linked to a "conceptual repertoire" that a person develops over time (Barrett, et al., 2001). According to this theory, institutional volition would depend on people's ability to expand their "emotional conceptual repertoires." This could take place following *reflective appraising,* when *"*we are thinking about and considering what is happening" (Ekman, 2003, pp. 24-25). In such instances, as we engage in an evaluative processes, *emotional appraising* mechanisms may take over, generating an emotional state that demands action. Reflective appraising is often associated with ambiguous situations for which there is no automatic or clear emotional answer at the ready (Ekman, 2003).

Research in sociology has increasingly argued that emotions are a type of intelligence – "a way of knowing in the world without certainty" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 357) – that directs people's agency. Building on pragmatist philosophy, Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005) have challenged previous understandings of emotions as "state of minds" or attributes of individuals and their actions, and instead emphasized that emotions must be understood in terms of relationships, expressing the emotional linkages people feel *towards* others or social objects. Linking the individual to the collective, a relational understanding of emotions helps explain the intrinsic bond and the dynamics between people (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005). Research has shown that people can experience extreme anxiety when their sense of belonging to a group, their identity or their worldview is threatened (Haidt, 2001). The experience of contradictions or cognitive dissonance can trigger a variety of defensive mechanisms. In such instances, people repress emotions (try to control or ignore them) and rationalize contradictions so that they can keep painful ideas and impulses out of conscious awareness (Schwartz & Kline, 1995) and do not have to critically engage with them (Haidt, 2001). As such, a relational understanding of emotions indicates that institutional volition is likely to have a strong inter-personal dimension. Institutional volition is likely to be situated in collective processes even though it is experienced at the individual level.

Emotions are thus likely to play a critical role in institutional volition. Underpinning intuitive judgements, influencing people's perception of collective processes, interfering with conscious reasoning processes, enabling or constraining agentic efforts, emotional dynamics are part of the cognitive processes likely to affect people's engagement in processes of institutional stability or change. Yet, how emotions are woven into people's "reflective purposefulness" (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012) and what role they play in people's engagement in institutional change remains under-investigated.

Having situated institutional volition within agency and reviewed the cognitive processes likely to affect how institutional volition emerges and unfolds, I now turn my attention to conceptualizing institutional volition as a process. For this, I build on a symbolic interactionist perspective to social conduct (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) and a structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974) to explore the micro-level dynamics involved in institutional volition as a process.

2.3.3 Conceptualizing institutional volition as a process

The symbolic interactionist perspective on social conduct (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980/2000) is particularly relevant to explore how institutional volition takes place as it seeks to capture the self-reflective, purposive and self-determinative character of human agency. In particular, Mead's (1934) conceptualization of "the self" as both an on-going process and an object of one's designation created in interaction with others, can help interpret and articulate how the volitional process is experienced by individual actors. A structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974) can complement Mead's (1934) attention to the self by accounting for the socio-cognitive schemas affecting the volitional process. Mechanisms associated with a "frame break" and "reframing" provide

especially valuable insights into the type of efforts required by people to develop the level of purposefulness necessary to engage in efforts to shape or transform institutions.

2.3.3.1 Volition and the self as an ongoing process

For Mead (1934), the self is not so much a substance or a state, but rather an on-going process, available for empirical investigation. Taking a behavioral lens, Mead (1934) identified the self as emerging and developing from social experiences and activity, and developing through self-observation and self-regulation (Baldwin, 1988). As such, people are not born with a sense of self, but develop it during the course of their lives (Blumer, 2004).

To explain the self as a process, Mead (1934) conceptualized the self as having two components, which he referred to as the "I" and the "Me." While these terms have been the object of debates (Blumer, 2004), their core characteristics and relationships offer valuable insights into the self as a process. The "I" is the self that takes action, the physical body, where feelings and values are located. It is the source of actions, spontaneity and creativity. Whereas the "Me" is the social self that observes and considers the action from the perspective of an institutional context or the broader society (Blumer, 2004). The "Me" acts to regulate actions or prospective actions by framing the situation in which the "I" operates, outlining the expectations of a community (Baldwin, 1988; Blumer, 2004). Importantly, Mead (1934) emphasized that the "Me" does not fully control the "I" as it only comes into play once the "I" has started to express itself. As such, "the "I" carries the germ of unpredictability" (Blumer, 2004, p. 67).

The self as a process results from the interaction between the "I" and the "Me," which Mead (1934) called self-interaction. Self-interactions underpin people's reflectivity and occur when certain actions initiated by the "I" become "objects" of one's attention - they are reflected upon, defined and judged by the "Me," which regulates how actions are carried out. Not all actions undertaken by people become the object of self-interaction. Many are routinized and

processed unreflectively. However, when people come across a problematic situation, for instance when a situation engenders frustration, uncertainties or unease, people may struggle to appropriately define and handle the situation. In such instances, the "I" may surface unconscious elements – "aspects and details of one's action that one does not perceive" (Blumer, 2004, p. 80) - and submit them to a reflective process, potentially leading individuals to question and break away from established arrangements. While minor issues might be easily defined and handled, more complex situations that are difficult to define or accept, may thus lead people to depart from the expected course of action and reorient their activities.

Mead's (1934) conceptualization of self-interaction provides significant insights into people's volitional process. First, the process of self-interaction shows how people come to "single out matters as object of concern" and how "unconscious" elements, such as emotions or values, surface and influence the reflective process (Blumer, 2004, p. 76). The "unconscious" elements are likely to play a significant role in the volitional process, influencing the type of cognitive and emotional efforts people are able to engage with. Second, Mead's (1934) conceptualization highlights that it is not the existence of institutional contradictions per se that potentially leads people to question and break away from established order, but rather it is *how* people engage reflexively with such institutional contradictions (Blumer, 2004). Similarly, bibliographic or psychological aspects of people, including their predispositions, emotions or social positions, influence volition only in so far as they are included into a self-interaction process. Finally, Mead's (1934) conceptualization shows how the self both influences the volitional process and is influenced by it. Thus, while the volitional process is "self-directed", it also participates in further shaping and developing a person's sense of self over time.

2.3.3.2 Confronting the constraints imposed by institutions

Mead's (1934) conceptualization of the self as a process provides valuable insights into the micro-processes involved in people's volition. Yet, these insights do not fully account for how people who are deeply enmeshed or embedded with the substance of institutions come to engage institutions, recognizing their non-immutability and evaluating new trajectories of action (Stryker, 1980/2000). To understand institutional volition and what it means for people to transcend the constraints imposed by institutions, it is important to situate Mead's (1934) insights. To do so, I complement Mead's (1934) conceptualization of the self with a structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974). In particular, I focus on the mechanisms associated with a "frame break" and "reframing" to gain key insights into the mechanisms shaping how people engage in purposeful action.

Frames can be defined as "principles of organization which govern the subjective meanings we assign to social events" (Goffman, 1974, p. 11). They are tacit theories about "what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6), helping people to answer the question "What is it that's going on here?" (Goffman, 1974, p. 25). How we relate to any given activity or situation is a direct result of how we frame it. Frames allow us to give order and meaning to a potentially overwhelming world of sensory experience. They call to attention that volitional processes take place within socially and culturally pre-defined contexts that are enacted through social relationships and impose constraints on individuals' interpretation (Diehl & McFarland, 2010).

According to Goffman (1974), any major shift in a person's understanding of reality implies some sort of "frame break" experience, in which a person is led to challenge and revise the frame(s) guiding his or her interpretation and actions (Purdy, Ansari, & Gray, 2017). A frame break is usually lived as a negative experience. People face a situation for which readily available meanings fail and for which they are unable to provide an adequate response. A frame

break leaves them disorientated and defenseless (Goffman, 1974). Yet, Goffman (1974) explained that people may perceive a "frame break" but decide to 'opt out' of the developing divergence in their understanding of reality. In such cases, a person "shields himself [or herself] from having to ratify and acknowledge what it is that has occurred" (Goffman, 1974, p. 379).

When people 'opt in' to the divergence, they must make sense of a situation without the guidance of habitual frames before they can go on with their activity (Goffman, 1974). This means having to 'reframe' a situation in order to see it under a new light (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Reframing does not involve creating an entirely new frame, but rather implies piecing together a frame using existing institutional resources as building blocks. As explained by Diehl and McFarland (2010), reframing a situation means understanding and acknowledging existing narratives, as they provide the context for legitimate interaction. Thus, the successful reframing of a situation depends on recognizing and using as a starting point some elements of the institutional context. Ultimately, reframing a situation allows people to assign new meanings to social events and revise templates of action in line with the new meanings (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974).

The mechanisms associated with a "frame-break and "reframing" provide key insights into how reflective purposefulness unfolds, enabling people to engage in efforts to shape or transform institutions. Combined with Mead's (1934) conceptualization of "the self," these mechanisms help to capture the duality of forces that enable and constrain institutional volition and people's active engagement in institutional change processes. They help to explain how people can subject their actions and self to critical judgment, progressively "loosen[ing] themselves from past patterns of interaction and reframe their relationships to existing constraints" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1010).

2.3.4 Summarizing key aspects of institutional volition

Insights from research on agency (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Haidt, 2001) and on the mechanisms affecting how people engage in action (Blumer, 2004; Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974; Mead, 1934) point to some key aspects of institutional volition. Institutional volition can be defined as the reflective process that leads people to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements. This process can be conceptualized as self-directed, iterative and self-shaping over time. It is inter-subjective yet experienced at the individual level. Figure 3 roughly sketches how this process might be experienced by people. Emerging when people submit conflicting moral intuitions to a moral reasoning process, the process of institutional volition may unfold through a self-reflective process and may involve a major shift in people's understanding of reality. It may lead people to reframe their situation in order to commit and engage in new trajectories of action.

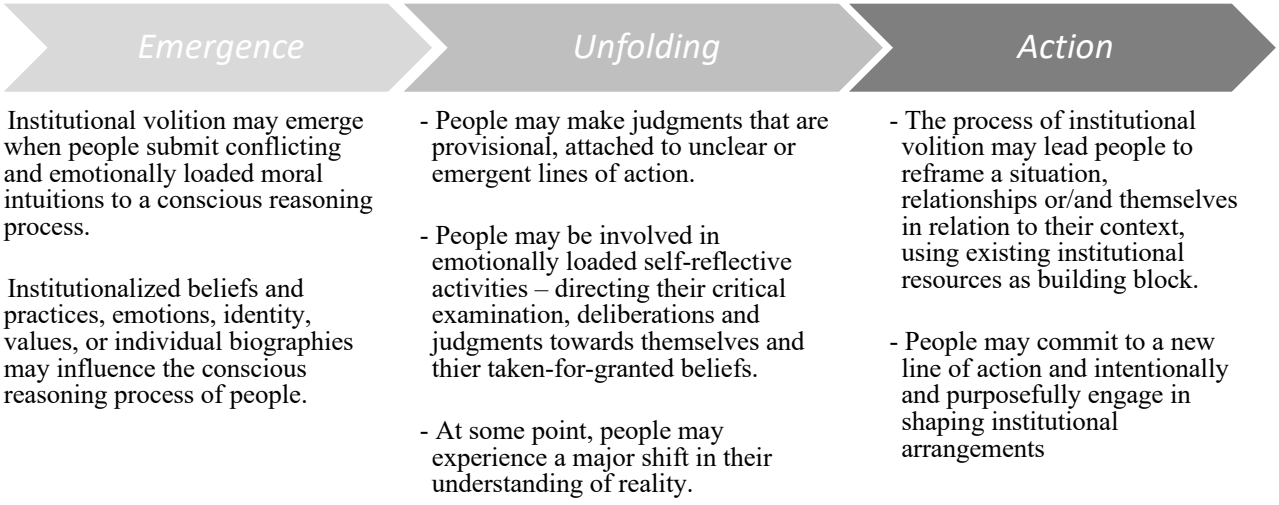

Figure 3: The possible experience of institutional volition

Despite the insights from prior work revealing that institutional volition is likely to be articulated around three stages – emergence, unfolding and action – it remains unclear how people move from one stage to another, and what exact mechanisms are at play within each stage. It is further uncertain how this process may shape people's engagement in different forms of institutional work.

2.4 Chapter summary and research objective

In this chapter, I explored what we think we know about the volition process leading individuals to engage in institutional change. In section 2.2, I started with an inhabited approach (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006) to explore how people experience institutions and to establish that people can shape or transform institutions. I turned to the institutional work perspective to gain insight into how people shape institutions, engaging in work "aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). I then explored the specific factors explaining why people engage in institutional change, highlighting the role of reflective shifts, identity changes, and emotional dynamics. My analysis showed that, despite the valuable insights provided by research on how and why people shape institutions, we still know little about the volitional process leading individuals to become institutional change agents.

To better understand this process, in section 2.3, I established some theoretical foundations for the concept of institutional volition. I situated it within the concept of agency, highlighting that volition aims to capture how the more purposeful dimensions of agency emerge and transform into action. I then explained the cognitive processes likely to affect how people engage in the more purposeful dimensions of agency, pointing to the role of conflicting moral intuitions and emotions as triggers or animators of institutional volition. Finally, drawing from a symbolic interactionist perspective to social conduct (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) and

a structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974), I identified some of the micro-level dynamics that may help explain the process of institutional volition.

Despite what prior work reveals about the process of institutional volition leading individuals to engage in efforts to shape or transform institutions, the theorizing of this process remains tentative and incomplete. It is further uncertain how this process might apply to privileged insiders who have little to benefit from engaging in change processes. The aim of my empirical research is thus to gain a better understanding of how privileged insiders experience the process of institutional volition leading them to engage in institutional change.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

My methodology chapter explains how I engaged in the research process. It is structured in four parts. In the first part, I describe my overall research approach, including my assumptions and the methodological choices I made in order to best understand how privileged insiders become change agents. In the second part, I describe my sampling strategy, including the settings in which I collected data, the demographics of my sample, and the processes associated with my data collection. In the third part, I elaborate on the four phases of my research process, going from preliminary investigations to theory refinement. For each phase, I explain how I engaged in data collection and data analysis. Finally, in the fourth part, I detail the strategies I employed to improve my research, showing how I attended to interpretive rigor, authenticity and reflexivity throughout my research process.

3.2 Research approach

To understand how privileged insiders become institutional change agents, I grounded my research in relational (Abbott, 1995, 2007; Emirbayer, 1997) and symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) ontological and epistemological assumptions. These assumptions allowed me to make the "dynamic, unfolding process" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 287) of institutional volition the focus of my analysis. I did not presume that "individuals" or "change agents" were conceptual entities with stable and predictable properties. On the contrary, I assumed that people could be "continuously recreated in the flow of interactions" and that they were inseparable from the context and set of relationships in which they were embedded (Abbott, 2007, p. 7). As such, I understood human agency as emerging from the unfolding

dynamics of situations and people's interpretation of them. I therefore paid attention to how people negotiated meanings through conversations they had with themselves and others (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 290) and how they acted *towards* others or themselves in a situated context (Snow, 2001). By adopting a relational and symbolic interactionist perspective, I was able to shift my analysis away from identifying characteristics that a person *has*, towards understanding "what the person *does* in particular conditions" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 303) and how patterns of feelings, meanings and action emerge from transactional dynamics (Blumer, 2004; Snow, 2001).

As my aim was to understand the process of institutional volition for a specific category of actors, it made sense for me to take guidance from process studies (Langley, 1999). Process studies investigate dynamic phenomena to build process theory (Langley, 1999). Central to my investigation was understanding the *process of emergence* pertaining to how people depart from everyday routines, practices, or perspectives and come to engage in institutional change (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). I wanted to understand how and why people's engagement with change emerges, develops and, in some cases, becomes restrained over time. I thus looked for "patterns in events" taking into account the temporal dimension of my participants' experience (Langley, 1999, p. 692). I paid attention to people's thoughts, interpretations and feelings to identify sequences of events that led to potentially different outcomes. As such, my aim was to go beyond the identification and description of events and to search for the underlying logic guiding the process and its temporal unfolding (Langley, 1999).

I adopted a grounded theory approach to develop a theoretical understanding of how institutional volition was experienced by privileged insiders. I chose to use the guidelines developed by Charmaz (2007, 2011) as these were consistent with my ontological and epistemological assumptions. Indeed, her constructivist approach to grounded theory reclaims

some of the main underpinnings of the Chicago school of pragmatism (Dewey, 1933; Mead, 1932, 1934) by attending to interpretation and human agency, addressing temporality, and viewing social processes as open-ended and emergent. It further "made sense" in terms of the type of data I was gathering (Langley, 1999). I had access to several comparable settings, I could explore the lived experiences, interpretations and emotions of a number of people within each setting, and several participants were willing to provide ongoing updates and engage in regular discussions on the evolution of their experiences.

Consistent with my approach to grounded theory, I chose to engage in an abductive reasoning process (Charmaz, 2011). Abductive reasoning starts with inductive data collection and, when coming across a surprising finding, moves on to the consideration of possible theoretical accounts for that finding, iterating between data collection and the elaboration of theoretical hunches until arriving at a plausible interpretation of the observed data (Charmaz, 2011). Abductive reasoning is well suited to the investigation of "processes involving human beings living and acting in a world" (Locke, 2011, p. 909) as it forces the researcher to cultivate doubt and continuously look for new "ways of seeing" (Klag & Langley, 2013, p. 155). The process of abductive reasoning allowed me to generate ideas and hunches from the data, while at the same time to look for explanatory propositions and investigate theoretical elements. As such, I moved back-and-forth from induction to deduction, iterating between data and theory. I systematically tested my data-driven ideas with possible theoretical accounts, thereby improving the generalizability of my emerging theory (Langley, 1999).

In line with this approach, my data collection activities and data analysis proceeded together (Charmaz, 2011; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). Using Miles and colleagues' (2014, p. 14) concept of an "interactive, cyclical process," my cycles of data collection activities were woven into cycles of data condensation (coding), data display and (re)connection with theory to draw (often visual) preliminary

conclusions. Data display and visual mapping tools were used to condense my data, facilitate analysis and allow for the representation of various patterns that were emerging from the data (Langley, 1999).

Overall, I worked iteratively between collecting new data, making sense of my data through conceptual and visual groupings, and reviewing prior research to identify connections to the developing theory (Charmaz, 2011; Locke, 2011). The developing analysis and emerging theoretical understanding thus progressively guided my inquiry, feeding back into my interview guide and observations, my sampling strategy, and the data condensation and display work (Charmaz, 2004).

3.3 Sampling strategy

3.3.1 Defining my sample

As my objective was to gain insights into the process of institutional volitional that led privileged insiders to become engaged in institutional change, my unit of analysis was individuals who had benefited from existing institutions and – without initially being mandated or having a personal interest to do so – had become involved in intentional efforts to engender change in their context. Yet, to understand their journey, I included in my sample people who varied in their degree of engagement with change processes. Thus, people in my sample ranged from individuals experiencing disquiet and tensions regarding prevailing institutional beliefs and practices (but not acting yet as change agents or having retreated from previous engagement), to people who were clearly identifiable as change agents and actively engaged in transformative change initiatives in their institutional setting.

3.3.2 Selecting appropriate settings

To improve the confidence and analytic generality of my findings (Miles, et al., 2014), I decided to collect data from five different settings. My objective was to ensure that my analysis was not specific to particular contextual circumstances and allow for "theoretical ideas to be tested and deepened in different settings" (Langley, et al., 2013, p. 7) .

I looked for settings where I could find privileged insiders who, in various degrees, were engaged in change processes that aimed to challenge existing institutions in order to address societal issues. The settings I chose were finance, law, education, agriculture and business. Each of these settings share similar properties. On the one hand, each could be said to be regulated by dominant institutional beliefs, norms and practices that guide the behavior of a majority of actors. On the other hand, in each of these settings, the dominant institutional order is being challenged by the need to address pressing societal issues. Below, I provide a brief overview of each context and how their dominant institutional order is being challenged.

Finance has been dominated by a focus on shareholder value and short-term profit maximization, yet people working in this setting are increasingly under pressure to take environmental and social factors into account in investment decisions. In this setting, I sought to interview professionals in the field of finance who had become involved in responsible investment or ethical investment. People promoting these approaches challenge what is considered 'normal' and 'legitimate' in this setting by promoting the integration of environmental, social and governance considerations in investment processes (Feront & Bertels, 2019; Himick & Audousset-Coulier, 2015). They do this in various ways. For instance, people promoting responsible investment seek to integrate environmental, social and governance considerations to improve the risk profile of investment (PRI, 2019). Whereas, people promoting ethical investment (or called socially responsible investment) seek to

strategically use investment strategies (including divestments) to generate a positive impact on environmental, social or governance issues (Richardson, 2009).

While ***law*** has increasingly become complex and expert oriented (by lawyers for lawyers) (Berger-Walliser, Bird, & Haapio, 2011), some argue that its institutions enable an extractive market economy that perpetuates social and environmental injustices (Susskind, 2000). With regard to social injustices, I sought to interview proponents of change (Lawyers or law professors) who were trying to rebalance power relations between contracting parties or to introduce new legal frameworks to support social justice efforts. Some legal professionals I sought to interview were involved in the plain language movement in law (Adler, 2012), promoting the use of understandable language or visualization to improve the understanding of contracts (Haapio & Passera, 2012). Others challenged the orthodoxy of contracts written in text or core assumptions around the equality of contracting parties, which have resulted in large segments of the global population being marginalized and denied justice. For instance, initiatives such as Comic Contracts use pictures to enable vulnerable, illiterate or migrant populations to autonomously understand their contracts and their rights, thereby affording them dignity and access to justice (Murray, Forthcoming). With regard to environmental law, some lawyers challenge the anthropocentric worldview that guides legal institutions and limits our ability to address environmental issues. For instance, Earth jurisprudence is based on the belief that nature ought to have rights. Proponents of Earth jurisprudence are promoting an ecological and relational understanding of law that recognizes our interdependence with natural systems (Burdon, 2010).

In ***education***, a growing number of individuals argue that current educational institutions are at the root of our ecological and social crises (Herman, 2016). Many argue that assumptions, curricula and practices guiding education systems are dominated by western values and culture, disconnected from ecological systems, and thus only consistent with further industrialization,

resource exploitation, and economic growth (Naude, 2019). In this setting, I sought to interview education professionals, academics or students who were involved in the decolonization of knowledge, challenging the epistemologies and methodologies underlying current teaching approaches and striving to rebuild institutions that recognize and explore a diversity of knowledge (Herman, 2016; Msila, 2017). I also sought to interview proponents of change using an ecological systems approach to rethink learning objectives, processes and outcomes (Green & Somerville, 2015; Shephard, 2008). These individuals focus on experiential learning techniques to help children think ecologically, nurture a sense of care for their communities, and understand the interconnectedness of humans and natural systems (Stone, 2009).

Agriculture has become dominated by large scale industrial operations that use high chemical inputs and water to increase crop yields, predominantly in intensive monoculture settings (Clunies-Ross & Hildyard, 2013). Proponents of change argue that the positive effects of this approach on yields are outweighed by negative environmental impacts, such as groundwater pollution, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss, which are increasingly affecting human health and livelihoods (Gomiero, Pimentel, & Paoletti, 2011; Willer & Lernoud, 2019). A variety of alternative approaches have emerged over time that seek to improve the sustainability and positive impacts of agriculture on human and ecological systems. I sought to interview farmers or other professionals (such as agri-business executives or university professors) involved in promoting a variety of alternative agricultural approaches. Some approaches are closer to conventional farming practices, such as precision agriculture, which aims to optimize returns on inputs while preserving resources through the use of technology (Mulla, 2013). Other approaches are more transformative, such as organic farming, biodynamic agriculture, permaculture, agroecology or regenerative farming. People involved in promoting these transformative approaches to agriculture use a variety of ecologically-based

production techniques to balance profitable farming operations with the restoration of resilient socio-ecological systems (Altieri, 2018).

Finally, in ***business*** I sought to interview people who challenged the predominant business approach that focuses on economic value creation and tends to consider social and environmental phenomena only insofar as they may affect financial output (Friedman, 1970). In the predominant approach, nature and people are resources for the creation of economic value and the effects of business that are not captured in market transactions are regarded as "externalities" (Marcus, Kurucz, & Colbert, 2010). Change agents in this setting work in various ways (as employees, executives, entrepreneurs) to promote approaches that aim to better integrate social and environmental imperatives into business models. These range from a "triple-bottom-line" approach (Elkington, 1998) that aims to pursue simultaneously business, societal, and environmental objectives, to embedded perspectives (Marcus, et al., 2010) that judge a business case based on its contribution to societal and ecological welfare, to post-growth models that look at alternative forms of organizing centered around socio-ecological wellbeing (Ergene, Banerjee, & Hoffman, 2020).

3.3.3 Sample demographics

Initially, I started my study in South Africa, a country rife with institutional change. In order to ensure that what I was uncovering was not unique to the socio-economic and political context of South Africa (Christians, 2011), I decided to also interview people from different countries. Thus, a third of my sample are from other countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Finland and the Netherlands.

Altogether, I conducted 73 interviews with 54 research participants. 48 participants were interviewed once, while six participants were key respondents with whom I organized several

follow-up interviews. Key respondents were people whose journeys appeared to exemplify different pathways to change agency and who were willing to engage in multiple and deeper conversations with regard to their experiences. Over time, as I refined my understanding of institutional volition, I further narrowed down my selection to four key respondents. These respondents best represented an archetypal pathway and operated in different settings (agriculture, finance, education and law). I continued to engage with these four key respondents until the end of my analysis process and the theory refinement stage of my research. In total, I conducted 19 follow-up interviews with my six key respondents.

I also engaged in a total of four group discussions during workshops centered on the topic of change agency. Two of these workshops were organized by the University of Cape Town and the other two by Stellenbosch University. About 30 people attended each workshop and most participants were non-academics. All were on a range of engagement with change processes and came from various backgrounds. In two instances, people attending were professionals involved in climate change mitigation, decolonization in education, or corporate social responsibility initiatives. In the other two instances, attendees were students wanting to find ways to engage more actively in change processes. I had been invited to these workshops to present my preliminary findings and took the opportunity to open the discussion and gather feedback. While I did not conduct individual interviews with any of the people attending, I gathered feedback during the group discussions that were organized following my presentation.

3.3.4 Sampling and interview process

In selecting my interviewees, I reached out to people whom others perceived both as privileged insiders and change agents. To do this, I first used convenience sampling and then a snowballing and theoretical sampling approach (Miles, et al., 2014). Convenience and snowballing sampling are common techniques used in research investigating change agency

(Creed, et al., 2010; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Theoretical sampling was used to refine my sample in line with my developing theoretical understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2004).

The majority of interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. Of the 73 interviews, 58 were recorded and 54 were fully transcribed (4 interviews could not be transcribed due to sound quality issues). For these, I went through the recordings and made written notes. The rest of the interviews – mainly the follow-up interviews – were either informal interviews or were not recorded at the request of the interviewee. I made written notes for these. Interviews conducted in South Africa between 2017 and 2019 were done in person. All other interviews, as well those with South African participants in 2020, were conducted over Skype or Zoom.

I adapted my line of inquiry after each cycle of data collection and analysis, slightly modifying the focus of my interviews as my analysis progressed and new theoretical connections emerged. My interview guide was thus revised four times as my research progressed (see appendix 1). Each interview guide was structured to suggest "lines of inquiry" rather than to provide a fixed list of questions to ask (Weiss, 1994). It functioned as a "prompter" around topics, while allowing me to stay fully present and deeply engaged during each interview, avoid interrupting participants, and tailor my questions to emergent themes or surprising elements emanating from the discussion (Creswell, 2013). My aim was to develop a comfortable rapport with my interviewees, maintain awareness of how I was bringing myself (as the researcher) into the interview process, and build "interactional expertise" to ensure a deep and analytical engagement with each interviewee (Langley, et al., 2013, p. 6).

3.3.5 Research ethics

Interviews were conducted in line with the code of ethics and ethical guidelines provided by the UCT GSB. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University's Ethics Committee prior to commencing the proposed research and renewed yearly. Research participants received an informed consent form to be signed before the start of an interview. The informed consent form promised anonymity and confidentiality, and it explained that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process. It also asked permission to record the interview. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, all audio, video or text files were anonymized before being stored on my computer. I further did not attempt to identify participants with their responses, their comments, the documents they shared, or observations made during the study. All data obtained during interviews were managed with the same level of care that I use to keep my personal information and access was restricted by a password. No one besides myself and my supervisors had access to them. Participation in my research was on a voluntary basis and no financial or non-financial incentives were offered. There were no known risks or dangers associated to my study for any of the participants.

3.4 Research process

Data for this study span from 2017 to 2020 and include interviews, observations and feedback from group discussions. During this period, I worked iteratively between data collection and data analysis, adapting my line of inquiry in line with my emerging understanding of the phenomenon. My research process was structured around four phases: (1) a preliminary investigation, (2) a theory exploration phase, (3) a theory development phase, and (4) a theory refinement phase. The data gathered during each phase of my research are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of my data

DATA SOURCES*		
2017	**Quantity**	**Preliminary investigation**
Interviews: 4 Finance;	4 interviews with new respondents	To understand the phenomenon and pilot my questions, I initiated my investigation in the field of finance. My interviewees were working to promote responsible investment. My interview guide was exploratory, inquiring about factors underpinning their involvement with change processes, including the possible role of emotions, intuitions, personal values or social encounters.
3 Finance; 3 Education; 3 Business	9 interviews with new respondents	To expand my understanding of the phenomenon and refine my set of questions, I interviewed three additional people in the field of finance. I further expanded my investigation to two other settings, namely education and business, interviewing three people in each of these settings. Based on the analysis of these interviews, and drawing on certain key concepts, I developed a tentative visualization of the volitional process experienced by my respondents (Annexure 1).
2018	**Quantity**	**Theory exploration phase**
Interviews: 4 Finance; 4 Education; 3 Law; 5 Agriculture; 2 Business	18 interviews with new respondents	Using a refined set of questions, I set out to gain a better understanding of the pattern of events that led people to engage in change and what change meant for them. These interviews with 18 new respondents aimed at developing an early model of institutional volition (Annexure 2.1).
Follow-up interviews	8 follow-up interviews with 4 key respondents.	To gain deeper insights into the experience of my participants, I organized follow-up interviews with key respondents. All were informal interviews that were not recorded. I conducted one follow-up interview with E5, three with L14, two with F17 and two with E42. These follow-up interviews led to the revision of my early model (Annexure 2.2)
Group discussions	2 group sessions, each with 30 (potential) change agents that were not respondents.	To gather feedback and see if my emergent understanding of institutional volition resonated with a broader set of actors, I presented my preliminary findings and early models at two workshops, each was attended by around 30 people. The first one (in May 2018) was attended by change agents working in a broad range of sectors, while the other (in August 2018) was attended by sustainability students wanting to become more involved in change processes. These workshops provided an opportunity for group discussions and feedback. They further allowed me to reflect on possible biases, look for gaps in my research and investigate alternative explanations.
2019	**Quantity**	**Theory development phase**
Interviews: 2 Finance; 3 Education; 2 Law; 2 Agriculture; 3 Business	12 interviews with new respondents	To look for gaps in my understanding of institutional volition and further develop my model, I refined my interview guide and conducted a total of 12 interviews with new respondents. My questioned focused on unpacking and reflecting on the most defining experiences that led them to challenge some of the core assumptions/ beliefs, how they had experienced reflexivity and how their new awareness had affected them – emotionally, in their institutional roles, in terms of belonging to a group, in the meaning their assigned to themselves.
Follow-up interviews	5 follow-up interviews with key respondents	To identify weaknesses in my model and deepen my understanding of each micro-process that led to action, I had a total of 5 follow-up interviews with 3 research participants. All were informal interviews that were not recorded. I conducted two follow-up interviews with B24, one with L14, one with A38 and one with E42. These follow-up interviews led to a more developed empirical model (Annexure 3)
Observations	2 occasions	To better understand the work that institutional change agents engaged in and get a feel for how their intentionality and approach was conveyed in practice, I watched two of my research participants (L14

		and E42) for about 3 hours as they engaged with change processes in their context. Essentially, I attended meetings during which they were engaged in change efforts with their peers. One was focused on 'creation work' while the other on 'disruption work.' I was able to get a live account of the content and dynamics of the discussions, the emotional dimension of the work, and the intention behind the actions.
Group discussions	2 group sessions, each with 30 (potential) change agents that were not respondents	To further calibrate my empirical model and reflect on my theoretical understanding, I presented my preliminary findings at two workshops. Similar to what took place in 2018, each workshop was attended by around 30 people working on transformation or sustainability initiatives. The first one (in March 2019) was attended by change agents working in a broad range of sectors, while the other (in August 2019) was attended by sustainability students wanting to become more involved in change processes. These workshops focused on people's experience of engaging in change processes and provided an opportunity to gather feedback on my empirical model and refine my emerging theoretical understanding of the process.
2020	**Quantity**	**Theory refinement phase**
Interviews: 2 Finance; 4 Education; 1 Law; 3 Agriculture; 1 Business	11 interviews with new respondents	To explore alternative explanations, check for biases and refine my theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, I conducted a total of 11 interviews with new respondents.
Follow-up interviews	6 follow-up interviews with key respondents.	To clarify certain aspects of my respondents' experience and dig further into additional aspects of my participants' narratives, I organized a total of 6 follow-up interviews with 4 key respondents. I selected these 4 specific respondents as I believed they exemplified the different pathways towards change agency. I specifically examined the role and shape of their emotional journey, how they managed setbacks, how relationships with peers evolved, and how invested they felt in their institutional context. I conducted two follow-up interviews with L14, one with F17, one with A38 and two with E42. These follow-up interviews led to a refined model presented in Chapter 5.
Observations	3 occasions	To continue to observe "in vivo" how respondents engaged in their change process, I again followed two of my research participants (L14 and E42) as they engaged with change processes in their context. I observed them for about 2 hours as they conducted meetings and engaged in change efforts. Due to the pandemic, these engagements took place on Zoom and I was able to listen-in on the calls.
Study total	54 interviews with new respondents 19 follow-up interviews with key respondents 5 observations of change agency occasions 4 group discussions with non-respondents	
**** In the text, interviews are labelled by the interviewee's field and a unique identifying number. E.g., L12 where L stands for the interviewees' field (Law) and 12 is the participants' number.*** ***Where there were potential overlaps, interviewees were classified according to the target of their institutional volition (a professor in agriculture trying to change agricultural institutions was classified as A; but a professor in education trying to change educational institutions was classified as E).***		

3.4.1 Preliminary investigation

The objective of my preliminary investigation was to improve my understanding of the phenomenon and to pilot my questions. My first three interviews were conducted with change

agents in the financial sector in South Africa, exploring how they had become interested in responsible investment and how this involvement influenced their relationship to their field. I had previously conducted research in that sector (Feront & Bertels, 2019) and could easily reach out to people who were actively promoting responsible investment within this context. To broaden my perspective on the type of change people were engaged in, the factors motivating their engagement and events shaping their journey, I then expanded my investigation to two other settings, namely education and business, interviewing three people in each of these settings. These interviews allowed me to refine my questions and improve my understanding of the phenomenon.

I started analyzing the data after the third interview, using Atlas.ti – a qualitative data analysis software – to highlight what was surprising and evocative in my respondents' experience. During this preliminary investigating phase, I adhered faithfully to informants' terms, to preserve the character of the data and their underlying meanings (Charmaz, 2011; Gioia, et al., 2013; Locke, et al., 2008). I coded as much as possible using gerunds to reveal implicit processes and emergent actions (Charmaz, 2011). Guided by what I was learning from my respondents, I re-engaged with a few articles and book chapters to reflect theoretically on what was emerging from my data.

One of the first things that stood out during this initial phase of analysis was that "change" meant different things to different people and some respondents were more conservative in their approach to change than others. Interestingly, the ones involved in more transformative change processes appeared to have gained their intentionality and commitment from an emotionally and rationally difficult journey that was deeply introspective. Some of the processes described by my interviewees evoked the idea of self-interactions developed by Mead (1934). Building on this idea and my emergent understanding of the phenomenon, I started visually sketching out what institutional volition might look like. Figure 4 provides an

example of my first tentative visual representation during the preliminary investigation phase of the research.

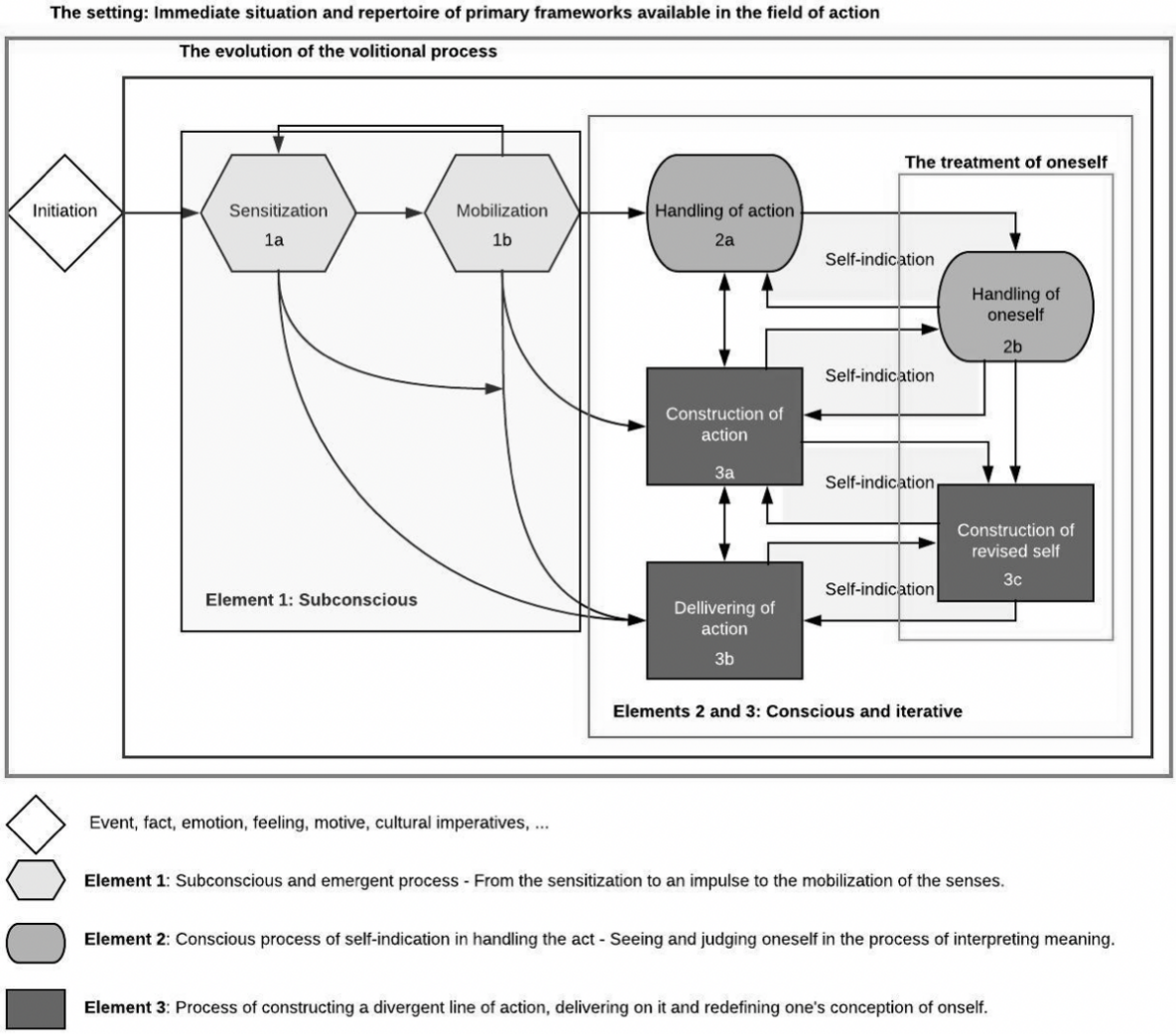

Figure 4: Preliminary investigation model (August 2017)

I used the information gathered and my emerging ideas to plan for the next cycle of data collection and analysis. Accordingly, I adjusted my interview guide to investigate more intently the reflective and emotional components of people's journeys, what change agency meant for them, possible events that shaped their engagement, and what energy guided them towards action.

3.4.2 Theory exploration

In this second phase of my research, my aim was to gain a better understanding of the "patterns in events" (Langley, 1999, p. 692) that led people to engage in change and what change meant for them. Using my revised interview guide, I conducted 18 new interviews in the five settings selected for my research. The data gathered during the interviews were complemented by eight follow-up interviews with four key respondents. I also gathered data from two group discussions with people on a "spectrum" of change agency but whom I had not interviewed.

After each new interview, I applied Miles and colleagues' (2014, p. 125) advice to reflect and summarize the key themes that had emerged. I looked for surprising and salient elements that were discussed during the interviews, and I compared notes and observations from the previous cycle of interviews to check what was new or different. I then coded each interview, looking for recurring patterns, key experiences or variances in the meaning that respondents assigned to different part of their journey.

During the analysis process, I compared data with data and then data with codes in efforts to condense, group and simplify the data and identify event patterns. Progressively comparing and grouping codes together also allowed me to create tentative categories. Engaging with the literature, I found certain concepts to be very useful, such as Goffman's (1974) concepts of frame-break and reframing. I thus used these to articulate an early model of institutional volition. This model, presented in Figure 5, helped me investigate the temporal organization of the process, reflect on what triggered people to progress along their volitional process and consider the core experiences or factors that animated their journey. The visual work on my model was supported by the creation of tables designed to ensure my emerging understanding of the process of institutional volition was representative of the data gathered (Miles, et al., 2014).

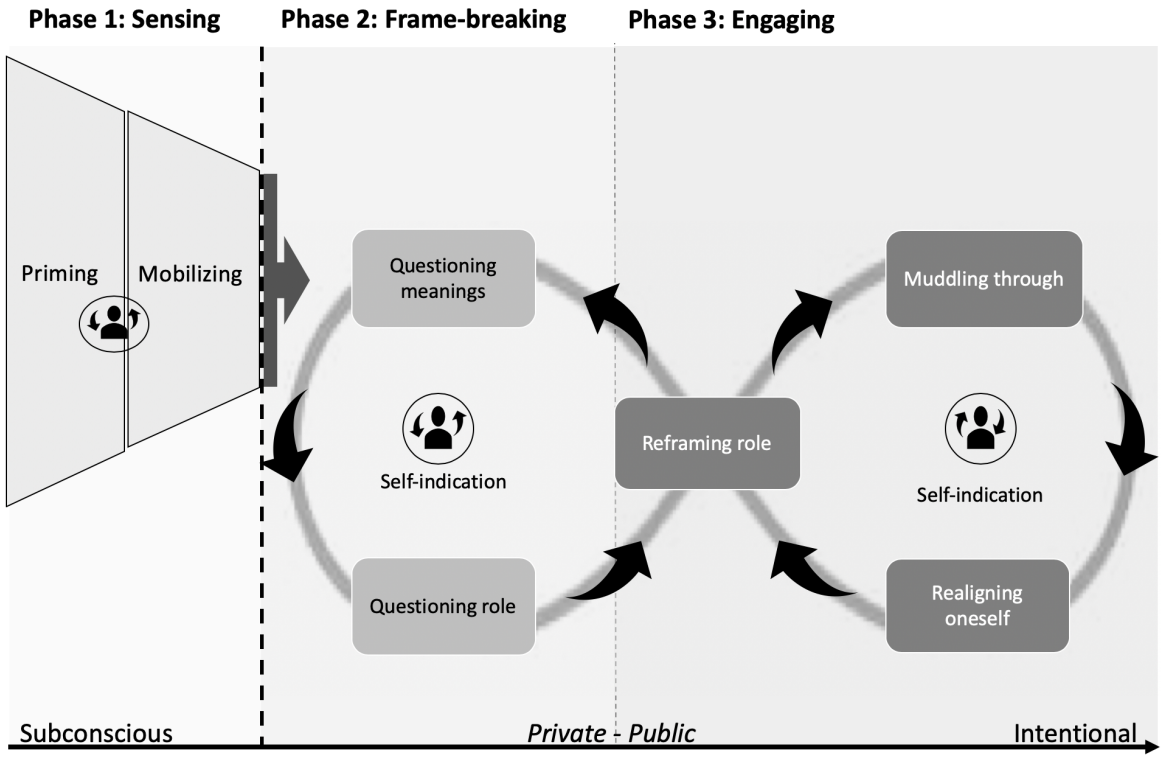

Figure 5: Initial theory exploration model (February 2018)

In order to deepen and challenge my emergent understanding of the phenomenon, I then organized a total of eight follow-up interviews with four key respondents. The journey of these individuals exemplified variations I was picking up regarding the process of institutional volition, and they were willing to engage in deeper conversation about their experience. The follow-up interviews allowed me to examine the pivotal moments that shaped my participants' volitional process and to better understand the differences between various microprocesses taking place. For instance, a key insight from these follow-up interviews was that some people could engage in critical reflection regarding institutions yet decide to withdraw from participating in transformative change processes. However, other people could not "unsee" what they had come to understand and appeared compelled to move towards more transformative engagement (see appendix 2 for a memo written on this insight).

Re-engaging with the literature led me to revise my tentative categories and model. Noting that some people "opted out" of the frame break while other "opted in," I found that that the experience of people who "opted in" evolved into something akin to the idea of a "reflective shift" developed by Seo and Creed (2002). I also noted that role reframing was not just a step in the process, as I initially thought, but rather a broader concept that helped explain how people engaged in transformative change. 'Reflective shift' and 'Role reframing' thus became my new tentative categories. To better account for my new insights and understanding, I reviewed how I was articulating the different phases of volition. The revised model is presented in Figure 6.

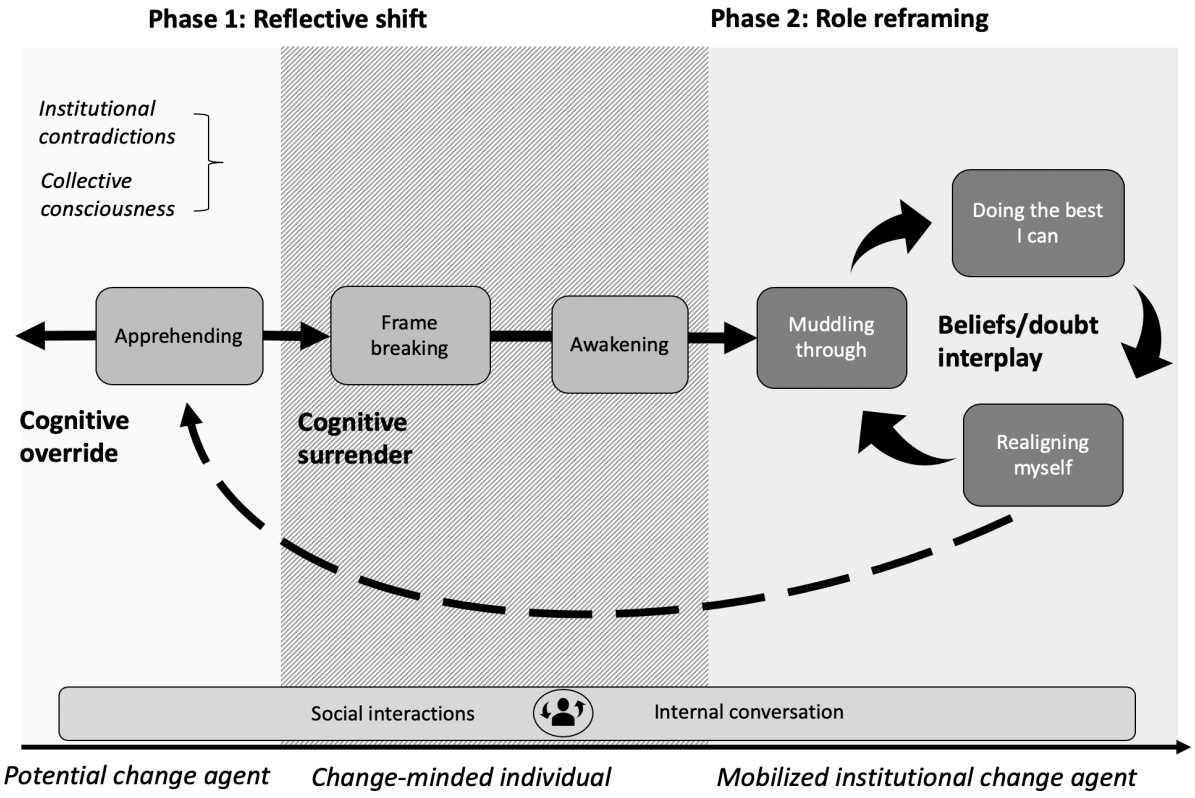

Figure 6: Revised theory exploration model (August 2018)

To identify gaps in my research, examine possible biases and investigate alternative explanations, I presented my model and preliminary findings to two groups of about 30 people,

composed of individuals whom I had not interviewed but who fitted within my sampling strategy. The first group included people working on climate change awareness initiatives in a broad range of sectors, such as mining, finance, agriculture, municipal management or education. The workshop was organized and convened by the University of Cape Town and I was asked to present. The second group was composed of sustainability students interested in becoming more involved in change processes. This workshop was organized and convened by Stellenbosch University. My presentation was followed by a time for questions, comments and discussions that allowed me to gather feedback and see how my model resonated with people. I used the feedback to further reflect on my model, refine my interview guide and prepare for the next cycle of data collection and analysis.

3.4.3 Theory development

The third phase of my research was focused on theory development. My objective was to deepen my understanding of the micro-processes around which institutional volition was articulated and examine how pivotal moments shaped my respondents' journey. I proceeded to systematically assess how the new data helped to refine my developing theory of institutional volition and I progressively raised the level of abstraction of my analysis.

Using a revised interview guide, I conducted twelve interviews with new respondents and a total of five follow-up interviews with four key respondents. While the interviews with new respondents helped me to further unpack the commonalities and differences between people's experiences, the follow-up interviews with key respondents gave me the opportunity to investigate the "theoretical message" carried within the participants' stories (Langley, et al., 2013, p. 7). They allowed for deep interactions, necessary to develop the fine-grained understanding of the rich micro-level processes involved in institutional volition (Gioia, et al., 2013, p. 19). Conceived as vivid exploratory conversations structured around topics, the

follow-up interviews supported the emergence of more abstract theoretical propositions (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012).

During this phase of my research, I continued to engage iteratively between additional data collection and data analysis. As my analysis progressed, I systematically assessed how the new data helped refine my codes and how these codes were connected to one another (Locke, 2011). As a result, I started differentiating more clearly between the different pathways towards change agency, noting that, depending on their pathways, respondents became involved in different types of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For instance, I noticed that some respondents were involved in what I described at the time as entrepreneurial work: revisiting sets of practices in relation to their moral or cultural foundations and creating "prototypes" that supported new norms and beliefs. Whereas, others were a little more contained in their approach, rather working to problematize existing institutions, challenging beliefs and broadening the discussion space. Finally, a last group of respondents was engaged in changes that were "institutionally bounded." Indeed, these respondents did not challenge the institutions themselves but rather engaged in pushing incremental changes to make existing institutions more adapted or cognizant of their context. Reflecting on these different outcomes of the volitional process, I progressively interpreted what I was observing as instances of what Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) described as creating, disrupting and maintaining institutions.

As presented in Figure 7, I also made clearer distinctions between micro-processes and their temporary outcomes. Naming the arrows, I got to a more granular understanding of the mechanisms that led from one temporary outcome to another. In the meantime, I continued to compare and condense my codes. For instance, I collapsed the codes 'small things matter', 'the *doing* is more important than the outcome' and 'using one's privilege' into 'Doing the best I can.' Finally, I also refined my understanding of the core phases of institutional volition – which I defined at the time as "shift in awareness" and "role reframing". Each new cycle of

data collection and analysis thus led to a better understanding of the categories and their dynamic relationships.

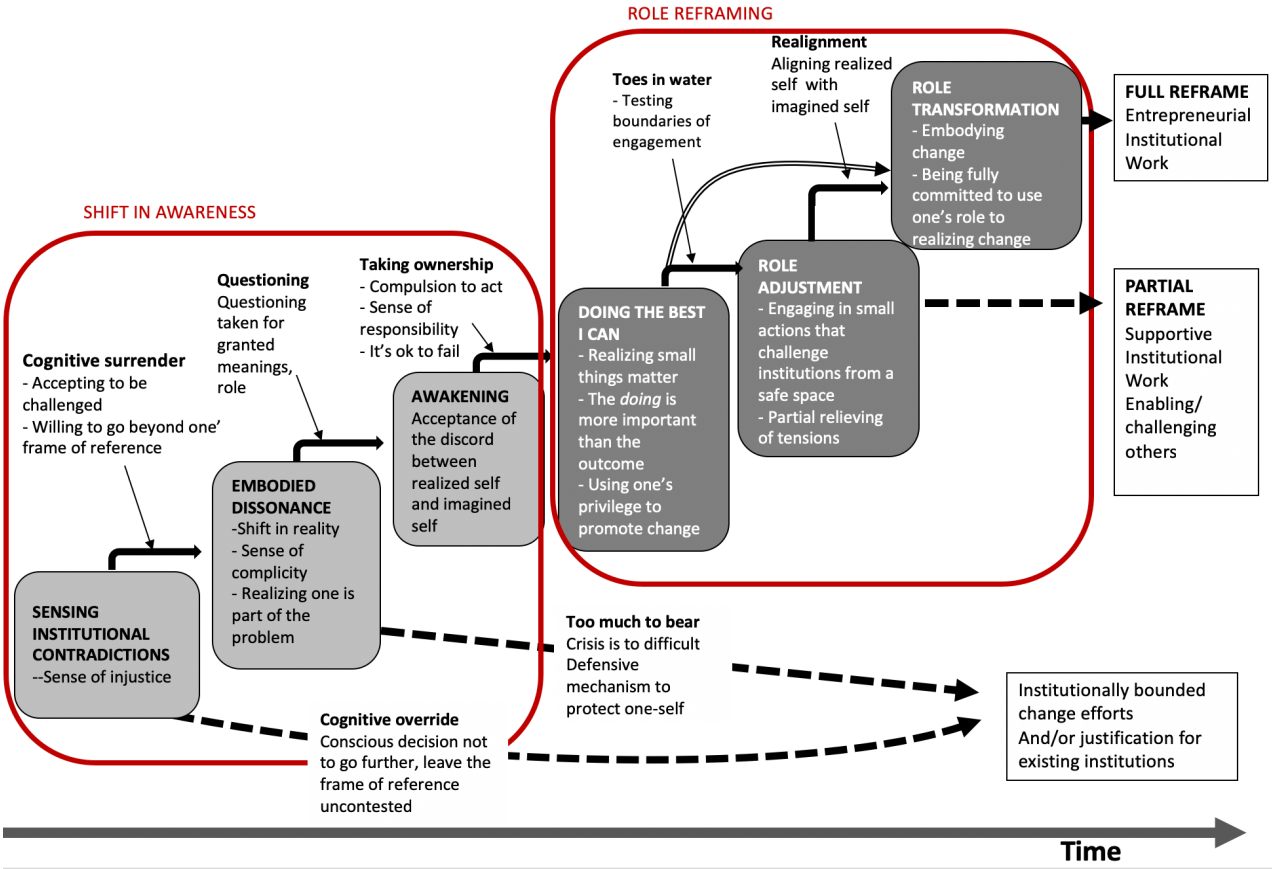

Figure 7: Theory building model (August 2019)

To further improve my empirical understanding, I complemented the data gathered during the interviews with observations that I made on two occasions. On these occasions, I watched how two of my key respondents interacted with others in their context to promote change. On each occasion, I paid attention to the content and dynamics of the discussions, the said and unsaid, the emotional dimension of the work, and the intents behind actions (Klag & Langley, 2013). These observations supported my objective of gathering both retrospective and real-time accounts of events and practices shaping change agency. They were further extremely helpful in differentiating between different types of "work" done by institutional change

agents, specifically between work that appeared more entrepreneurial and work that appeared to rather challenge institutions. These observations allowed me to get a better sense of the practices through which my respondents engaged in change efforts, and investigate how these contrasted or resembled efforts aimed at creating and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). During these observations, I found that the practices of one key respondent focused on changing norms by offering an alternative set of templates, whereas the practices of the other were centered on raising awareness around the existence of institutional contradictions and the need to address them. Going back to my data and analyzing what other interviewees had shared, I found further evidence supporting this distinction.

Similar to what I had done during the theory exploration phase of my research, I also presented my emergent theory during two workshops on change agency organized by the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, respectively. My objective was to gather feedback and reactions on my model, understand how my emerging theoretical ideas resonated with people's experiences across a broad range of settings, and identify gaps in my analysis. Like the previous year, people attending were either already involved in change processes within their context (the majority focusing on climate change or corporate social responsibility in a broad array of industries) or wanted to find ways of engaging in change and find out more about what it meant (sustainability students). I used the feedback gathered during the discussions that followed my presentation to further refine my model and my interview guide.

The iterative data collection and data analysis, together with my constant comparison of codes and categories sharpened my ideas and supported a dialectical process towards a refined theoretical understanding (Klag & Langley, 2013). During this process, I reviewed the names of certain codes, I reassessed how I had grouped them, and I analyzed them again in the context of existing literature, looking for alternative theoretical explanations. For instance, I collapsed

the codes 'taking ownership' and 'doing the best I can' into 'Gain renewed sense of agency.' Then, comparing my codes in the context of existing literature, I further realized that there were two different types of 'questioning' taking place: one focused on institutions and the other centered on the self. This led me revisit the category 'shift in awareness' and distinguish between *question institutions* and *question self*. As presented in Figure 8, this process ultimately led me to identify categories – *Question institutions, Question self, Redefine action* and *Reframe role*–, which I argue represent the main phases of the volitional process underpinning how privileged insiders engage in transformative institutional change. Table 2 provides a sample of my data structure for participants who come to engage in institutional transformation work – disrupting or creating institutions. The table provides details on how I ended up aggregating my codes to my main four categories.

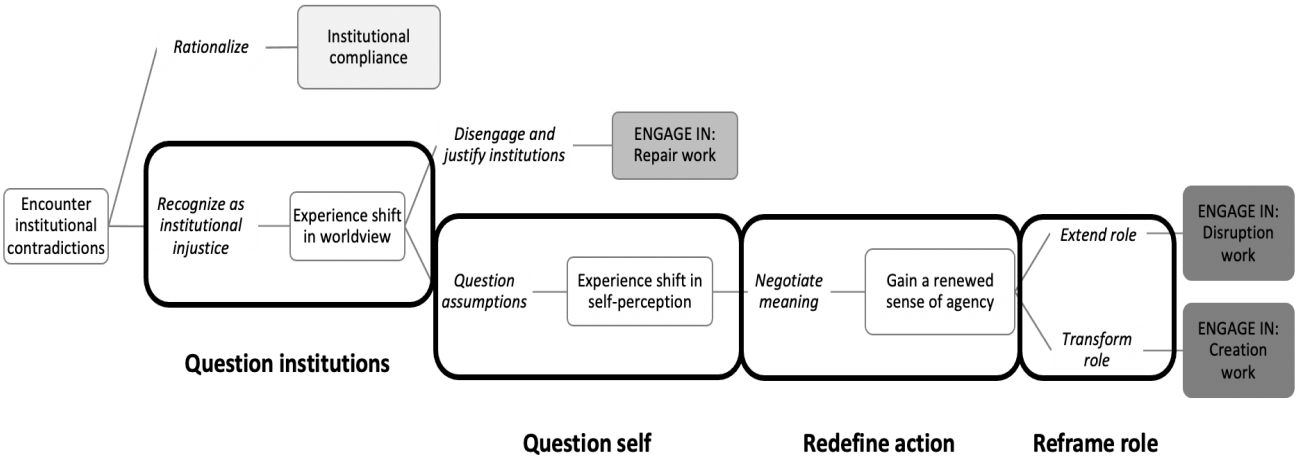

Figure 8: Key categories of privileged insiders' volitional process

Table 2: Sample of data structure for people who come to engage in transformation work

	Codes	Supporting data
QUESTION INSTITUTIONS	**Recognize as institutional injustice** Definition: Perceiving (rationally and emotionally) the institutional nature of certain injustices	*Every day you see a lot of suffering. At some point, you can't just stand aside and watch. You're like, "No, something's not right here." You start questioning the ideology, you start questioning the system. (E21)* *I started asking critical questions. Yes, we were tripling beer sales. We won awards. But how much of that didn't go to medical care, school books, or education? How many wives with kids were beaten, or raped, or da da da? You start opening that can of worms and you have an unarticulated gut feeling that all of this is wrong. (B27)* *It's a willingness to have our hearts touched by the things that are happening around us. (E46)*
	Experience a shift in worldview Definition: Realizing the taken for granted assumptions shaping our beliefs and behaviors are flawed.	*I realized that you absorb a whole lot of stuff subconsciously from your society, which are unexamined beliefs, which become incorporated into your own belief system, and may be entirely wrong. I realized that a whole lot of things that my society had taught me were wrong. (L12)* *I started realizing more and more that my entire world view was just wrong. It felt as if the ground underneath my feet was taken away and it was not replaced by anything what so ever. Your world gets crushed so much that you don't even know where to start. It's overwhelming. (E10)* *In that moment, you face the limitations of your own beliefs. (A13).*
QUESTION SELF	**Question assumptions** Definition: Diving into an intense investigation about belief systems and assumptions.	*I grew up in a house where nothing was questioned. And, suddenly for the first time I actually started questioning everything. (A28)* *You are essentially questioning everything you've always known. The things that we've always known may no longer serve us, so are we willing to actually ask the real questions? … when you ask your questions, you have to have a courage to deal with the answers that they bring up. (E47)* *I just started asking more, and more, and more questions, which I think is a critical part of this journey, asking questions and asking the right questions. You dive in deep, pushing into quite uncomfortable conversations, facing the hard facts you get to know. (B27)*
	Experience shift in self-perception Definition: Gaining an insight about one's self and one's responsibility.	*I suddenly realized I had contributed, unconsciously, to a world where Black South Africans were second-class citizens, third-class citizens probably today. Because I grew up in a relatively stable background, happy family to be honest, went to white prep school and I had an easy life really. So, you know, I've lived this life, I've studied history, yet I knew flipping nothing. How could I know nothing? (E8)* *I think it's often a lot easier to ignore troubling facts and do nothing about them than to confront them because when you do confront them, you're confronting yourself personally. You've now got to think "Why wasn't I aware of this before? Why didn't I do something about it before?" That means I screwed up. (B27)* *I just realized that if half of the shit that has been done to these people had been done to me, I wouldn't be where I was. I just had a really, really privileged upbringing and it wasn't*

		fair…And it was horrifying: Guilt, shame, confusion, injustice. Not For me, but for others. I felt complicitness. (E5) *Really for me a big shock was scales falling from my eyes about my own motivation and finding the limits of my own goodness. (A13)*
REDEFINE ACTION	**Negotiate meaning** Definition: Processing implications and accepting to step out of one's comfort zone.	*I came to know what I was signing up for, because I named it and accepted it as a necessity for creating the future that I preferred. I became very in tune with my own courage, my own ability to step out of my comfort zone, my own ability to take risks. (E46)* *And that's when I first started realizing that one has to actually re-educate oneself, one has to consciously unlearn stuff. That racism, for example, or sexism, you know ... you don't question the way things are when you're brought up. But it requires a conscious effort to sort of catch yourself if you find yourself going down that route and just saying, "Well, you know, is that really logical? Is that really what I think?" (L12)* *It's a difficult part of the journey because there are no guard rails in learning to live with that discomfort. (E25)* *You accept that you never can fix it. Doesn't mean you can do nothing about it. Doesn't mean that turning your blind eye to it is the right thing. Doesn't mean that wallowing in the guilt and regret is the right thing. It's just a muddle, it's a muddle that you have to keep on through. (A13)*
	Gain renewed sense of agency Definition: Realizing that one needs to take action to relieve the tensions	*It was taking responsibility to contribute my gift and my talent to making a difference (E46)* *You realize that you don't have to change everything. You can change particular things, even down to the opinion of one person, and that can be valuable. (F31)* *Ultimately, it's knowing that I'm not focusing on what I can't change, I'm going to focus on what I can change, and I do it in a way that I think will be the most effective way to make it work. (A26)* *I became determined to use the skills I've built up over the last 20 years to create positive change using communication, awareness. All the skills I'd learned at the advertising industry used to exploit, increase sales, increase market share were now going to be used to increase awareness, increase change. (B27)*
REFRAME ROLE	**Extend role** Definition: Broadening one's role to include actions that challenge a field's core beliefs and practices	*You have the potential for radicalism, but you actively temperate and then at a certain point you decide to not temper some of it. … The thing is that I'm still trying to work from within. I haven't become a radical, but it definitely has shaped what I include in my work (E5)* *I haven't given up my daytime job. But I'm trying to use it to re-introduce some of the values that have been forgotten by my profession and challenge those that are oppressive. (L29)* *I think it's publicly questioning the status quo, openly challenging the system and the stories we've been told about the system. I see my role as starting a lot of conversations (E18)*
	Transform role Definition:	*Ultimately, the decision I was making was an entrepreneurial one. It was to go out and do things in a way that hadn't been done before, without the support of an institution and any of its resources. (E47)*

	Reviewing one's role to embody change	*Before, when would people asked me "What do you do?" I would say, "I'm a lawyer." That's funny. They didn't ask "what are you?", they asked "what do you do," yet I used to answer that question with "I am". Now, when people ask, "What do you do?" I explain what I do. I have crafted my own role within law. (L14)* *Because you are clear that the old models no longer work, you review your role so that it doesn't produce the symptoms in the first place. (L12)* *I'm still me, and I'm still a farmer. I'm just doing things really differently with a different purpose in mind. (A35)*

3.4.4 Theory refinement

The final phase of my research focused on theory refinement. I gathered additional data and pursued my analysis to challenge and improve my empirical and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, and to progressively refine my theoretical model. As I started writing my thesis, the iteration between my findings, literature review and discussion chapters further helped to clarify and refine my theory.

To explore alternative explanations, challenge my assumptions and check for biases that I might have brought into my research, I conducted a total of eleven interviews with new respondents. At this stage, new data tended to confirm my empirical findings and I felt I had reached saturation. To ensure my emerging understanding of the process of institutional volition was representative of the data gathered, I created a table that grouped my participants according to their field and mapped how their journeys corresponded or fitted the different pathways I had identified (Miles, et al., 2014). Table 3 highlights that, overall, 17 of my respondents were involved in creation work, 17 were involved in disruption work, eight were involved in repair work, four were involved in institutional compliance and seven were somewhere within the phase of *question self.*

To clarify certain aspects of my respondents' experience and challenge my theoretical understanding or assumptions, I organized an additional six follow-up interviews with four key

respondents. I narrowed my selection from six to four key respondents because I felt each of these respondents best exemplified a specific pathway. As such, I wanted to write about their specific journeys in my findings chapter as to exemplify the four archetypal journeys I had observed in my data. My follow-up interviews with these key respondents thus helped me to ensure I had captured a detailed and faithful account of their journeys.

I had three further occasions to observe "in vivo" how two of my key respondents (L14 and E42) engaged in change processes. As I had done during the previous phase of my research, I followed them as they engaged with others to promote change in their context. For example, I observed L14 engaging in transdisciplinary efforts to help new legal practices become normatively sanctioned. These efforts involved representatives from various organizations, including many academics, investigating norms and normativity as means of transforming institutional power relationships. Due to the pandemic, these engagements took place on Zoom and I was able to listen-in on the calls.

As I started writing my thesis, iterating between drafting the findings, the literature review and the discussion chapters, I identified further differences and similarities between my findings and extant theory. This helped me to refine my model of the volitional process (see chapter 5). For example, reflecting on the role of emotional dynamics in peoples' journeys and examining literature on emotions, I became sensitized to the difference between "feelings" and "emotions." Understanding that feelings resulted from a conscious and subjective process of interpretation (of emotions) that shaped their intensity and polarity (Lazarus, 1991) helped me to better understand the mechanisms underpinning key pivotal moments in peoples' volitional journeys. It further highlighted that people's disposition to experience and engage with *intensive negative feelings* might play a key role on their ability to become involved in transformative change.

Table 3: Map of participants and their pathways

	Encounter contradictions	*Rationalize (1) or Recognize (2)*	*Shift in worldview*	*Disengage (1) or Question (2)*	*Shift in self-perception*	*Negotiate meaning*	*Gain renewed sense of agency*	*Extend role*	*Disruption work*	*Transform role*	*Creation work*
F2	X	1-Compliance									
F4	X	1-Compliance									
F37	X	1-Compliance									
F1	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
F6	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
F17*	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
F41	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
F53	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
F9	X	2	X	2	X	X	X				
F19	X	2	X	2	X	X	X				
F3	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
F11	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
F31	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
F39	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
F48	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
E25	X	2	X	2	X	X					
E10	X	2	X	2	X	X	X				
E43	X	2	X	2	X	X	X				
E5*	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E8	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E21	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E22	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E42*	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E49	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E52	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
E18	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
E46	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
E47	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
E50	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation

B23	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
B44	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
B15	X	2	X	2	X						
B45	X	2	X	2	X	X					
B7	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
B54	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
B20	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
B24*	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
B27	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
L51	X	2	X	1 - Repair							
L29	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
L40	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
L32	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
L12	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
L14*	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A38*	X	1-Compliance									
A13	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
A34	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	Disruption		
A16	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A26	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A28	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A30	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A33	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A35	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation
A36	X	2	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	Creation

Total: 4 respondents were involved in institutional compliance, 8 respondents were involved in repair work, 7 respondents were not yet engaged in change efforts and were somewhere within the "question self" phase, 17 respondents were involved in disruption work, 18 respondents were involved in creation work. Key respondents identified by *.

The iterative writing process further helped me to clarify the theoretical and practical implications of my research. For instance, I gained insight into how privileged actors commit to transformative agency. While prior research focusing on marginalized insiders suggests that these actors commit to take transformative action when they accept their identity and recognize that they are not the problem (Creed, et al., 2010), I found that privileged insiders did so when they acknowledged their complicity in the perpetuation of institutional injustices and situated the problem not with others but with themselves. Building on this insight, I was able to identify what underpinned privileged insiders' commitment to transformative agency.

3.5 Strategy to improve my research

In line with the relational and symbolic interactionist assumptions of my research, I attended to interpretive rigor, authenticity and reflexivity throughout my research process (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

3.5.1 Interpretive rigor

Interpretive rigor meant "rigorously demonstrating connections between data and theory" (Gioia, et al., 2013, p. 26). I took three measures to achieve interpretive rigor. The first was to engage in member check-ins, either with individual respondents or in group settings. Interviewing key respondents on multiple occasions gave me the opportunity to clarify certain points these respondents had made, bring up opposing ideas to challenge possible biases, and review how the different facets of their experience were accounted for in my emerging theoretical understanding. In group settings, I presented my preliminary research findings and interacted with a broader set of change agents who were "outsiders" to my research (as I had not interviewed them individually). This gave me the opportunity to gather valuable reactions

to my model, identify gaps in my research and gain a better understanding of what felt resonant or representative of change agents' experiences.

The second measure was to regularly discuss my emerging findings and theoretical models with other researchers. I was very fortunate to be part of a "PhD pod." Organized by one of my supervisors, my "pod" was composed of three other PhD students and two post-doctoral students. Our regular meetings on Skype or Zoom gave me opportunities to have open and challenging discussions on various aspect of my research and understanding. From codes to visual models, emerging ideas and concepts were critically debated, leading to the identification of holes in my research that required further data gathering or analysis.

A third measure involved documenting thoroughly my data collection and data analysis process, explaining carefully the systematic approach employed, clarifying the evolution of emergent themes and representing the process visually. I used Atlas.ti to help me organize, sort, reshuffle and progressively fold data into codes and categories. Atlas.ti also served as an audit trail of my work, supporting and substantiating the transparency of the interpretative process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

3.5.2 Authenticity

I based my understanding of authenticity on criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989, pp. 245-251), namely fairness, ontological authenticity, and educative authenticity. On the point of fairness, I tried to render a balanced view of my participants' experiences and voices, avoiding portraying certain voices as better or worse than others. I further tried to keep my codes and constructs as close as possible to the terms used by my participants. Fairness also involved a constructive critique of my own awareness and of how my subjectivity influenced my engagement with others (Lincoln, et al., 2011; Van de Ven, 2007).

On the point of ontological authenticity, I tried to stay true to and be consistent with my relational (Abbott, 1995, 2007; Emirbayer, 1997) and symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) ontological assumptions, both in my engagement with research participants and in my rendering of my findings. I focused on how meanings emerged from unfolding dynamics and people's interpretation of them. I tried to stay faithful to how my respondents accounted for the process of emergence and how they saw their own self changing over time in relation to their context. I was aware of the non-linearity of peoples' experience and of the potential limitations in elaborating a model that described how it was unfolding.

On the point of educative authenticity, my focus was on ensuring that change agents would be able to "see" themselves in one or the other pathways and that my research would help them reflect on their experience or help potential change agents gain insight into the journey ahead. My objective was both to render a faithful account of what I had learned and create a "practical" tool that may be used by others to enable action (Schwandt, 1989). I strove to achieve this by presenting to groups and gathering people's feedback, and by engaging on multiple occasions with key respondents to ensure my understanding of their journey was faithful to their experience.

3.5.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity – "the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher" (Lincoln, et al., 2011) – was an integral part of my strategy to improve my research. To ensure I was reflective throughout the inquiry process, I reflected after each new interview, I wrote memos on my emerging understanding, and I participated in regular discussions with my "PhD pod." After each new interview, I reflected on the experiences shared by my interviewee. Observations centered on the main themes discussed during the interview, the commonalities and differences with other interviews and on the event patterns emerging (Langley, 1999).

Other memos focused on bringing my own perspectives or biases into view, whilst documenting the progressive construction of and making connections between emergent concepts (Charmaz, 2011). For instance, I reflected the fact that I am a privileged insider studying other privileged insiders and how this situation might influence the research process. Certain memos centered on my own state of mind, how I could improve the rigor or depth of my inquiry, as well as themes brought up during interviews that needed to be further investigated and reflections on emerging theoretical constructs. Regarding the latter, many took the form of diagrams or drawings that seeded the visual displays used in my data analysis. In appendix 5, I provide an example of a memo written during the research.

My reflexivity was further supported by regular discussions with my supervisors and other PhD students ("PhD Pods" described above). The regular discussions were key in surfacing possible biases and "digging deeper" into my analysis to refine my emerging understanding of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this findings chapter, I share what I learned from my informants: privileged insiders who were, in various degrees, engaged in change processes to address societal issues within their institutional context. At the onset of my study, I expected to find that they all shared a common volitional process towards change agency. My goal was to uncover this process. Yet, in listening to my informants' stories and comparing their journeys, I noticed that there were major differences in the path that they took and the outcome it led to. Ultimately, I found that there were different degrees or types of change agency, underpinned by significant variances in people's volitional journeys.

To provide a general picture of what I have found, I first briefly describe the different archetypal volitional journeys I have identified, and their respective outcomes. Second, I share the stories of four participants that illustrate the four archetypal journeys. Third, I draw on data from all my informants to unpack how their volitional journey unfolded, focusing on the pivotal moments that shaped these different outcomes. Fourth and finally, I identify key volitional pathways from variances in my participants' journeys.

4.2 Four archetypal volitional journeys

As I started listening to the stories of my informants and compared their journeys, I noticed there were significant variances both in the volitional process they experienced and how they approached change agency. As described in Figure 9, all participants expressed uneasiness when encountering contradictions linked to the normal functioning of institutions. Yet, what people did with this uneasiness and where it led to was often very different.

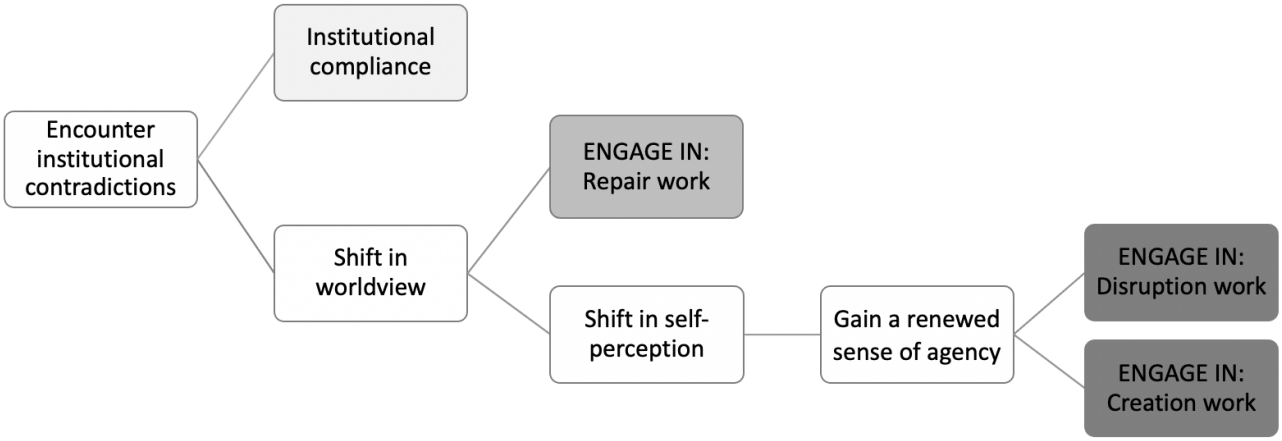

Figure 9: Four archetypal volitional journeys

A first set of participants resisted engaging too deeply with the tensions that they experienced when they encountered institutional contradictions. They defaulted to a "best practice" approach to the work that they did, complying rigorously to the latest legal requirements or industry standards. Their volitional journey led to an outcome I call "institutional compliance."

In contrast, the rest of my sample inquired more deeply into their uneasiness, leaning into the tensions that they felt and questioning institutional arrangements. This led to profound changes in how they perceived the world and their context. Yet, among the people whose worldview was disrupted, there were differences in their journeys. Some people backed away from further interrogation. Their volitional journey led them to focus on promoting changes that went beyond compliance but remained within the institutional boundaries of their field, an outcome I call "repair work."

For other participants, the shift in their worldview triggered a deep questioning, leading to a shift in how they perceived themselves. The implications of this shift were generally emotionally and intellectually difficult to come to terms with, but ultimately led them to gain a renewed sense of agency, setting them on a path towards transformation work. Participants

engaged in transformation work in two different ways. Some ended up challenging existing institutionalized beliefs and practices, an outcome I call "disruption work." Whereas others went on to engage in creating new institutional arrangements, an outcome I call "creation work."

4.3 Four illustrative stories

In the following section, I introduce four of my informants, each exemplifying an archetypal volitional journey. The first is Riaan, a fruit farmer who defaulted to institutional compliance. Riaan's journey is typical of the 'compliance' path. The second is Victor, a finance professor who became involved in the promotion of responsible investment. Victor's journey is typical of the 'repair' path. I then introduce Lucie, a climate activist advocating for change within the education sector. Her journey is typical of the 'disruption' path. Finally, the fourth example is Simon, a lawyer who is transforming contract law, and is typical of the 'creation' path.

4.3.1 Riaan, a farmer who defaulted to institutional compliance

The first volitional pathway is exemplified by Riaan, a fruit farmer in South Africa. He grew up in a remote area surrounded by nature, living close to the local community, where most of his friends were. His family was open-minded, allowing him the freedom to question religion and segregation. As he grew, his focus was on being financially independent and stable. After graduating from university, he landed his first job in a company marketing consumer fresh fruit brands. After two years, he left the company to start his own farming and marketing operation.

Encountering contradictions. Both at a personal and business level, he had been aware of environmental and social issues. He explained, "I recognize that the world economy is very

distorted. The income distribution is very distorted, and nature is out of balance," adding that this was leading to lots of risks and unhappiness. A big concern for him involved automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence. He explained, "we use a lot of that already in our business and it's definitely decimating job opportunities." He further commented "in some of our pack-houses, if we used the technology of 10 years ago, would create jobs for 2,000 people where now we are creating jobs for 300 people. So, this is a serious question."

Managing contradictions. Despite feeling uneasy, he felt he didn't have a choice if he wanted to be competitive in the market place. He explained, "it's one of those areas where I cannot give you a concrete answer. Sometimes I think we question and disrupt unnecessarily." He added, "I feel a sense of duty in promoting change through the work that I do, but I'm not going to do it at the expense of my business." Thus, he brought sustainability factors into his business assumptions when they mitigated risks or increased efficiency. He gave the example of precision agriculture as a way of addressing environmental issues.

> We've implemented techniques that have been quite innovative and economically profitable, and I don't believe it was at the expense of the environment. Our irrigation practices now are very precise. We have used precision agriculture and instruments, such as satellite imagery and better data analysis, to be more efficient. This has also saved us money. So, implementing these changes was also beneficial to the business.

Institutional compliance. His philosophy was to "lead through compliance," adopting and implementing new standards. He commented, "I'm in favor of requirements becoming more stringent. Sometimes they may seem too stringent but that in itself is a big discussion." While he noted that "just running the business in the current environment has become hugely complex", he also indicated that this operational complexity was for him a necessity that he positively engaged with. Summarizing his perspective, he explained, "As a business, we really ensure that we are compliant to auditing and monitoring standards on labor issues, on environmental issues, on pesticides, and residues."

4.3.2 Victor, a finance professor promoting repair work

Victor had not always been concerned with responsible investing. Born in a conservative, religious, working class home, and growing-up in a "tight-knit community", he was raised to believe you could "work yourself out of poverty" provided you adhered to the foundational values of hard work, integrity and honesty. Losing his father early in life, he "realized the importance of not relying on others" and of making the best of every opportunity. His early focus was on achieving and succeeding.

Encountering contradictions and experiencing a shift in worldview. Victor first felt tensions while studying an MBA in a different country. Being in contact with people from a variety of backgrounds who had "totally different perspectives" challenged some of his views and shed new light on his ideals. It opened his eyes to the risk of living "in a bubble" and being numbed to certain realities. Having lived his life in a country where extreme wealth coexisted with extreme poverty, he realized he had tended "not to notice this anymore." As his MBA experience raised new questions around capitalism and poverty, he felt increasingly torn. Seeing "how people can really be exploited," he felt he didn't want to be part of a system "that just strengthens this type of mindset." More tensions arose later while working in a consulting firm where he felt forced to give advice that he did not personally agree with. He felt a clear conflict emerging between his personal values and what he was requested to do to satisfy "client wants and the firm's profit motive." The moral conflict he experienced became so strong he could no longer stay in the consulting firm.

He decided to get a job at a university because "at least a university is a civilized environment." He felt he would have enough freedom to express his thoughts, and over time, he could actually have a very positive impact shaping students' knowledge. Doing his PhD in financial management, he didn't want to promote "hardcore capitalism" and thought it was important for him to add an "human element" to his research. As he fell upon the concept of

ethical investing, he saw an opportunity: financial investment with a human angle, a combination that made sense. The more he engaged in his research, the more it became clear to him that decisions regarding right and wrong ought to play a more prominent role in financial markets. Unless investors consult their personal values, "the current tide of unsustainable and unethical business and investment practices would continue to rise." He felt deeply affected by this new insight.

Moderating ambitions. A significant moment arose shortly after Victor's PhD, at a practitioner event on responsible investment, while he was spending time with individuals considered expert in the field and "seeing how things work in practice" and "how responsible investors actually make decisions."

> I had that realization, 'Oh, maybe I was a bit too ambitious. It is still finance first.' You still invest in a project, wind farm because it's profitable. Then only, do you look at the impact, the societal and environmental impact. That, for me ... I mean doing the PhD I thought we could transform the world. And at that practitioner event, I realized, wait a bit, maybe I was a bit naïve. This is the real world and it is all about finance. The responsible part is secondary.

He explained how he felt "despondent" and "a bit deflated" at first, having been motivated by the possibility of finance bringing "responsible, ethical, social choices" forward.

Over time, he commented having become "older and wiser", realizing "the reality of things." As he explained, investors engage "to improve profits, first and foremost." If employees' basic conditions can be improved in the process, "that's a positive by-product and I need to keep that in mind." He accepted the reality that responsible investing is "still driven by financial fundamentals", observing "we live in a capitalist environment, you need to make money."

Adjusting his role to promote incremental changes. From this realization, his aim has been to "prove [his] weight in gold first and establish a credible position both within the

university and on the board of trustees" to slowly start "chipping away, showing the evidence" about the financial performance of responsible investments. As a member of a board of trustees with "very established views, focused solely on the money", he has managed to put in place an environmental, social and governance (ESG) policy where asset managers are asked to extend their consideration to ESG factors. Though he notes "it's a little bit at a time..., we still invest in tobacco by the way. And I don't think I'm going to convince the other trustees just yet that we should get out of tobacco." As frustrating as the process feels, he believes this is the only way forward. "People don't change overnight. Especially in this industry, they are quite set in their ways." He further notes, "It's a gradual process of convincing them that there's another way of looking at things. It could be different." For Victor, the aim was to repair what was "broken" with investment beliefs and practices, promoting changes to ensure that these would progressively take into account emerging societal concerns.

4.3.3 Lucie, a climate activist engaged in disruption work

Lucie grew up in a wealthy setting. From an early age, she was diligent with her work and school was where she flourished. She appreciated her teachers and had lots of friends. She tried to please everyone around her, always doing what she was told, and never going against authority: "I behaved like a model child, trying to always do what I thought my parents or my teachers wanted me to do."

Encountering contradictions and experiencing a shift in worldview. Lucie went to a reputable and established high school. While she settled in nicely at first, doing her best to "fit-in" socially and performing well academically, she progressively felt uneasy. Racial tensions, sexism and favoritism were omnipresent yet not openly discussed. Wealth and entitlement were allowing behavioral excesses that were difficult to justify. Lucie explained "people were so wrapped up in their superficial world that they didn't care about anything else." She felt that

the school molded students into “caricatures of success” that “excelled academically but failed to have any empathy for the world around them.” The more she tried to fit in, the worse she felt about herself. She commented: “on the one hand I was horrified by the other students and didn’t want to become like them. But on the other hand, I was doing my best to have friends, to please and be accepted.” Her uneasiness grew, affecting her school life and her wellbeing. The sense of despair that followed drove her to reject and disengage from what she had previously accepted and embraced. She saw herself as part of a system she “literally couldn’t stomach.”

On a day where she felt she had “hit the bottom”, she watched a “random” documentary about health, which recommended eating a plant-based diet. Defiantly, “because [she] had nothing to lose”, she challenged herself to “go vegan.” Unexpectedly, what started as a dare became a transformative journey. She read everything she could find on the “vegan lifestyle,” becoming increasingly aware of its environmental benefits alongside the disastrous consequences of our contemporary economies. While environmental justice was not “why [she] had become vegan”, it became her “passion and drive.” She asked herself “what else is affecting the environment that I didn't even think about and why.”

Asking questions and acknowledging her responsibility. Watching “one documentary after the other,” she obsessively consumed information on unsustainable trends, “from fast fashion, to factory farming, climate change, plastic pollution, social impacts linked to environmental degradation and overconsumption, I wanted to know the facts, I was unstoppable.” So many questions arose about what it all meant for society. She felt angry: “These problems were escalating but no one seemed to really care.” These issues appeared “inextricable and loaded.” Most people around her didn’t want to discuss them, claiming they were “already doing enough.” She was particularly angry with the schooling system that “wasn’t getting students to ask or think about the problems that they would need to solve in the

future.” Students were focused on absorbing facts unreflectively for marks and there was little room for critical engagement on societal issues.

As her frustration grew, she also realized that she was not much better than the people around her. Just a few months before, she “wasn't vegan, consumed fast fashion and bought smoothies in a single use plastic cup with a single use plastic straw.” She also still travelled by car, took flights overseas, and bought food wrapped in plastic packaging. She observed “I was an average teenager with just a little bit of extra 'eco',” adding, “I felt pretty bad about myself because I didn't want to be causing harm and every time I discovered something new about my lifestyle that was unsustainable, I couldn't unsee it.” She added “I realized that I was part of that system, but I couldn't be part of that system and be happy with myself.”

Finding a way to take action. From this realization, “things clicked” and she started doing things differently:

> I realized that environmental activism went hand in hand with a lifestyle change. If I say that people should not be using so much plastic, but then I go and I buy stuff in a plastic bag, that clashes with my values and it’s inconsistent. Same with the clothes, I couldn't just carry on going to normal shops and buying normal clothes. I started just buying second hand. And so, I realized I needed to live out what I preach in a sense. And I think by doing that, internally, I then started feeling more at ease and at peace with myself.

Living her values progressively transformed Lucie into a “completely different person.” She spent more time in nature, redefining her relationship to the natural environment and “learning to breathe.” She started to question more deeply what she was learning and how. But at school, her views “clashed” with the view of most other students and teachers. She believed they saw her as a “fictional character” who they couldn’t relate to. There were also days when she wished she wasn’t thinking about environmental issues so much: “When I thought about the problems a lot and realized that there was nobody I could talk to [at school] that could understand what I was feeling, I felt very alone. I wasn’t sure how to carry on.”

Yet, she described how, despite these moments of doubts, she had started feeling happier and much more confident. The internal crisis she had experienced and her new awareness led her to seek out people that thought like her. She took part in climate strikes, got involved in beach clean-ups or tree planting festivals, and went to conferences on ecological restoration. On these occasions, she found "a tribe" of people that understood and supported the same things she did. She explained that this network of like-minded people gave her a channel "to express [her] extreme ways and avoid just having to block it all in."

Extending her role to disrupt education. Over time, she co-founded a climate action organization that sought to organize climate marches, raise ecological awareness in schools and engage with government officials to change the curriculum in light of the climate emergency. The more she engaged in taking action, the better she felt. She explained how, having felt very critical of herself, she could now look at herself and say, "you know what, you're trying your best."

She described how she learned a lot about herself and how to challenge the status quo through her "trial and error" actions. For instance, people reacted strongly against her campaigns for meatless Mondays and the banning plastic bottles within schools. She observed that while she was glad she did it, she also noted that it disrupted her deeply: "I ended up feeling really sad because I realized that other people were just so different and I didn't understand why they couldn't see that going plastic free and protecting the environment was important." She explained that setback moments required a recuperation time "that just slowed everything down."

She changed her approach. She realized that "when something is foreign to people and you push for fast and radical change, they're going to feel attacked or at least they are going to feel scared and unprepared." She became careful when selecting the issues she wanted to bring forward, starting with small changes, creating space for others and holding back on her desire

to rush ahead. She commented, “I have come to realize that people have different priorities. They are guided by a different story and if they were to try and impose part of their lifestyle on me, I would probably also get a shock and try to fight back, making my skin thicker before their next round of attack.” While her aim is to “shake up the education system and drive different behaviors,” she came to recognize that she needed to be strategic about what, how and who she engaged. She had to fine-tune her role to balance both what the context could accept in term of disruption, and what she could deal with in terms of pushback or frustration.

Tempering her actions and taking a long-term view has been necessary for her to be more effective and manage her resilience. She notes:

> When you plant a seed, you never see it grow to its full potential, but you kind of dream about what it can be. You dream about its potential and that's what drives you. I think about my role in the same way. I have to accept that my role is getting the soil ready and planting a few seeds. I have to deal with all the small, necessary changes and just dream about what it could look like in the future. My aim is to enable change as opposed to making sure that I'm the one to complete it.

Lucie has learned to plan and select her actions carefully, combining social events, the coordination of strikes and marches, speaking engagements with newspapers and TV stations, campaigns and petitions to raise awareness, and participating in workshops with government officials. Together, the “mix of actions” aimed at disrupting how people perceived the role of education in the context of the ecological crisis.

4.3.4 Simon, a lawyer undertaking creation work in the legal field

Simon was born to Dutch immigrants in apartheid South Africa. The Afrikaans suburb in which he grew up strongly influenced his initial worldview. Going to a public Afrikaans school and the Dutch Reformed church shaped how he engaged in the world. He explained: “You were supposed to be quiet, listen and obey, and the sources of information were always very restricted. The family, government, school, and church setting very strongly overlapped

so that you were not encouraged to think critically." Respectful of order and hierarchy, he did not object when he was called to go to the army, and then choose to study law "not with any kind of big social justice ambitions, but because it was considered to be a safe career, or a good career."

While the school, church, and army had a strong influence on him, going to study in Holland for a term opened him up to seeing things a little differently. He explained: "seeing South Africa and the world I lived in from the outside started a slow process of disabusing my preconceived ideas. I felt a kind of hangover from my time at the church, I saw how drunk I had been in that space." He also realized that you can firmly believe something is right, only to discover later that you were wrong. He started to be more critical of his own belief system.

Encountering contradictions and experiencing a shift in worldview. As a young commercial lawyer, he learned to do litigation and contracts the way his seniors did. Simon explained that law is a very hierarchical system, designed to perpetuate itself: "You have principals and article clerks. The clerk is never going to contradict his principal, who is also his employer. So, you learn to do things the way your principal does it, and therefore, your clerk will one day learn to do things your way." However, the more he gained experience, the more he felt the weight of the system. To him, it was ineffective, expensive and stressful.

In parallel, the continued growth of social inequalities in South Africa made him increasingly uncomfortable. He commented: "when you drive, everywhere you look you see poverty and inequality. Where is it all going?" He couldn't understand why, following the end of apartheid, the social landscape wasn't changing faster and the majority of people continued to struggle. Had the economic playing field not been redressed? Was it not in fact "a little bit skewed against white people," as many believed?

He volunteered at legal aid clinics and got involved in initiatives helping street children and homeless people. Yet, nothing seemed to really make a difference, nor appease the internal

tensions he was struggling with. He explained: “even if you intellectually realize that things are wrong, and you want to do something about it, it's not easy to do something about it. You can give money to organizations, you can give of your time, but it doesn't really make a difference. There's nothing scalable about it.” Overwhelmed, he felt lost and dissatisfied with his work.

As his frustration grew, he came across attorneys doing mediation and realized there “were other ways of doing law” that made more sense. While his practice of mediation did not lead to many commercial opportunities, mediation sensitized him into thinking about contracts in a less conventional way and brought about his decision to register at an MBA program. He was inspired by the program’s emphasis on the social and environmental responsibility of business, but it was a course on system thinking that shifted his perspective. He realized that “a system can be so pervasive and strong in reinforcing privileges, while at the same time be so pervasive, strong and insidious in oppressing.” As he commented, “living in South Africa, this just made so much sense. You realize that you're a beneficiary of a system that works for you, but which works against most.” This realization was a “sobering” experience. He explained: “At first you are amazed by your new insight. But then the implications of what you have just understood dawn on you and unsettle you to your core. You realize you were wrong; your understanding of the world was wrong.”

Asking questions and acknowledging his responsibility. He started using systems thinking to questions some of his assumptions about business and law, while looking for ways to integrate his insight into his work. Reading one article after another, he was progressively driven to question the role of contract law in the perpetuation of injustices. As Simon explained,

> Contract law assumes that a person who signed a contract has read and understood it, making it enforceable. This assumption makes it easy for companies to do business, but is unrealistic and unfair to vulnerable and illiterate people who must sign contracts they

> cannot read or understand. This "collusion" between law and business shifts all the risk onto the vulnerable and illiterate people.

It was towards the end of his MBA journey that Simon came across research on contract visualization. The authors were proposing to use visualization as a way to help the understanding and retention of agreements. It sparked the idea that visualization could "level the playing field" for vulnerable people. He saw this as an opportunity: if low literate people could rely on the pictures to understand contracts, they would have a better understanding of their rights and obligations. Ultimately, relationships founded on contracts could be improved, and many injustices could be avoided. He felt motivated and inspired.

Yet, this idea came with the realization that the legal institution was currently oblivious to the basic realities of the large majority of people. As a lawyer, he was part of a system that contributed to the "institutional oppression" experienced by many South Africans. He felt "undeserving" of his privileges and "conflicted" about his role. He explained wanting to escape the feeling of "moral bankruptcy" and find a way out of the systemic imbalance he was witnessing. Ultimately, he felt his privilege was his liability, and he had a duty to pay for this liability.

Finding a way to take action. Simon then became "consumed by a need to read everything" he could on visualization and how it could be used to help vulnerable and illiterate people. He also contacted the authors of various academic articles and initiated conversations with them. In the process, he realized that these academics still posited that the text accompanying the pictures was the only binding element of the agreement. For Simon this this didn't make sense. He explained that it struck him as unfair: "Low literate people would rely on the pictures that are easy to understand, but legally be bound by the text that they didn't understand!" As he wondered how to create a contract relying only on pictures, he thought of

comics: “If a comic could tell a story in pictures, and a contract is a dialogue about a future relationship, maybe a contract could be expressed as a comic…?”

He took time away from his legal practice and hired different cartoonists to work on the visualization of a domestic worker contract. Yet, progress was slow, and Simon was concerned: “there was still too much text in the call out boxes. It was not true to the purpose of creating a contract that could be understood by people who cannot read.” The efforts were also financially draining – spending less time with paying clients and spending money on illustrators was not something he could afford for long. On many occasions, Simon was overcome by fear that his idea would never materialize. But eventually, after nearly three years of experimentation, things came together. He was introduced to an illustration company who was keen to partner and received the budget from one of his client companies to create a complete visual contract. Within three months, the first “comic contract” was signed by 300 workers, he was invited to present at an international legal conference and was awarded an innovation award.

Leaving his legal practice aside, Simon’s next steps involved working on key aspects of the concept and its practices, while promoting its legitimacy within the legal fraternity. As the demand for comic contracts grew, he realized that the success of the concept depended on a plurality of skills that were foreign to legal practices. He explained, “I’m working at the confluence of law and creative thinking. We need to combine legal design, plain language, translation and comic devices to create culturally relevant characters and images that people can positively identify with, and which can be understood with a minimum number of words.”

At the heart of his approach is the recognition that “current text contracts perpetuate injustices and violate the dignity of vulnerable or illiterate people, as they are forced to enter into agreements they cannot autonomously understand.” For him, the false assumption of equality between contracting parties drives and legitimizes exploitative agreements making the law a tool of institutional oppression. His goal is to design contracts and contracting processes

that foster the dignity of the parties, thereby challenging established beliefs and practices about contract law. To support the mission, he engages with legal practitioners and academics, participating in conferences, workshops and webinars, and co-authoring several academic articles.

Transforming his role to create new legal institutions. Reflecting back, Simon described how privileged he feels to be able to create something that makes a meaningful difference to the lives of other people. He commented, "I felt that it was my opportunity to employ my privilege and pay it forward." It allowed him to feel "a little bit less conflicted about living in South Africa" and it relieved him "a little bit of that feeling of hopelessness about the situation." He described it as having a little asset that could grow in terms of its impact and could hope to settle his social debt.

Simon also explained how comic contracts had allowed him to reconcile his identification as a lawyer with his need "to be on the more progressive side of things." He explained: "There are different ways of being a lawyer. I am not just perpetuating or benefiting from a kind of 'identity by association.' I have crafted my own role as a lawyer. I feel I can walk a bit taller, like I have my own place at the table." More important than being a lawyer was what he *did* as a lawyer. For him, this meant "trying to achieve the purpose of comic contracts... which is to change the way people contract with vulnerable people." He felt this purpose held a truth that resonated deep within him.

This sense of purpose was what helped him persist through several challenges, as not everyone welcomed the idea of a comic contract. Some of his peers within the legal fraternity were critical and unsupportive. Simon explained that "the legal system is very hierarchical and conservative. There's precedents, ways of doing. There's a lot of stuff that feeds into keeping things the way they are. Risks, perceptions, ... which all reinforce this one way of doing contracts." He realized that he could not ignore the views of the dominant voices in that space.

He explained: “I don't need their legitimacy, but my work is at risk of their judgement.” His concern was that if a senior lawyer published a view that attacked comic contracts, he might lose support and time. He managed this risk up front by getting opinions from senior lawyers and judges. “I'm hoping to bring them on my side. So, I'm therefore careful not to attack the dominant voices. I'm not out there looking for a fight. I'm just saying, ‘have a look at this. This is a different way of seeing things.’” While he felt like “an entrepreneur”, his goal was to show the legal institution that a comic contract “was consistent and extended the ideals of justice.”

Moving ahead, he felt a duty to dedicate his time to comic contracts. He explained that having “seen” a better way of doing something, and what it meant for people using the contracts, he could not go back to doing agreements the old way. He felt encouraged and stimulated, commenting: “because it's such a visual thing, people literally see things differently.” His goal was to introduce the concept of dignity as a legal standard in contract law and collaborate with all initiatives that are dedicated to enable this change. He observed, “I have this amazing opportunity to make a meaningful difference in this unequal society. So, the responsibility is on me to do it right.”

4.4 The unfolding of volitional journeys

The stories of Riaan, Victor, Lucie and Simon exemplify the four archetypal journeys that I observed in my data. Despite being initiated from similar starting points, these four archetypal journeys lead to different types of engagement with institutional arrangements. To gain further insights into these different types of engagement, I now draw on my full data set to unpack how these journeys unfolded, and I examine the pivotal moments that shaped my participants’ engagement with institutional arrangements.

4.4.1 Participants encounter institutional contradictions

All of the individuals that I interviewed reported becoming aware of institutional contradictions when they encountered injustice. Participants reported a nagging sensation that "something is wrong" and "unfair" with regard to how current institutions allowed, produced or maintained contradictions, such as social inequalities or environmental degradation. For instance, a financial professional (F19) explained "on our watch so many people are just falling completely off any radar and the value of their life experience is shocking."

Most participants described feeling a deep contradiction between their personal situation and the suffering of others or the degradation of the planet. Talking about her career in education, a scholar (E46) illustrates this by saying "I had to some degree arrived. I was successful. But as all of this was happening, I started to get a niggling inside my heart. And the niggling in my heart would not stop." Similarly, a large-scale farmer (A38) expressed feeling a "huge, uncomfortable feeling" about the economic and political system and its implication for rural communities, and a growing personal need to "fight for the underdog."

Most participants described how they initially tried to suppress the "nagging feeling." A business owner (B24) described initially trying to "block [her] emotions or repress or rationalize them instead of actually just feeling them." Similarly, a financial professional (F41) explained how "For a long while, I didn't quite capitalize on that emotional surge, to fit it into my journey. I tried to leave emotions pretty much out." A young educational professional (E10) explained "every day seeing inequality, injustices is difficult …, but initially you don't think much further. It's something out there."

Yet, as illustrated in Figure 10, not everyone reacted in the same way when they encountered institutional contradictions. Whereas some people resisted engaging further, others allowed themselves to be moved and engage with their uneasiness. People who resisted engaging further *rationalized* what they perceived and ended up focusing on ensuring

compliance with the latest institutional expectations. On the other hand, participants who leaned into their uneasiness progressively *recognized contradictions as institutional injustice* and engaged further into their volitional journey, towards a shift in their worldview. Below, I unpack these two different responses.

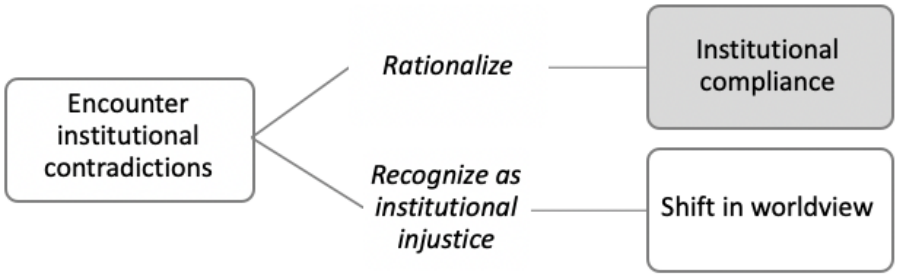

Figure 10: Participants respond to institutional contradictions

4.4.2 Some people rationalize contradictions and default to institutional compliance

Despite their awareness of institutional contradictions, some informants rationalized the tensions they experienced and avoided engaging too deeply with any specific issues. A few were quite defensive about the beliefs and practices of their profession, arguing how "it has worked for the last couple of hundred years," how "this is a system that has been perfected," and how "there is no point throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Others expressed a sense of despondency. For instance, a portfolio manager commented, (F37) "Seeing poverty ... It never sits well with me. But then you would have to question the way society is structured. I guess that's just how things are always going to be." Reflecting on his experience, a sustainability professional at a financial firm (F2) explained "I avoid engaging too deeply [with the concept of responsible investment] because then I think of morals, I think of divestment, so it means that we might have to exclude certain categories of investment which would reduce our investment universe...that would just create more problems than it would solve." Similarly,

a farmer (A38) explained "Sometimes you have to consolidate and just be at peace with what you have," adding that while for him agriculture in its current format "may not be sustainable", there was little he could do about it if he wanted to stay in business.

Institutional compliance. Those participants who rationalized institutional contradictions appeared to see existing institutional arrangements as non-negotiable, with any substantial changes being dependent on top-down regulatory intervention. They reverted to complying with the latest institutional and regulatory requirements. For example, a sustainability professional at a financial firm (F2) explained that it was the responsibility of governments "to level the playing field" in his industry. However, he felt his responsibility lay in complying with the latest institutional and regulatory expectations. He commented, "we are not shying away from change. We recognize that it's an unfortunate behavioral weakness of investors to focus on short-term returns." He added "But there is only so much we can do. We implement what we can, where we can, in line with regulatory requirements." The head of engagement at an asset manager (F4) observed "We are working to be the best among our peers." In that sense, his role had changed "from a very reactive insular siloed approach to a much more broad-based, proactive and collaborative kind of approach to compliance."

4.4.3 Other people recognize contradictions as institutional injustice

In contrast to those who rationalized institutional contradictions, the other participants in my study explained that these contradictions became progressively harder to ignore as they experienced a sense of injustice building up inside them over time. As commented by a communication professional (B20) "things started to eat at me." Participants reported feeling increasingly "triggered" by certain discussions, people or events, which challenged their comfort levels or made them feel angry, uneasy, frustrated or sad.

They attributed the growing uneasiness less to the increasing presence of injustices, but rather to something inside them, a disposition, that "let whatever was manifesting become more and more" until it could no longer be ignored. Participants used evocative descriptions to explain how they were noticing and allowing tensions to grow, exposing themselves to become emotionally vulnerable. For instance, an academic (E47) observed "perhaps subconsciously we're choosing the things that allow the niggling to become an explosion inside of us. It's a series of choices and I think the first choice is, are you going to pay attention to the niggling or are you going to ignore it?" A business owner (B24) further added "I think it was allowing myself to feel. Also, allowing to see my own reality from a distance, me and my reality next to other people and their realities to go, 'Oh, okay. There's more than one reality.' There is all these parallel universes of cultures and ways of doing things.'" A regenerative farmer (A28) explains that for him this process "…was not just an intellectual process. It was a series of really anguished decisions that exposed me to feeling more. Like falling in love … it was an intentional process stemming from the heart."

Engaging with their feelings of discomfort triggered a process of reflection. Participants described how their feelings of discomfort guided them towards questioning some aspects of their world. A professional in the legal field (L14) explained "It's an iterative and partly subconscious process. You seek out answers to your feelings, you get new information and you kind of hold on to your old ideas. And so on." He added, "It's realizing you're wrong over time. You notice, you question but you move along … until you can't hold on any longer to your old understanding and it hits you." As another education professional (E10) put it "I started realizing more and more that my entire world view was just wrong."

Through this process of reflection, participants progressively sensed what many described as the "systemic nature of injustices." For instance, a communication professional (B20) commented, "things started to really shift for me when it became clear that some

systemic mechanism was at play." Similarly, a financial professional explained (F17), "I progressively realized that we are all part of a system that just strengthens injustices," while an educational professional (E25) explained coming to acknowledge that "we live in a broken system whose normal functioning generates these insane levels of privilege and unacceptable levels of poverty."

Dismissing their uneasiness or leaning in and recognizing contradictions as institutional injustice became the first bifurcation in understanding my informants' journeys. All participants who opened up and recognized the institutional nature of injustice engaged in a latent process whereby they questioned their understanding of the world. They became progressively aware that their taken-for-granted beliefs were flawed. At some point, their perception of the world shifted.

4.4.4 Participants experience a shift in worldview

All participants who recognized their uneasiness and allowed this energy to drive their questioning described how at some point they were no longer able to justify their beliefs and "the narrative unraveled" (E5). As previous meanings ceased to make sense, individuals were pushed into uncertainty. Deeply rooted assumptions were being challenged and what was known in the abstract takes on an acute reality. Illustrating this point, an education professional (E46) commented: "What does it mean when the theatre that we call life starts to change dramatically all around us? What questions do we ask when all that we have known to be true and sufficient no longer is, when our ideas about progress, development, governance, systems, institutions are being challenged?"

Participants described experiencing a deep crisis that affected how they saw their profession or context and left them feeling deeply emotional. For instance, a marketing professional (B27) explained:

> I realized the negative impacts of marketing, and branding, and products within the world and how a brand could also have a conscience and go through a process of change. I realized how what I did was damaging society and the environment, and it was just for the benefit of the shareholders.

Similarly, a farmer (A35) commented:

> The big shift was around social aspects. We are a grain operation, and until then we were trying to reduce the number of people we employed [by using bigger machinery]. But now I felt the burden of the huge unemployment in our area and the responsibility of farming operations. So, my challenge became looking at ways to do stuff that's more labor intensive.

Participants described feeling emotionally overwhelmed by their new understanding. For example, a communication professional (B20) observed "I remember being so physically and emotionally broken, that I just cried" while an academic (E47) explained "It turned into physical symptoms. I was unhappy, I was unsettled. I would be in meetings and just feeling like a sourness, I wasn't enjoying the conversation." She added "I would literally go to bed at night feeling like I was going to get punished by some universal force."

While the shift in their worldview had profound effects on informants, they did not react uniformly to it. As illustrated in Figure 11, some disengaged and decided not to ratify the shift in worldview. The rest of the participants decided to lean into the shift by questioning their own assumptions. I describe the differences that I observed below.

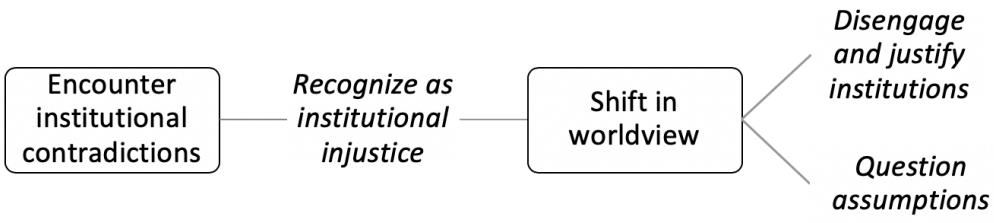

Figure 11. Participants experience a shift in worldview

4.4.5 After the shift in worldview, some people disengage and justify institutions

Having experienced a shift in their worldview, some interviewees described shielding themselves from having to engage further with what had just occurred and disengaging from the shift in worldview. This is exemplified by Victor, who felt he had perhaps been "a bit naïve" and had come to realize "the reality of things." Several participants explained their decision to opt-out as stemming from having somehow "come to their senses." A financial professional (F17) provided a good illustration of this when talking about responsible investment. She explained "It's easy to become passionate ... be a greenie... but we need to stay realist, this is how decisions are made by large asset managers. If they engage, it is to improve profits, first and foremost." Others explained being scared to go any further. For instance, a sustainability professional (B44) described: "… Going deeper [is] too scary. I don't have the capacity. There is only so much I can do." Similarly, a person working in the financial industry commented (F19), "there's that internal tension. An internal wanting to do something but then being scared, scared to really step into it."

The decision to respect current institutional arrangements appeared to these participants as the only conceivable way forward, even if it did not alleviate all of the concerns or uneasiness they felt. For instance, another financial professional (F3) explains:

> The fact that we feel this isn't the right thing to do, that doesn't carry a price, and therefore it's not a factual thing we can respond to. I think when things are going well in a fund and you're beating your benchmark, there's no way somebody's going to change things.

Similarly, a business consultant (B23) justified his level of engagement by saying "there is still some reticence to put your head too high above the parapet, if you want to call it that, and make yourself out to be a target." As a result, he did not feel he had an option but to keep within current institutional arrangements.

To bring some of their concerns and new understanding forward into their work, participants explained making adjustments to their role as to be in a position to promote change within the boundaries of current institutional arrangements. Their aim was to balance emerging and established concerns. A good example of this process is expressed by a business professional (B44) “I think, by and large, my foundations haven't changed significantly, and I suppose they wouldn't, but I've definitely changed my approach over the last five to eight years to make it more relevant to what's happening outside.” As further explained by a supply chain professional inside a large corporate (B7):

> I am fully involved in doing my job for the business, but at the same time I am looking at or working for the [XX] Foundation on small business development, as well as trying to source organic cottons, or learn about whether I should do it or not do it. A lot of it actually had to do with ethical sourcing and local manufacturing and local sourcing, which helped me to tie it into what I was doing.

These two examples highlight how participants worked to adjust their role to address some of their emerging concerns within current institutional arrangements.

Repair work. As depicted in Figure 12, the decision to disengage from the shift in worldview ultimately led individuals to a type of work that I call ‘repair work’, as it aims to promote change that improves current institutional arrangements, either containing externalities or using established operational mechanisms to promote positive societal outcomes. Repair work is illustrated by a sustainability professional in a large financial organization (F1):

> “You're constantly holding this double agenda because you try to meet the business where it's at, and yet you've got this progressive vision of where you think it should be. But you know that if you worked from where it should be, you would just lose everybody. So, you're holding this dual vision and dual agenda the whole time hoping that you are pushing the system in the right direction.”

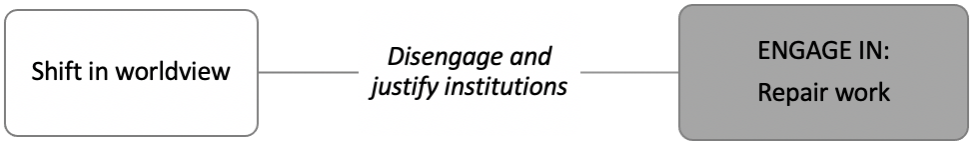

Figure 12. After the shift in worldview, some people justify the institution and focus on repair work

Participants doing repair work promote incremental changes within the boundaries of institutional arrangements. They recognize that current beliefs or practices may not be sustainable but cannot see their field radically transforming these. Their work thus focuses on implementing operational changes that limit adverse effects or push initiatives that progressively align their field with larger societal concerns. For instance, a financial professional (F17) tells of the role impact investing can have on the investment landscape:

> "[Within the capitalist system] impact investing can make a difference. It's not aid, but empowering people to create social change and a beneficial setup for the business owner and the consumer and the investor. That's why I like impact investing a lot because it's got that very strong human element, although it also aligns with financial and economic imperatives."

Participants doing repair work could be said to offer a nuanced and gradual forms of agency that can lead to institutional change over time but in the shorter time-frame, aimed at incrementally adjusting institutional arrangements to encompass new considerations.

4.4.6 After the shift in worldview, other people question assumptions

Participants who did not disengage, instead engaged into further questioning. As illustrated in Figure 13, these participants initiated an intense investigation about their assumptions and belief systems, a process I call 'questioning assumptions.' This ultimately led on a path towards transformative action.

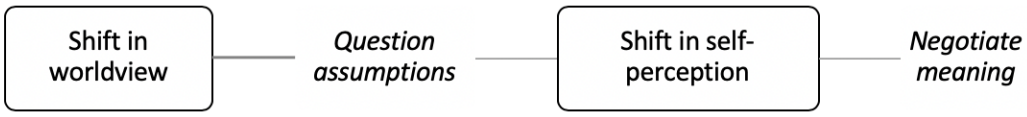

Figure 13. After the shift in worldview, some people question assumptions

Question assumptions. Participants describe being "obsessed" with asking questions, "questioning everything" they had always known, "re-evaluating everything" they had learned. As explained by a respondent (E46) "Your insert yourself into the center of the issue and you engage with it deeply, intimately, intentionally." Another respondent (B27) observed that for him "a large part of this process [was] reaching out and joining the dots, "adding "It's like I've been sitting in a box and only having access to limited information to walking into this massive library. It's just information and questions at the same time. It changes everything."

Participants described this process as very intense emotionally and impossible to stop. A farmer (A13) commented on his experience, "There's a feeling, an inchoate dimension to what's happenings and you decide to burrow into that and understand what this is about and to raise it to the level of self-awareness, of proper analytical understanding." A lawyer (L14) explained, "the emotions that you feel push you to face the facts", adding that "at the same time, you accept that the more you understand, the more you risk having to confront your own responsibility in the situation."

Shift in self-perception. Leaning-in eventually led participants to a 'moment of insight' about themselves and their responsibility that shifted how they perceived themselves. Like facing a mirror image which did not reflect what they expected, they realized that who they were in the world and who they wanted to be was discordant. They asked themselves "What if the story was that I had abandoned my responsibility. What if the story was that I was also to blame?" (E46). This is illustrated by a farmer (A13) saying, "Part of it was recognizing that

I'm part of the mess. It was taking responsibility for my own part in it rather than finding some external object that I could blame." An academic (E5) explained: *"*My personal narrative about 'who I was' was undermined in a way that I couldn't easily repair." A legal professional (L29) described it slightly differently "It was realizing that I'm just as bad as the people that I'm trying to criticize. This is not a proud moment. It is a wake-up call." Like seeing themselves from somebody else's perspective, participants appeared to be humbled by an understanding of their own failings or limitations.

There appeared to be no turning back from this moment of personal insight. Most participants described their experience in very similar terms, unable to "unsee" what they had seen: "in that moment, once, you know, … once you've seen behind the curtain, you can't unsee it (E5)." Similarly, a marketing professional (B27) commented "When you realize that you stepped through the door, then, that's it. There's no way you could step backwards. There are no ways", while a business owner (B24) observed "It's much easier to be asleep than it is to be awake. Yeah. But if you're awake, you're awake. Nothing can put you to sleep again." A farmer (A26) commented "I had one life up to that point, and I went on a whole different life afterwards."

Negotiate meaning. The shift in their self-perception left people in a state of shock, needing to answer questions such as: "Where do I go from here?" (A26), "Will I need to betray others in order to be true to myself?" (E47), "What obligations come with this new knowledge" (A33), "Why wasn't I aware of this before? And why didn't I do something about it before?" (B27). In a process I named 'negotiate meaning', individuals grappled with these questions and the possibilities they presented. As powerfully explained by an academic (E47) "It's the space [where] the vestigial and the imaginal selves are fighting it out." Reflecting upon this mechanism, another education professional (E46) explained that in that process one needs to be very honest about the losses that one faces, naming them and accepting them as a necessity.

She observed that during the process she had reconciled herself, as an individual, “to face some losses so that [she could], in the end, gain some wins” (E46). She added, “It requires that you go inward first and ask, ‘what matters to me’? ‘What keeps me up at night’? ‘What is a future I cannot accept, and how do I fix it?’ It requires that you be willing to change the story.” The outcome for her – as for others - was to be willing to have her comfort zone disrupted.

Participants describe the process of coming to terms as both emotionally and intellectually taxing, as they looked for ways to find relief. A marketing professional explained (B27) “I went through anxiety, realizing the facts, depression even, and then I felt empowered because I knew the facts, and I could do something about it.” He further added “What’s important is to recognize that you feel fear, but you stop, and think, and look a little bit better. And you start unpacking what you see until you start making sense of it and it’s not so frightening anymore because you can do something about it.” Similarly, a business owner (B24) observed how she had to engage emotionally with rational, intellectual ideas while at the same time engage intellectually with her feelings. She explained: “I've worked really hard at opening the conversation and the dialogue between the two aspects of myself and trying more and more to operate less from one or the other, but to be more integrated.”

Some participants in my sample were still grappling with this process, struggling to accept the personal implications of their insight and unable to proceed any further. They expressed feeling the “burden of knowledge” (E10 and B45) and were not quite sure what to do with it. For instance, a young education professional (E25) explained how she felt disorientated and was “just trying to take it day-by-day.” She commented, “I feel I can only handle so much right now. All my grief is coming together. There are things that are implicitly or subconsciously coming together in my mind.” This was leaving her “almost awaiting that second wave of, A-ha.” She couldn’t quite see “how to take all this forward yet.”

4.4.7 Participants gain a renewed sense of agency

Ultimately, the process of negotiating meanings appeared to lead individuals to realize that the relief of the tensions they were experiencing would only come if they engaged in actions that addressed the contradictions and injustices they sensed. A regenerative farmer (A30) explained "Until you go forward and do something, you are complicit in some way in the whole thing," while an academic (E5) commented, "you realize that actually the only way to counteract that feeling of being complicit is to engage in actions that make you feel less complicit." At this point, individuals entered a new phase in their volitional process, a phase during which a renewed agency emerged and progressively shaped how they engaged in the world.

Participants' renewed agency was articulated around three aspects: the realization that small changes matter, the acceptance that the 'doing' is more important that the outcome, and the recognition that they had a 'privilege' they should use to promote change. On the realization that small changes matter, a business owner (B24) explained "I think one of my biggest learning has been to just accept… that little inch forward, that little inch forward. That's okay. That is what it is." She added "Change is very seldom a big bang. It's a little repetition, and a little repetition, and a little repetition, and a tiny tweak, and a little ... Then, those all add up. And when you put a frame on it, you go, 'Okay, that's a big impact or a big change.'" Thus, doing something, "no matter how small," allowed participants to overcome the feeling of being overwhelmed, and to motivate them to act. A young education professional (E10) noted "I don't have the illusion anymore that I'm going to change the entire world. That's not going to happen. Small changes are all I can do. And that can be meaningful in itself." Similarly, a regenerative farmer (A26) explained "I can't change everything. But in my little environment I'm trying to wake some people up on those specific issues that I care about. I can do what I can do and it's still making a difference in what's going on. I find peace in that." The quotes reveal the

importance that participants placed on each contribution. An activist in the education space (E21) explained this quite poetically, noting: “I view myself as a drop in the ocean. Without a drop, there will be no ocean, so you cannot discount the value of that drop.” He added “The drop might only bring so much change, but this change can set the foundations for others to join and it can accumulate from there.”

Linked to the understanding that small change matter, participants emphasized that the “doing” was more important to them than the outcome. As explained by an education professional (E18), the resolution to act “implies accepting not being able to determine outcomes but being committed to doing something.” It implied acknowledging that “change is a process” and that “it’s never over.” Participants were engaging in the change processes without having a clear idea of what they would achieve, thus accepting to “muddle through” and “make mistakes along the way.” Expanding on this, a farmer stated (A13) “At no point have I felt, ‘well now it's fixed’, or ‘that solves it or that settles it’…There's no righteous path, there's no clearly correct way of dealing with things. I think that I am dealing with things as opposed to pretending, and that's good.”

Finally, the resolution to act came with an awareness that one had a privilege – which could be a skill, a competence, a position, a character trait, or a context – that could be used to facilitate change. An agriculture professor (A30) described it by saying that “the meaning of life is to find your gift, and the purpose of life is to give it away.” All participants referred in one way or another to their ‘gift’ or ‘privilege’ to express how they would take their resolution to act forward. For instance, a scholar (E5) observed “Because I have privilege, I can convene, I can help shape or shift a conversation because I have done my time working my ability to have credibility in that space.” Similarly, another respondent working in the advertising industry (B20) commented “I realized, well this is my privilege. This is my thing. I have the

privilege of having been introduced to many companies, to work for cool companies. And while I've got this privilege, I need to use it to have a positive impact on the world around me."

Yet, not every participant engaged with transformative action in the same way. Depending on their circumstances, their own disposition, or what they felt would ultimately be more effective, some participants extended their role to include disruptive activities, while others instead transformed their role to create new institutional arrangements. These two different ways in which the resolution to take action unfolded for participants is illustrated in Figure 14 and is exemplified by Lucie and Simon's stories. While Lucie challenged the status quo by engaging in disruptive activities, Simon went on to work at the confluence of law, design and philosophy to extend legal institutions and create new arrangements.

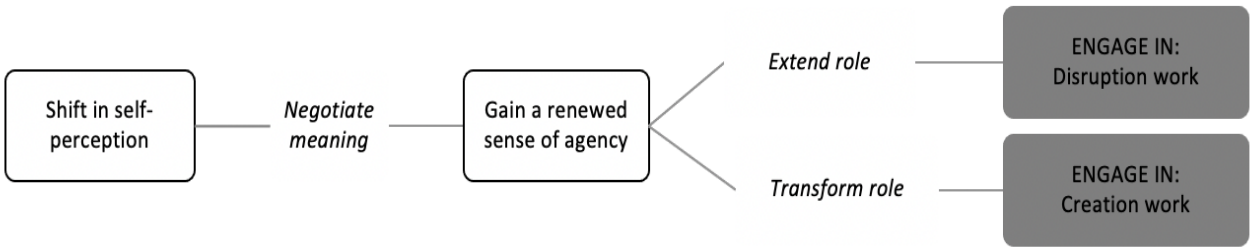

Figure 14. Participants gain a renewed sense of agency

4.4.8 After gaining a renewed sense of agency, some extend their role to engage in disruption work

Some participants went on to extend their role: progressively broadening their role to include actions that disrupted institutionalized beliefs and practices. Respondents describe how they started to hold their convictions clearer in public, "not being passive" and instead "fighting for it" and "actively looking for opportunities to get involved." They felt "compelled to step in places" where before they would have not bothered. An academic (E5) explained "I'm trying

to put myself back on the right side of things, by aligning my actions with what seems more just now that I have a different view of the facts." She described it as "a set of choices" that made others around her uncomfortable but that she owned and stood behind. Participants observed how over time, these choices added up to "a very different pathway" both for them as a person and socially, leading them to progressively reconstruct their personal narrative, use different language, hang out with new people, and engage with their job or context very differently.

Yet, participants remained careful and contained in their engagement. Working "from within," they were either "purposely very technical," or "still a little fearful." To describe their level of mobilization, they made comments such "I'm not burning my house down over this," "I do the safe thing," or "I'm still too compromising," "I'm a gradualist," or "I can't be too radical." There were two main reasons advanced for this. One was "to meet people where they were at." Like in Lucie's example, these participants strategically tempered their activism to be able to get a conversation going and introduce ideas in a less threatening way. The other reason was "the fear around social acceptance" and "the need to keep a good position." For instance, a law professional (L29) explained "I am grappling with this activist in me. … I often find myself not brave enough… I'm not yet willing to go all out and stake my practice on it," while an educator commented "I feel sometimes angry with myself for not being courageous enough to call it out as it is."

Disruption work. Individuals who extended their role engaged in actions that disrupted institutional arrangements, an outcome I call 'disruption work'. Informants described it as "publicly questioning the status quo", "openly challenging the system and the stories we've been told," and "shifting ideas and perception in a transformative direction." A sustainability professional in a financial organization (F3) provided a good summary of this type of work: "My job is to stimulate different thinking and to make people feel uncomfortable. If I'm not a

day away from being fired every day, then I'm not doing what I should." Respondents' actions ranged from "helping others in how they want to act," to "creating the space for change to occur," "starting a lot of conversations," or "getting ideas off the ground." An educator (E22) depicts his actions as "just knocking it a little bit further ...pushing the orbit of a community slowly into a particular direction by mixing different types of engagements techniques, some non-conflictual and others more daring."

4.4.9 After gaining a renewed sense of agency, others transform their role to engage in creation work

Instead of extending their role, a final group of participants went on to completely transform their role and to create new institutional arrangements. I use the term role because they all emphasized how their sense of personal identity had not changed. Rather, it was how they engaged in the world that was different. They transformed what they did to align with who they wanted to be in the world. In doing so, they reformulated what it meant to be a lawyer, a farmer or an educator, ultimately pioneering with new assumptions, beliefs and practices within that field.

Participants described how transforming their role required them to completely redefine what their purpose was and how they situated themselves in respect to their field or context. A lawyer (L12) explained:

> "it meant reviewing my life and my work so that it could be an instrument of change. As an [environmental] lawyer, I had until then worked and drafted laws to reduce or manage human behaviors that were causing problems. I then discovered that there were some problems I couldn't fix with better drafting, and that the problem was deeper. It was in the philosophy that informed the law. So, when I realized that the legal system was fundamentally part of the problem, I felt my role was to set out an entirely different vision of what law could be."

To engage on that route, participants commented about having to choose "to consciously re-educate" themselves and to permanently challenge their own thinking. They had to become a "prototype" showing what an alternative path meant practically. Participants described this process as "following a path of resonance" and having the "public courage" to "fully step into [their] beliefs." For instance, a communication professional (B27) explained that "you are changing your life, and you somehow break from the career that you've built for 25 years to embark on a path hardly anyone understands. It's getting over the fear and having a blind faith that you can play a role in enabling this alternative path."

All participants emphasized how demanding transforming their role had been. As a farmer (A30) explained "[you accept to be] in a position where every moment of every day you feel as if you're in service to what you believe in. You've got to preach the gospel as in living it. You are not claiming something with words. You are representing and living your ideals in a public setting." Many participants commented on the amount of courage they had needed to step into this unchartered role. They needed courage to accept potentially disappointing others, being rejected by their fraternity or being misunderstood by colleagues and friends. For instance, an academic (E47) described how she had to "step fully into the courage, not the periphery of it, with the palm sweating and the heart beating very fast."

Creation work. Participants who transformed their role engaged in creation work; work that "challenged the idea of what is possible" not in the abstract but in practice. They used their expertise or particular access to a context to design, implement and promote new practices consistent with new philosophical foundations within a field. Some respondents referred to their work as "ontological work," and others as "building credible alternatives that people can move to." This is the example of Simon who "transcended the boundaries of contract law to confront and address its oppressive outcome. Other participants were engaged in developing regenerative farming models, formulating Earth Rights, spearheading new educational

philosophies or leading new social business models. All were involved in “breaking grounds” because they were clear that “the old models no longer worked.” As a lawyer (L12) observed: "I think that there are times when you need to resist things and fight against things that are happening to stop bad things from happening. But there are other times when you can’t change the world by fighting an existing reality. If you really want to change things, you need to invent a new model that can make the existing model obsolete."

Across interviewees, it was clear that the goal of the alternative models they were developing was not “to gain a competitive advantage” in their field, or to be the only ones doing what they were doing. Quite the opposite, they focused on sharing, because they wanted this to be the start of a “movement” capable of pushing through change on a wider scale. As a famer (A28) commented "The more people farm like that, the better, that's why I’m always open to giving my plans to anybody.” He added: “If it took me ten years to learn how to make this work, I just say to people ‘Here's my plans. Don't take so long, just start tomorrow.’" Similarly, another farmer (A30) noted: “the more purposeful other regenerative farmers become, the more purposeful I can become. And when the two of us are working together or collaborating, then fundamental change can really happen.” Rather than operating from a competitive perspective, they operated from an open and synergetic perspective. While several respondents referred to their work as “a service” rather than a business, an academic (E47) working on transformative leadership models commented that she was not “driven by making money or scaling [her] venture. I’m driven by my sense of purpose and the promise of change.”

4.5 Identifying key volitional pathways

4.5.1 Four possible pathways shape privileged insiders’ engagement with institutions

Through reviewing variances in my participants’ volitional journeys, I was able to identify four different pathways, that led to different forms of engagement with institutions. As

presented in Figure 15, the first volitional pathway leads privileged insiders to an outcome described as *institutional compliance*. Rationalizing institutional contradictions, they complied with current legal requirements or industry standards and did not engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform institutions.

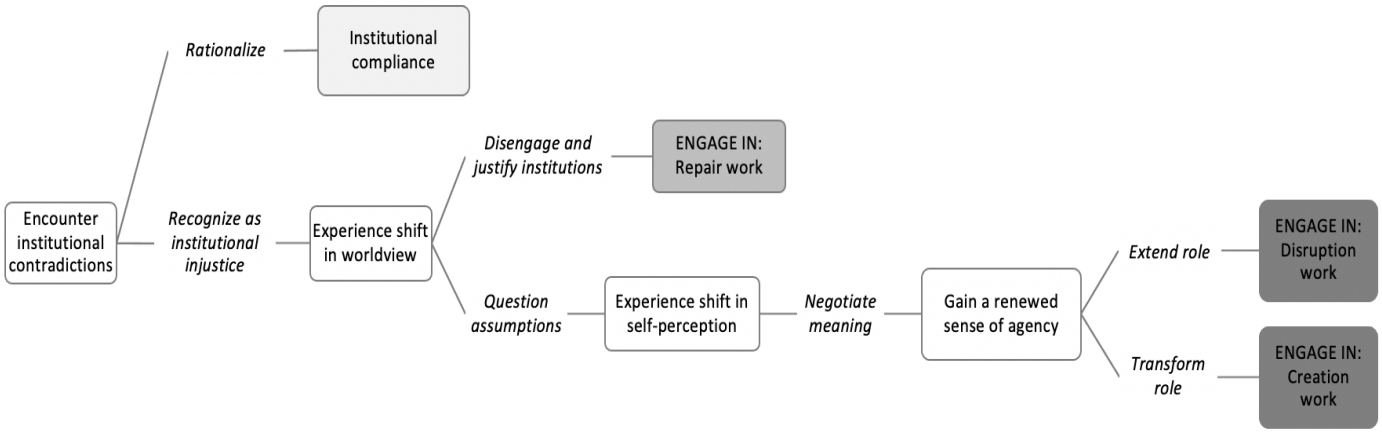

Figure 15: The four possible volitional pathways

The second volitional pathway led other privileged insiders to engage in *repair work*. These privileged insiders recognized institutional contradictions as institutional injustice, questioned institutions and experienced a shift in worldview. Yet, this shift appeared to be more than what they could emotionally and rationally cope with. They disengaged themselves from the developing divergence in their understanding of reality and instead adjusted their role to engage in efforts aimed at promoting changes within the boundaries of existing institutions.

The third and fourth volitional pathways led privileged insiders to engage in transformation work. After experiencing a shift in worldview, these privileged insiders engaged in a highly emotionally charged process leading them to question assumptions about themselves, their role and their responsibility. Following a deep introspective process, these privileged insiders experienced a shift in self-perception. Ultimately, this shift led them to gain a renewed sense of agency and to take action. Individuals engaged in transformation work in

two different ways: either extending their existing role to engage in *disruption work* by challenging institutionalized beliefs and practices or transforming their role to engage in *creation work* by creating new institutional arrangements.

4.5.2 The feelings that underpin the four pathways

The pathways I uncovered appear to be underpinned by different feelings: how people engaged and managed the negative feelings triggered by institutional contradictions appears to have had a significant influence on their change journey. As presented in Figure 16, upon encountering contradictions, a set of respondents rationalized these contradictions and didn't appear to engage with negative feelings (the light grey line in the figure). Reverting to institutional compliance, they also expressed feeling "at peace" with the fact that it was all they could do.

The rest of respondents expressed engaging with some negative feelings such as "feeling uneasy" and "feeling that something is wrong." This progressively led them to recognize contradictions as institutional injustice and went on to experience a shift in worldview. They spoke of enduring a surge in negative feelings, conveyed as feeling "unhappy," "unsettled," "punished," or even "broken." But there again, the set of people who disengaged from the shift in worldview (the darker grey in the figure) managed to change the valence of their emotions and expressed experiencing low intensity positive feelings, such as feeling "back in balance," as their engaged in repair work.

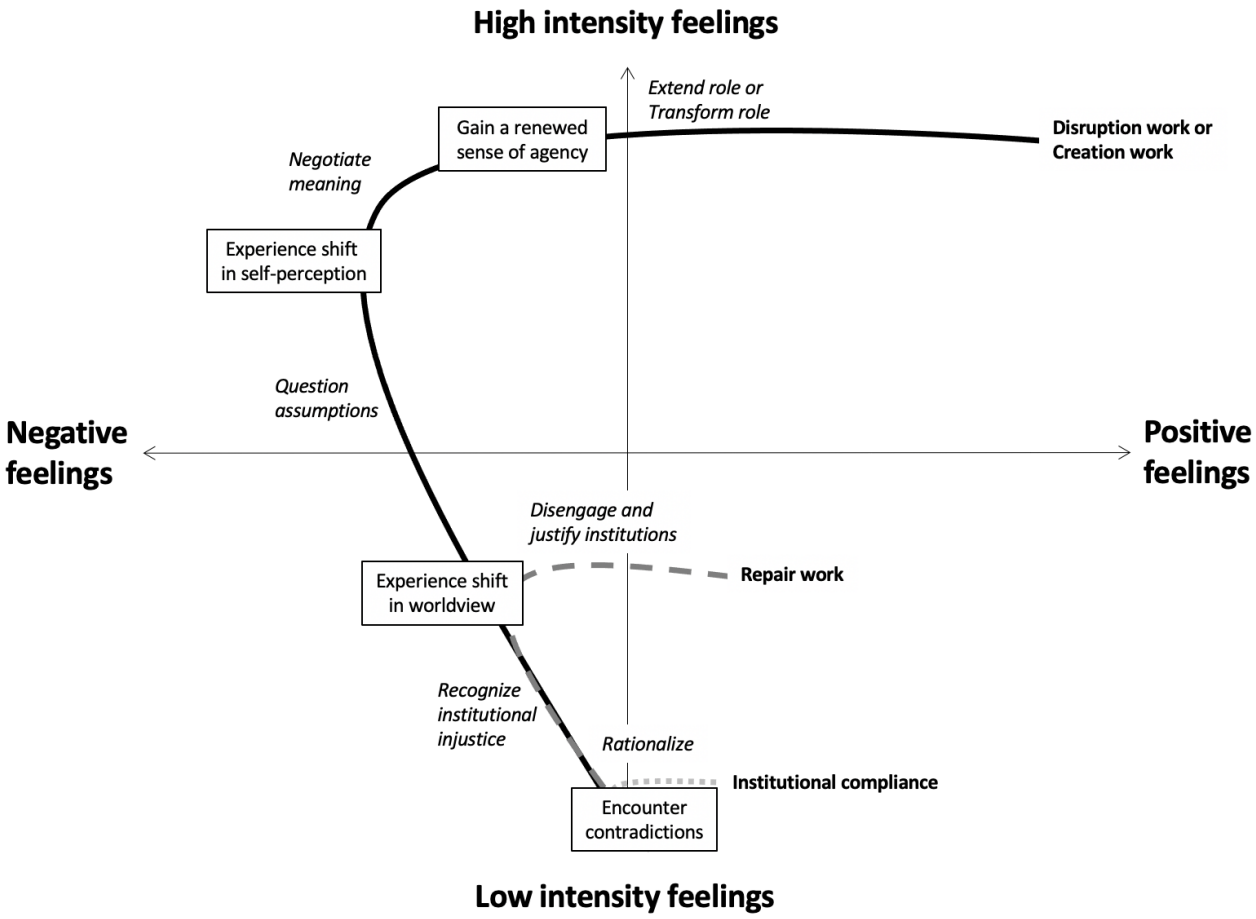

Figure 16. The feelings underpinning the four volitional pathways

In contrast, the people who went on to experience a shift in self-perception described having to deal with an emotional surge and intense emotional distress, feeling "overwhelmed," "depressed," "shocked," or "lost" (the black line in the figure). This emotional surge appeared to peak as they negotiated meanings and grappled to accept the personal implications of their insight. Gaining a sense of agency progressively shifted the valence of their emotional load.

Participants who engaged in transformation work described feeling positive about their efforts. While there were some slight differences between individuals engaged in disruption work and those engaged in creation work, with those engaged in disruption work reporting that their work was sometimes "emotionally stressful," both groups expressed a sense of deep satisfaction, resonance and fulfilment. Despite the difficulty of working "counter current", they

commented about feeling “privileged,” “driven” and “aligned,” having further gained “a sense of meaning and purpose.” A lawyer (L40) summarizes her emotional state saying: “I’m questioned and misunderstood. Yet, I’m proud, I feel privileged and happy to be able to do what I do. I feel I am realizing something deep inside.” Similarly, a business owner (B24) explained “Oh, it brings me incredible joy and hope and, yeah, satisfaction,” while another respondent (B47) described feeling “in flow” with what mattered, further stating, “it's highly rewarding because it makes my soul happy.”

How these feelings evolved and influenced outcomes highlights the counterintuitive and tumultuous nature of the process leading to transformative change agency. My findings show that the people who fully engaged with the negative feelings brought about by the volitional process ended up involved in transformative change. Moreover, involvement in transformative change seemed to ultimately generate higher intensity positive feelings.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

I set out to explore the process of institutional volition that leads privileged insiders to become engaged in institutional change efforts to address societal issues. Privileged insiders are individuals who benefit from existing institutional arrangements, often by gaining preferred access to various forms of capital (cultural, social, material, symbolic etc.) from their participation in institutions. Contrary to institutionally marginalized individuals (Creed, et al., 2010; Martí & Mair, 2009) or peripheral actors (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007; King & Soule, 2007), who may have incentives to become engaged in work that challenges the institutional status quo, it is less clear what motivates privileged insiders to rise up and challenge institutional arrangements that benefit them (Garud, et al., 2007). Research on dominant actors has assumed that they would only engage in institutional change work if it allowed them to protect or reinforce their own interests (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). We lack explanations for why and how privileged insiders may also come to challenge institutions for broader societal benefit.

Previous research exploring what leads people to engage in transformative institutional change has pointed to the experience of a reflective shift (Seo & Creed, 2002), identity work (Creed, et al., 2010), and emotional dynamics (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Maitlis, et al., 2013; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Yet, we still know little about why and how privileged insiders develop the "reflective purposefulness" (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009) necessary to become change agents challenging institutions.

To understand this process, I first built on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency and on research investigating the cognitive factors affecting

reflexivity and action (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Haidt, 2001) to explore the concept of *institutional volition*. I defined this concept as the reflective process that leads individuals to engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform dominant institutional arrangements. I drew on a symbolic interactionist perspective on social conduct (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934) to conceptualize this process as self-directed, iterative and self-shaping over time. Building on a structural perspective on frames (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Goffman, 1974), I further identified that a major shift in people's understanding of reality was likely necessary for them to engage in new trajectories of action. Yet, despite what prior work reveals about institutional volition and how it may lead people to engage in institutional change efforts, the theorizing of this process remains tentative and incomplete. It is further uncertain how this process might apply to privileged insiders who have little to benefit from challenging the status quo.

To gain a better understanding of how privileged insiders experienced institutional volition and become actively engaged in promoting institutional change, I set out to explore the lived experiences and journeys of a sample of privileged insiders as they engaged with change in different settings. Rather than finding one common volitional process, my empirical investigation led me to identify four different volitional pathways leading privileged insiders to different forms of engagement with institutions. The first volitional pathway led some privileged insiders to default to *institutional compliance* rather than engage in institutional change: these privileged insiders complied with the latest legal requirements or industry standards and did not engage in purposeful efforts to shape or transform institutions. The second volitional pathway led other privileged insiders to engage in *repair work*: their efforts aimed at promoting changes within the boundaries of existing institutions. The third and the fourth volitional pathways led privileged insiders to engage in efforts to transform institutionalized beliefs and practices: either extending their existing role to engage in *disruption work*, or transforming their role to engage in *creating work*.

My study makes several contributions to our understanding of why and how privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work. First, I propose a process model showing the conditions under which privileged insiders engage in purposeful work to either repair, disrupt or create institutions. Second, I point to a distinct role for feelings, revealing that individuals' active engagement with their feelings is a critical determinant in whether and how they engage in work to repair institutions or in work to transform institutions. Third, I demonstrate that privileged insiders commit to transformative agency when they acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of injustices. Fourth and finally, I show that role reframing is what enables privileged insiders to actively engage in institutional transformation work, either disrupting or creating institutions.

5.2 Variances in the institutional volition of privileged insiders

In this section, I present a process model that illustrates the conditions under which privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work. While the process leading institutionally marginalized individuals (Creed, et al., 2010; Martí & Mair, 2009) or dominant actors (Hardy & Maguire, 2017) to engage in institutional change has been well researched, both the motivation for privileged insiders to do so and how this process unfolds remain unclear. My study shows how variances in the institutional volition of privileged insiders determine whether these actors participate in institutional maintenance by engaging in repair work, or if they promote institutional transformation by engaging in institutional disruption or creation work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Figure 17 illustrates the volitional pathways of privilege insiders and their different outcomes: institutional compliance, institutional repair work, institutional disruption work and institutional creation work. The first volitional pathway leads to *institutional compliance*. Some privileged insiders never question institutions nor engage in purposeful efforts to

influence institutional arrangements, instead responding to institutional contradictions by continued adherence to current institutional prescriptions. Consequently, they never engage in institutional volition. In contrast, Figure 17 helps us to see that the other volitional pathways lead to purposeful efforts to reshape institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). They lead privileged insiders to become engaged in institutional change work. However, differences in the degree to which a privileged insider is willing to engage with the negative feelings that arise from apprehending institutional injustice and question the underlying institutions in which they are embedded leads them to undertake different types of institutional change work . Those that repress these negative feelings engage in *institutional repair work* (a form of institutional maintenance work) whereas those that engage with their negative feelings go on to become involved in *institutional disruption work* or *institutional creation work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), working to transform institutions.

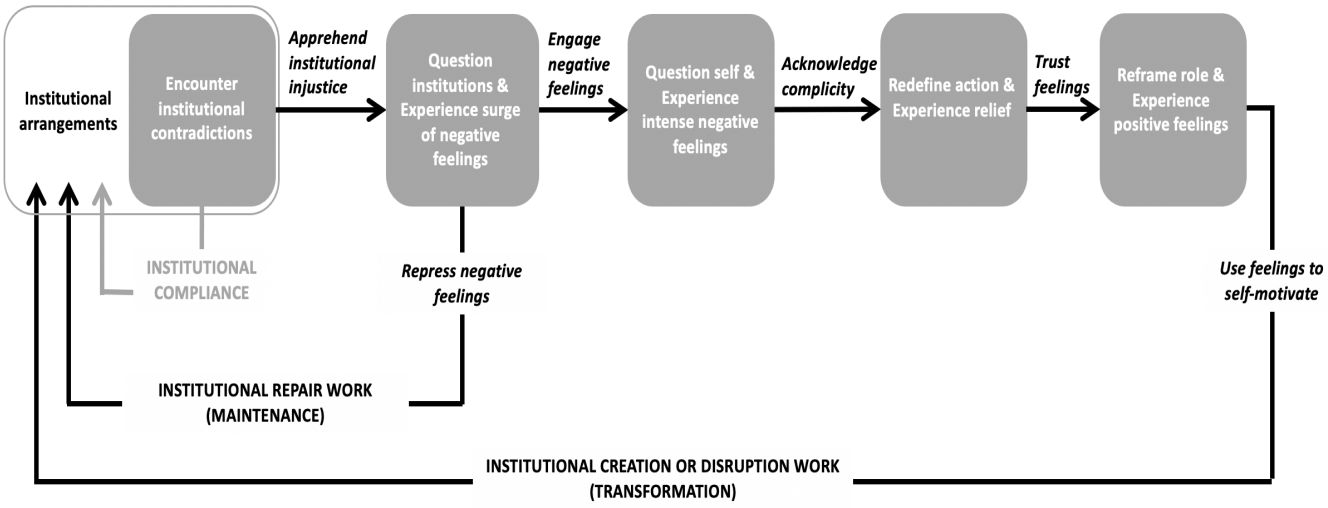

Figure 17: Variances in the institutional volition of privileged insiders

Regardless of the outcome, the institutional volition of privileged insiders begins from a common point of apprehending institutional contradictions both rationally and emotionally as institutional injustices (Voronov & Yorks, 2015). This leads these actors to question

institutions and experience a surge in negative feelings. Justice theory research has shown how perception of injustices may trigger both a rational and an emotional response in people (Hegtvedt & Parris, 2014), even when they are not victims but observers of injustices suffered by others (Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). In my study, privileged insiders who apprehended institutional injustices described experiencing unsettling feelings as they critically analyzed institutional arrangements and scrutinized what they previously thought to be true or legitimate about their context. How they respond to these feelings is crucial in determining their institutional response.

An unwillingness to challenge existing institutions can be explained by the repression of negative feelings - when individuals try to control or ignore what they are feeling (Hochschild, 1979; Voronov & Weber, 2016). Repressing one's feelings is sometimes described as a defense mechanism enabling individuals to shield themselves from the anxiety generated by their feelings (Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Haidt, 2001; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Those participants in my study who repressed their feeling tended to justify institutional arrangements and the changes they initiated were aimed at maintaining existing arrangements, rather than departing from them. Thus, privileged insiders who repress the negative feelings provoked by the questioning of institutional arrangements engage in *institutional repair work*, promoting changes that have tendency to align with, rather than challenge, current institutional arrangements.

In contrast, the pathways leading privileged insiders to disrupt or create institutions rely on these actors engaging with their negative feelings, trying to make sense of them and embarking on an introspective journey. As depicted in Figure 17, engaging with their negative feelings leads privileged insiders to self-question. Self-questioning involves a deep introspective reflection about who they are and their responsibility in the world. Participants in my study described becoming the "object" of their own analysis and experiencing an

intensification of their negative feelings. Self-questioning lasts until privileged insiders come to acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of institutional injustices.

While deeply unsettling, acknowledging one's own complicity enables privileged insiders to redefine their actions. They realize that engaging in action, however small, is the only way to feel less complicit. For participants in my study, redefining action involved realizing that small changes matter, accepting that the "doing" was more important than the outcome, and understanding that their "privilege" could be used to promote change. When privileged insiders redefine action, they experience relief from negative feelings.

As privileged insiders redefine action, they also start to trust their feelings, listening to them and integrating them into their reflections. Trusting their feelings enables privileged insiders to reframe their role: leveraging the skills, resources and legitimacy associated with their roles to extend or transform them in order to engage in institutional transformation. Insiders who *extended* their role broadened it to include practices or beliefs that challenge what was considered normal and legitimate in their context. They used different language, introduced new concepts, questioned the moral foundations of certain beliefs and practices, and extended their interactions to engage with people outside the traditional boundaries of their institutional context. On the other hand, insiders who *transformed* their role reformulated the core assumptions and templates of actions of what it means to be a lawyer, a farmer or an investor. They did so by becoming "prototypes" of what this practically entailed, shifting the normative foundations that informed their actions and creating new interaction patterns.

Privileged insiders who reframe their roles experience positive feelings that underpin and sustain their engagement in *institutional disruption* or *creation work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In my study, participants described how these feelings bolstered their motivation in the face of the adversity and misunderstandings they encountered. Positive feelings play a motivational role in work aimed at transforming institutions.

Thus, the model outlined in Figure 17 helps us to understand the conditions under which privileged insiders may become engaged in different types of institutional change work. In the subsequent sections, I outline three key contributions that stem from this model: the role of feelings in institutional change work; acknowledging complicity as a catalyst to transformative agency; and role reframing as an enabler for institutional disruption and creation work.

5.3 The role of feelings in institutional change work

My study helps us to see that feelings, not just emotions, matter when it comes to understanding why and how individuals engage in institutional change work. Prior research investigating the antecedents of institutional change work has drawn on the literature on emotion work (Hochschild, 1979; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019; Voronov & Weber, 2016), but in doing so, it has tended to conflate the role of emotions and feelings. In contrast, my study points to a distinct role for feelings, revealing that individuals' active engagement with their feelings is a critical determinant in whether and how they engage in institutional change.

The concept of emotion work has been used to explain how actors manage their emotions to conform to social norms or use emotions to achieve certain goals (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Creed, Hudson, et al., 2014; Hochschild, 1979; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019; Voronov & Weber, 2016). It is thought that people engage in emotion work to display the "right" emotions consistent with the prescriptions of an institutional or organizational setting (Hochschild, 1979; Voronov & Weber, 2016), to manage difficult interpersonal situations (Hunter, 2005), to improve their personal or organizational performance (Van Kleef, Homan, Beersma, & van Knippenberg, 2010), or to trigger certain reactions in others (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Creed, Hudson, et al., 2014). Emotion work helps us to understand how individuals regulate their own emotions in order to be perceived as legitimate and competent within their

institutional context, and how individuals may use emotions strategically to influence the behaviors of others.

Yet so far, this research provides limited insights into how emotions influence the way individuals engage in institutional change work (Creed, et al., 2020; Lok, et al., 2017). Prior work has suggested that individuals who recognize institutional contradictions emotionally are likely to initiate institutional change (Barberá-Tomás, et al., 2019; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). Individuals who become emotionally disinvested from existing institutional arrangements may be more likely to engage in institutional creation and disruption, suggesting that a diminishment of emotional attachment may be necessary (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Still, how the process of emotional disinvestment may lead individuals to actively engage in institutional change work remains unclear (Lok, et al., 2017). Research has tended to view emotions as epiphenomena, subordinated to other institutional processes (Creed, et al., 2020). Moreover, scholars have tended to assume that individuals react to emotions in a similar way (Lok, et al., 2017). Thus, current explanations do not account for differences in the way emotions may affect individuals and influence their engagement in institutional change.

To better understand the antecedents of institutional change work it is important to distinguish between emotions and feelings (Barrett, et al., 2001; de Waal, 2019; Panksepp, 2005). While emotions and feelings are deeply interconnected, they express different phenomena (Barrett, et al., 2001; de Waal, 2019; Panksepp, 2005). *Emotions* are psychophysiological states triggered in response to stimuli. They are observable and measurable, reflected in bodily changes such as changes in people's temperature, facial expressions or the rhythm of their heart beat (de Waal, 2019). Emotions can also be unconscious, in which case sensory information is excluded from individuals' awareness (Lazarus, 1991).

In contrast, *feelings* are private, subjective and conscious (Lazarus, 1991). First, unlike emotions, feelings are private inner states that are not visible on the outside. Feelings are only accessible by the person experiencing them (de Waal, 2019). Second, feelings are subjective. The feelings experienced in relation to a particular emotion (such as fear, disgust or anger) vary from person to person, depending on how people engage with their emotions, the meaning they attribute to their subjective experience, and the cultural references influencing their assessment (de Waal, 2019). As de Waal explains, "What one person experiences as pain, another may feel as pleasure" (2019, p. 257). Third, feelings are conscious. They result from a conscious process of interpretation and evaluation of emotions. Emotions are expressed as feelings when individuals assign specific meanings to emotions (de Waal, 2019). This conscious process of interpretation shapes the intensity and hedonic valence (positive or negative) of feelings (Damasio & Dolan, 1999).

Recent research has shown that feelings act as the interpretive link between emotions and action (Barrett, et al., 2001; de Waal, 2019; Panksepp, 2005). Feelings help people filter and make sense of experiences, while motivating certain behaviors (Frijda, 2004). As such, scholars have shown that *negative feelings* carry important informational value, often signaling the need to act or respond and helping individuals to problem solve and change behavior (de Waal, 2019). On the other hand, *positive feelings* tend to motivate individuals to broaden their thinking (Barrett, et al., 2001; Fredrickson, 2001) and engage in personal transformation (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Research has also shown that repressing feelings may have negative consequences on individuals, leading to unresolved problems and potential psychological issues (Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, & Isic, 1999).

Indeed, in this study, it is clear that privileged insiders' engagement with their feelings seemed to shape their engagement in institutional change. This is illustrated in Figure 18, in which I have mapped the volition process outlined in Figure 17 with respect to the intensity

(vertical axis) and valence (horizontal axis) of the feelings experienced by those participants in my study who engaged in institutional change work. This figure demonstrates how feelings seem to influence the character of privileged insiders' institutional change work, while also identifying how feelings underpin each pivotal moment in the volition process.

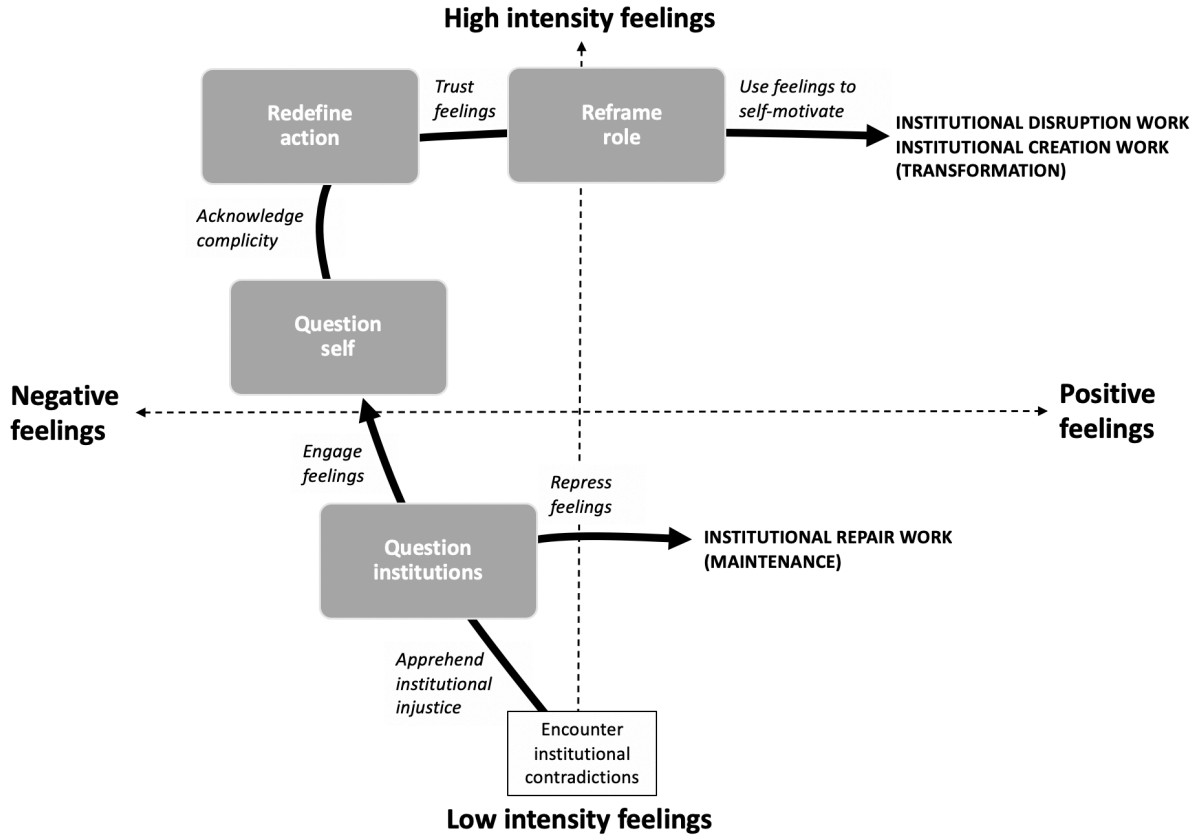

Figure 18: The role of feelings in institutional change work

At the start of the volition process, privileged insiders who apprehended institutional injustice described experiencing a surge in negative feelings that led them to question institutions. I then observed two different responses to this surge in negative feelings. While some privileged insiders seemed to *repress* their feelings, others appeared to *engage* their feelings. Those who *repressed* their negative feelings seemed to experience short-term relief (positive feelings). However, attempting to shield themselves from negative feelings in this

way also appeared to limit their questioning of institutional arrangements, leading most of them to focus on institutional maintenance and repair work. Thus, the repression of negative feelings may offer an explanation as to why individuals become involved in repair work, focusing their efforts on promoting incremental changes to maintain institutional arrangements rather than engaging in more transformative efforts to effect change.

In contrast, the privileged insiders who reflectively *engaged* with these initial negative feelings, trying to make sense of them, tended to embark on a journey leading them to engage in institutional transformation work, either creating or disrupting institutions. Instead of repressing these negative feelings, these individuals consciously and purposefully faced them, often leading to a new, even more intensive surge in negative feelings and a period of self-questioning. Yet, these intense negative feelings seemed to guide and support these privileged insiders' reflection about themselves and their responsibility. As such, individuals' disposition to engage with intense negative feelings appears to be a critical factor explaining why some individuals are able to challenge their self-perception and acknowledge their own complicity, while others are not.

Acknowledging their complicity marked a turning point in the volitional process of privileged insiders, as it compelled them to redefine action going forward and led them to start trusting their feelings, consciously integrating them into their rational reasoning process. Trusting their feelings appeared to allow privileged insiders to find ways of reframing their role. This indicates that allowing one's feelings to permeate the rational reasoning process (rather than regulating or repressing them) may improve our ability to problem solve and adapt to difficult situations. Finally, role reframing appeared to give rise to positive feelings, which these actors could leverage to motivate and sustain themselves as they engaged in institutional creation or disruption work. This finding lends support to the work of positive organizational

scholars (Barker Caza & Caza, 2008; Nilsson, 2015) by pointing to the motivational role that positive feelings play in fostering institutional creation or disruption work.

Thus, my study demonstrates that individuals' active engagement with their feelings is a critical determinant in whether and how they engage in institutional change. This study also has implications for research on emotion work, showing that distinguishing between emotions and feelings may help better account for differences in individuals' responses to emotional dynamics.

5.4 Acknowledging complicity as a catalyst to transformative agency

My study also helps us to understand what triggers privileged insiders to commit to transformative agency. Previous research has suggested that individuals may engage in transformative action when institutional arrangements do not meet their needs or interests, leading them to experience a reflective shift (Creed, et al., 2010; Seo & Creed, 2002; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). Yet, current explanations do not fully explain what triggers privileged insiders to commit to transformative agency when their personal interests are aligned with institutional arrangements (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). When considering those privileged insiders who engage in transformative work, my study reveals that these actors commit to transformative agency when they acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of injustices.

Prior research investigating why individuals commit to transformative action has pointed to the experience of a reflective shift (Creed, et al., 2010; Seo & Creed, 2002; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). A reflective shift involves a reshaping of individuals' consciousness (Seo & Creed, 2002), leading them to critique existing social patterns and search for alternatives (Seo & Creed, 2002). Research focusing on marginalized insiders suggests that these actors commit to take transformative action when they accept their identity, recognizing that they are not the problem and that instead it is "those perpetuating [unjust] institutional claims" who are in the

wrong (Creed, et al., 2010, p. 1353). Through this process of identity reconciliation, marginalized insiders are able to question institutional prescriptions and commit to challenging the status quo (Creed, et al., 2010). However, this offers an unlikely explanation of what drives privileged insiders to commit to transformative action.

Research focusing on dominant actors has tended to imply that privileged insiders would only engage in institutional change work if it allowed them to protect or reinforce their power or interests (Beckert, 1999; DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy & Maguire, 2017). While this explains the "opportunity for action" (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009), it leaves open the question of what underpins the individual-level commitment to transformative change that is not aligned with the interests and power of privileged actors.

This study points to acknowledging complicity as a catalyst to transformative change for privileged insiders. Indeed, privileged insiders who came to acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of institutional injustices became committed to transformative agency. These participants described the experience of this acknowledgement as deeply unsettling, leading them to feel compelled to act. Committing to transformative agency became the only way for them to feel less complicit in institutional injustices.

The process of acknowledging complicity by privileged insiders contrasts sharply with the process of identity reconciliation enabling marginalized insiders to commit to transformative action. Whereas marginalized insiders commit to taking action when they recognize that they are not the problem (Creed, et al., 2010), privileged insiders commit to action when they situate the problem not with others but with themselves.

The acknowledgment of complicity offers an explanation as to why privileged insiders commit to institutional change that is not aimed at protecting their interests or power (Beckert, 1999; DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy & Maguire, 2017), but instead seeks to challenge institutions for broader societal benefit. This study further challenges our understanding of who may act as

a change agent engaged in transformative change. Whereas previous research has identified marginalized insiders or peripheral actors (Creed, et al., 2010; Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Seo & Creed, 2002) as more likely to experience a reflective shift leading them to challenge the institutional status quo, my study suggests that privileged insiders may also experience such a shift in consciousness when they become aware of their own responsibility in the perpetuation of institutional injustices.

5.5 Role reframing as an enabler of disruption and creation work

My study identifies role reframing as the mechanism enabling privileged insiders to engage in institutional disruption or creation work. Prior research has used the concept of role as a resource (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994) to show how marginalized insiders engage in transformative action by reclaiming roles that were denied to them (Creed, et al., 2010). Yet, this process is unlikely to apply to privileged insiders who already hold desired roles. My study shows that privileged insiders need to reframe their role in order to engage in work aimed at transforming institutions.

The notion of role as resource (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994) helps explain how individuals leverage their roles to enable change agency (Callero, 1994). Roles are conceived as particular "cultural objects" that are used to construct the self and as tools to accomplish goals within a particular context (Callero, 1994). However, while roles can serve as a resource, unless actors are able to adjust them, their actions are likely to remain bound by the existing meanings and prescriptions associated with those roles (Callero, 1994).

What then do we know about how roles, as cultural objects, change? The concept of "frames" (Goffman, 1974) helps us to consider how people's "perspectives" on roles as cultural objects might evolve over time. How we relate to a role is a direct result of how we frame it. Frames act to imbue roles with meaning and guide how people relate to an activity (Goffman,

1974). Yet, frames can evolve through a process of *reframing* (Diehl & McFarland, 2010). Reframing allows the meanings of frames to be transformed into something patterned on the initial frame but experienced in a different way (Diehl & McFarland, 2010). Through this process, it is possible to see how an original role frame may evolve through a process of reframing. When individuals reframe their role, they are not creating an entirely new role frame, but rather piecing together a frame using existing institutional arrangements as building blocks. Nevertheless, through role reframing, actors can shift or revise the meanings associated with a role.

In my study, in order to engage in institutional disruption or creation work, privileged insiders needed to reframe their roles. Some appeared to reframe their roles by *extending* them: broadening their roles to include beliefs, practices and interactions that extended outside traditional prescriptions. This allowed privileged insiders to engage in actions that disrupted the institutional status quo. Others appeared to reframe their roles by *transforming* them: reformulating what it meant to be a lawyer, a farmer or an investor, thereby shifting core assumptions associated with their roles and developing new interaction patterns. This enabled them to participate in creating new institutional beliefs and practices.

Role reframing enables privileged insiders to transpose their roles into something "patterned" on original ones, but which allows them to develop alternative templates for action to engage in institutional creation and disruption work. The process of role reframing relied on a shift in self-narratives whereby participants came to view their privilege as a tool for change. This reframing also involved efforts to help to amplify the voices of those who were not so privileged and/or to extend collaborations across disciplines (for instance between law and design). Through these processes, privileged insiders altered the meaning of their roles in ways that allowed them to transcend existing institutions norms.

My study demonstrates that role reframing is a key mechanism enabling privileged insiders to engage in institutional transformation work. While research has shown that marginalized insiders challenge the status quo when they reclaim roles that were denied to them (Creed, et al., 2010; Srinivas, 2013), this study reveals that privileged insiders do so by reframing their existing roles. The process of role reframing expands our understanding of role as resource (Callero, 1994), showing how people's "perspectives" on roles as cultural objects might evolve beyond existing norms and prescriptions. Through the process of role reframing, privileged insiders are able to shift the meanings and behavioural prescriptions associated with a role, using existing institutional arrangements as building blocks to piece together alternative templates for action.

5.6 Practical implications

A quote often attributed to the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti reminds us that "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society." With so many crises building up before our eyes, it might be time to question what we call "normal" and our relationship to it. Normal is what has brought us catastrophic climate change, systemic racial and social injustice, widespread destruction of biodiversity, and even COVID-19. If we agree with the scientific consensus that these crises require an urgent departure from the status quo (WEF, 2020), "normal" is not an option.

The role of privileged individuals: The challenge is to change a system of production and consumption that reinforces the privileges of a few at the expense of a majority of others and the planet. This does not mean bringing society to a standstill. It means carefully assessing each component of the system and putting a question mark over each of our activities to see whether they contribute to the problem or to the solution. As argued by Latour, "More than

revolution, this is dissolution, pixel by pixel" (2020, p. 3). We need to choose our path carefully.

In the perpetuation of crises, as in the fight for change, we are not all equal. Some of us are part of the privileged few that have benefited more than others from current institutional arrangements. We have reaped advantages associated with our education, our socio-economic background, our citizenship, our gender or our race. If you are earning more than 38,000 USD a year, you are part of the richest 10% of the global population (Kartha, Kemp-Benedict, Ghosh, Nazareth, & Gore, 2020). Whether you realize it or not, you are a beneficiary of the system. You are a privileged insider.

As beneficiaries of the system, privileged insiders carry the biggest responsibility for the converging crises. We travel the most, buy the most, and carry unconscious biases that are reinforcing current trends. We also have leisure time to reflect, skills to leverage, and networks to facilitate action. Yet, we are often the least inclined to engage in change. Unlike people who have been disenfranchised or marginalized by the current system, we benefit from current arrangements, whether we want to admit it or not. Despite holding the greatest transformative potential, we struggle to imagine alternative futures.

Pathways to change: It took time for me to acknowledge my privilege and realize I was part of the problem. Leaving Europe to live in South Africa, my journey started with a deep feeling of discomfort. Over time, I realized that I was living in a bubble. Despite my good intentions, I was complicit in the perpetuation of current trends – whether social or environmental.

I embarked on a research project to explore why and how other privileged insiders had come to challenge institutions for broader societal benefit. Investigating privileged insiders in a range of industries, I learned that those who rise up to engage in change begin with recognizing the presence of institutional injustices around them and experiencing deep feelings

of discomfort. Depending on how they engage with these feelings and accept their own complicity in perpetuating institutional injustices, privileged insiders may become involved in actions that start to challenge the status quo. Ultimately, this may lead them to reframe their role, assigning new meaning and practices to their role, in order to facilitate transformative change in their context. Here are some practical takeaways from that research:

If you are a privileged insider feeling uncomfortable about the current system and where society is heading, what you decide to do with this feeling of discomfort is critical. Some may ignore or repress this feeling, shielding themselves from having to engage in further questioning. While they may push for incremental changes within the current system, they won't be the ones to fundamentally challenge the status quo.

On the other hand, you may be willing to try to make sense of your feeling of discomfort. This is likely to be a difficult introspective journey where you will question yourself, your assumptions and your role in the unfolding crises. At some point, you will face a critical moment when you will realize that you are complicit in the perpetuation of injustices. Your only way out of this personal crisis will be to start to engage in actions that challenge the status quo. But take heart, even small actions matter. The key will be to get started. Uncovering how you can leverage your privilege will help you to transform your role and use it as tool to facilitate transformative change. Once you engage in action, you are likely to experience a renewed sense of purpose and meaning that can help bolster you from the resistance you may face from others along the way.

If you are an organizational change agent and want to engage privileged senior executives, you might need to create the conditions to initiate the transformative process. Many senior executives are sheltered in their daily existence from the social and environmental consequences of our current institutional arrangements. Many have no real exposure to the existence of others who might not be so fortunate. You will need to work to create an

opportunity to break their bubble and expose them to injustices. Your work is to create the penny-drop moment that can trigger the start of a reflective process that could ultimately lead privileged senior executives to review the meaning of their roles.

If you are a member of a community that has been systematically excluded by privileged insiders, you may feel that it is not your job to help privileged insiders see a different reality. You may feel this is an additional burden that you don't have the time or energy to carry. Yet, there may be an opportunity to create bridges and enable collaborative effort towards transformation. For privileged insiders to start engaging in the change process, the challenge is for them to recognize institutional injustices both rationally and emotionally. Your work could be to engage in uncomfortable discussions and maintain a constructive level of tension. Whereas, too much tension might be counterproductive as privilege insiders risk activating defense mechanisms and shielding themselves from engagement, too little tension might fail to trigger the reflective process that could lead them to acknowledge their complicity. This engagement process is going to be very raw and difficult on both sides, it will be punctuated by pushbacks and iterations. During this process, it will be important to separate the visible emotions from the subjective feelings that influence the process. It might even be valuable to show support toward privileged insiders who engage in small actions, while keeping a steady focus on deeper transformation objectives.

5.7 Limitations

As with any research, my study has limitations. First, I am a privileged insider who studied other privileged insiders. This might have both helped and hindered the research. It helped me gain access and perhaps establish a level of trust that could not have been achieved otherwise. Yet, it means that I reflected on my participants' experience from the perspective of a privileged insider, with the biases that this implies and a level of empathy and understanding

that others might not have had. This could have led me at times to "jump to conclusion" about what my participants felt, based on my own experience or assumptions. My interpretation of the phenomenon must therefore be understood as conditional and situated.

Second, I mostly gathered retrospective data from my participants. As individuals tend to remember better their more intense experiences, my participants' recollections may have focused on the intense feelings or pivotal moments. This might have led me to over-privilege extreme aspects of their journey, compared to the more mundane and tentative aspects. I therefore acknowledge that my participants' recollections may not provide an exact depiction of their volitional journeys. However, the retrospective data gathered represents my participants' efforts to make sense of their experience within the confines of the interview.

Third, and linked to the previous point, my study might have benefited from having a stronger ethnographic component, with more real-time observations of participants in their context. While I engaged in some observations and had planned to do more, I was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of my observations had to be conducted over Zoom, which was not ideal. It would have been valuable to be more exposed to the interactions taking place between some of my participants (key respondents) and the community of people around them.

5.8 Future research

My study points to several directions for future research, including how institutional volition might apply to other categories of actors or types of change, to what extent institutional volition might enable or support the emergence of social movements, what could be the power implications of institutional volition and work aimed at transformation, how insights from institutional volition can help foster more collaboration across categories of actors to effect change, and how self-narrative might support institutional volition and transformative agency.

First, whereas I focused on privileged insiders engaging issues such as climate change, decolonization or regenerative agriculture, further studies could investigate how the process of institutional volition applies to other categories of actors or other types of change. For instance, it would be interesting to explore how people who might feel disenfranchised by the system become engaged in reactionary movements, pushing against efforts to address climate change, gender rights or systemic racism. While there has been increasing research on reactionary movements, these have tended to focus on the constraints and opportunities that exist at the political-institutional context level or on ideological framing of movements, rather than the micro-level dynamics involved in individual engagement processes (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). It would be interesting to explore how individuals' institutional volition process may differ in reactionary engagement compared to transformative engagement, and what key mechanisms act as driving forces in this process. This may help to clarify further how value-based commitments transform into active (political) engagement and how rigid these might be.

Second, it might be interesting to investigate the link between institutional volition and participation in social movements. While it was beyond the scope of my research, conversations with my informants point to a link between institutional volition, transformation work and the emergence of social movements. It would be valuable to explore the extent to which social movements and collective agency may emerge from an endogenous process initiated by privileged insiders, whether these have more chances of success than movements initiated by challengers from outside institutions (Levy & Scully, 2007), or how the "inside" and "outside" perspectives may merge to generate new trends in activism (Skoglund & Böhm, 2020).

Third, there would be value in exploring the power implications of institutional volition and work aimed at transforming institutions. For instance, it would be valuable to understand the extent to which privileged insiders who become involved in disruption or creation work

may be willing to cede power and reduce their scope of influence within existing institutional arrangements. This speaks directly to Hirsch and Lounsbury's (2015) point that we need to better understand how individuals use their volition to confront power issues that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. In particular, it represents an opportunity to understand how dominant actors come to be effective allies of marginalized actors, challenging the status quo not for "hegemonic accommodation" (Levy & Scully, 2007) but rather for a genuine rebalance of power relations.

Fourth, further studies could explore institutional volition in the context of allyship. The literature investigating allyship has already highlighted the role of marginalized actors working to get privileged actors to see and embrace their role in systemic inequality (DeJordy, et al., 2020; Radke, Kutlaca, Siem, Wright, & Becker, 2020; Russell & Bohan, 2016). Insights from institutional volition can help understand how to move privileged insiders beyond "symbolic support" (Sumerau, Forbes, Grollman, & Mathers, 2020) and develop a sense of "Calling" for their role as change agents and allies to marginalized groups. This could help foster more collaboration across categories to effect more systemic change.

Fifth and finally, further studies may benefit from investigating narrative structures and conventions to unpack the relationship between institutional volition, self-identity construction and agency. Recent research has highlighted the performative effects of self-narrative on agency (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2014; Lok, Creed, & DeJordy, 2019). Building on work from Lok, et al. (2019), narrative analysis could help us understand the role of language and narration in individuals' volitional process. Complementing what we know about the role of feelings, this could provide additional insights into how people evaluate their participation in institutional processes, reshape their commitments, and ultimately, deliberate on the core values that animate their participation in institutions.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

I set out to explore the volitional process leading privileged insiders to become engaged in institutional change for the broader benefit of society. In the perpetuation of crises, as in the fight for change, all actors are not all equal. Privileged insiders benefit more than others from current institutional arrangements, and are often the least inclined to engage in change. Unlike people who have been disenfranchised or marginalized by the current system, their interests are aligned with existing arrangements and they struggle to imagine alternative futures.

My research shows that, depending on how they engage with their feelings, privileged insiders may become involved in different types and degrees of institutional change. While privileged insiders may be tempted to repress negative feelings and get on with their lives, allowing their feelings to permeate their rational reasoning process may help them question what they call "normal" and find the courage to engage on a transformative path. I also demonstrate that privileged insiders need to acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of injustices in order to engage in action that challenges the status quo. This is a critical milestone. Challenging the status quo starts by understanding that small changes matter and that one's privilege can be used to facilitate change. Ultimately, engaging in work to transform institutions means assigning new meanings to one's role to either disrupt existing arrangements or create new institutions.

With the worsening of societal problems such as climate change and social inequalities, many of us who are complicit in maintaining the system are feeling uneasy. I hope my study will inspire those who feel this way to start questioning their feelings and engage on a pathway to change. While the idea of transformative change might be unsettling to some, it is time that we critically reflect on what "better" institutional arrangements mean, and whether adjustments to the current system are going to be enough to address the pressing issues of our time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The evolving focus of my interview guides

Focus in 2017

- How did they come to be interested in certain societal issues and how did that influence their relationship to their field?
- What motivated / created the foundations for them to take on an 'engaged' role.
- Could they 'turn the page' on and move on from engaged attitude? Why did they feel this way?
- Whether they saw themselves as a change agent within their context? What did it mean for them to be a change agent?
- Was having an 'engaged attitude' towards certain societal issues always part of 'who they are', or was it the result of a process that has been building up over time?
- How would they describe the role of emotions and intuition in their journey of change?
- How have their personal values influenced their journey and their relationship to the field?
- Today, what is their sense of alignment between personal and their professional identities?
- How do they engaged in action despite resistance, what does it mean for their role or professional identity?
- Do they feel 'at odds' with colleagues/peers/ industry? If yes, what does it mean practically?
- How did they see their future within their field?

Amended focus in 2018

- How did they come to ‘see’ or ‘understand’ certain things differently? Do they remember experiencing pivotal moment that changed their relation to their field or shifted their understanding?
- Did they experience change as a sense of rupture – a radical change, an epiphany - or rather as a series of minor tipping points. Could they give me examples?
- Whether/ how they felt a sense of duty/ responsibility in promoting change?
- Whether/ how engaging with/promoting change relieved them of possible tensions.
- How would they describe the place of creativity in the change/engagement process?
- How would they describe the place of deliberation and reflection in their journey, have deliberation and reflection always taken such a role in their lives?
- Did they experience failure or vulnerability in their process of engagement/ if yes, what did this mean for them.
- What was the aim of their change efforts and why did it matter to them?

Amended focus in 2019

- Reflecting on the most defining experiences of their life, how did they come to challenge some of the core assumptions/ beliefs about their field or context and what did it mean for them?
- Did changes in their perspective influence how they see/saw themselves?
- Did they experience a particular difficult moment/phase in their journey of change?
- How would they describe the role of emotions / intuition as opposed to the rational analysis of facts in their personal journey?

- How would they describe the place of values and moral judgement in shaping their journey?
- How did the new awareness affected them – personally, in their institutional roles, and in terms of belonging to a group?
- What did it mean practically for them to be a change agent and could they stop being one?
- Whether/ how they found meaning by engaging in change processes / what sustained their engagement?
- Whether certain relationships / encounters shaped their change journeys/ engagement processes?
- How did their engagement in change processes affect their sense of belonging and relationship to their field?
- Did they feel the need to distance themselves from / or get closer to certain people?

Amended focus in 2020

The focus of new interviews was similar to those conducted in 2019. However, I strove to check for biases and challenge my emerging theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Especially with follow-up interviews, I explored alternative explanations and dug further into certain aspects of my participants' personal stories.

Appendix 2: Extract from Memo written on 3rd July 2018

Radicalization or tempering?

It feels that many change agents go through a process of coming to terms with how much change they can really entice. A sort of 'tempering' of their ambition or a realization of the 'limit of their goodness' (ex, how much change and engagement they are really ready to do).

This tempering seems essential to allow change agents to work 'from within' the system and not transform into outsiders.

This tempering appears 'in flux' and not fixed in time, subject to permanent negotiations and internal struggles. (ex, "maybe I will be less tempered as time goes on). Also affected with the perception of change or lack thereof taking place.

From a temporal perspective, there appears to be 2 processes

1. A process building up to a point of 'seeing' things differently, and not being able to 'Unsee.' This process is essential to trigger the will to engage and sustain being at odds with peers.
2. A process of tempering of change ambitions, essential to remain within a community of peers, stay credible and able to 'muddle through.' But this process creates internal tensions with regards to one's identity and true values. The more a person feels able to engage in activities making a difference, the more they relieve these tensions. The less they are able to engage in meaningful activities, the more tensions build up to a point where people could become outsiders.

To stay 'within', the level of frustration experienced by change agents needs to be manageable. They need to be able to engage in meaningful activities.

B7 is an example of a person who could not manage the frustrations anymore and had to step out.

Importantly, the first process might have 2 components.

1. One subconscious and emergent, but not fully realized. (For example, F17). She senses she is doing the 'right thing', her gut feelings are leading her on a certain path but then she backs away, stops from going too far and instead remains within the same paradigm. These change agents will work within a paradigm aiming to ameliorate it but without the conscious desire to transform it.
2. A conscious component (For example E5, A13, L12, L14) which leads people to say that they can't 'unsee' what they've seen, they feel responsible (burden/salvation of knowledge) and compelled to act. Part of this involves the realization that 'one has been wrong' or 'other perspectives carry valuable insights'. These change agents work within paradigms with the conscious desire to transform it. It does not seem to be linked to someone's past professional experience, or at least not primarily or in combination. Rather, it appears mostly linked to personal level experiences that somehow reduce the distance between an issue/ a world problem and the individual, making the issue very personal (reflecting a facet of someone's identity?)

Difference in intentionality.

Seems to start with the questioning of unconsciously held assumptions

Realization: I'm part of the problem, I carry responsibility, feeling shame, guilt.

Question to myself: Do you need to realize that you are part of the problem before you can start being involve in transformative actions?