

## **Institutional theory and change: the deinstitutionalization of sports science at Club X**

### **Introduction**

Whilst institutional theory has become a popular explanation for individual and organizational action, it has often been critiqued for its tendency to focus on explaining how institutions endure, rather than on how they change (Baum, 2002; Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002; Elsbach, 2002; Goodman et al., 1980; Oliver 1992). One means by which researchers have sought to draw attention to sources of institutional change is in relation to the deinstitutionalization of existing norms and practices; the processes by which institutions weaken and dematerialize (Scott, 2001: 182). The importance of deinstitutionalization has been emphasised (e.g. Oliver, 1992; Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Zilber, 2002) with several such studies (following Scott, 2001: 184) stressing the importance of placing this phenomenon in a broader context of institutional change, as the weakening and disappearance of one set of beliefs and allied practices is likely to be associated with the arrival of new ones. Over the last ten to fifteen years, a new emphasis on understanding the role of actors in these processes has emerged within institutional studies – as witnessed in debates concerning institutional entrepreneurs as agents of institutional change (Maguire et al, 2004); stressing the purposive actions of individuals to alter existing institutions to suit their own ends. More recently, the concept of institutional work has extended our understanding of the role of agents in the creation, maintenance and destabilization of institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), emphasising the centrality of the situated practices of individuals and groups as they cope with and respond to the demands of their working lives.

These developments set the theoretical context for this paper which is concerned with the deinstitutionalization of the sports science capability at an English Premier League (EPL) football club, Club X, which over a seven year period institutionalized sports science as an important means of achieving and sustaining team performance. The overall objective of the research was to understand and identify how an institution, maintained and extended over time and seen to be key to sustaining performance was deinstitutionalized. This led to the following research questions: first, what were the antecedents of deinstitution at Club X and to what extent do they cohere with existing research findings? Second, what forms of institutional work were carried out to disrupt the institution and to what extent do the findings mirror or diverge from existing conceptualizations? Finally, what are the implications of these findings not just in relation to institutional theory, but concerning key areas of organizational activity? The findings contribute to existing theory by illustrating the paradoxical role played by institutional entrepreneurs and the institutional work they engaged in; showing that the antecedents of deinstitutionalization may lie in the ways an institution is created or customized by key agents. Our findings also suggest that in highly competitive institutional fields, whilst institutional entrepreneurs might engage in establishing and maintaining institutions to secure high performance, it is not necessarily in their interests to ensure that the institution operates so effectively once they depart; thus highlighting the centrality of ensuring effective succession in key roles to ensure institutional continuity. Finally, whilst research into forms of institutional work highlight the cognitive aspects of the work carried out by actors (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2009), this case shows the important role played by emotion via the operation of social complexity and the ways by which it played an important role in fostering a nurturing environment and in deinstitutionalization (Voronov and Vince, 2012).

Following a review of relevant literatures, an account is given of the research methods and data analyses adopted by the researchers. This is then followed by a summary of the key findings with a particular focus on the deinstitutional aspects of the research. These are then discussed and the conclusions highlight the implications of the paper for both institutional theory and for organizational practice.

### **Institutional entrepreneurs and deinstitutionalization**

There are a number of explanations as to why deinstitutionalization might occur. One common explanation suggests that new practices simply displace old ones with new approaches being seen as preferable to existing arrangements (Hardy & Maguire, 2008: 202; Leblebici et al., 1991; Wicks, 2001); potentially reflecting a self-interested awareness that there are better alternatives so that the original practice loses its meaning (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001; Davis et al., 1994; Maguire & Hardy, 2009), or through the undermining of core assumptions and beliefs. Another explanation is that practices can simply be abandoned (Oliver, 1992), or that because the micro level of validation of the institution is discontinued, the macro level of the institution falls away (Zucker, 1988). Other explanations concerning deinstitutionalization highlight coercive force (Fligstein, 1990) or emphasise the institutional work of disconnecting sanctions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 235), where state and non-state actors work through state apparatus to disconnect them from some sets of practices, technologies or rules (Jones, 2001; Leblebici, et al, 1991). This kind of coercive work aimed at disrupting institutions involves defining and redefining sets of concepts in ways that reconstitute actors and reconfigure the relationships between them – often effecting large-scale, revolutionary change (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001). Deinstitutionalization also may occur through contestation between alternative institutions (Clemens & Cook, 1999; D'Aunno, Succi, & Alexander, 2000; Seo & Creed, 2002), an argument that resonates with this study.

More recently, developments within institutional theory concerning institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work have emerged which allow for an exploration of the role of key actors and agents within deinstitutionalization. The term 'institutional entrepreneurship' refers to the "activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones" (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004: 657), which implies that institutional entrepreneurs have the ability to disrupt institutions as well as create or adjust them (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hardy & Maguire, 2008: 198; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Perkman and Spicer, 2008). There is a paradoxical dimension to institutional entrepreneurship because whilst research on institutions has tended to emphasize how organizational processes are shaped by institutional forces that reinforce continuity and reward conformity, the literature on entrepreneurship tends to emphasize how organizational processes and institutions themselves are shaped by creative entrepreneurial forces that bring about change. This can be done through the institutional entrepreneur pursuing other interests, some of which help to delegitimize the institution (DiMaggio, 1988). It can also be achieved by the promotion of competing institutions and institutional logics by institutional entrepreneurs, thus leading to abandonment of some institutions and adoption of others (Scott & Meyer, 1983: 150-151; Powell, 1991: 195; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). These individuals can also act as 'institutional carriers' (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Zilber, 2002) and 'insider' institutional entrepreneurs can also act as catalysts for deinstitutionalization by adopting a new practice, followed by other members of the institutional field (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Greve (1995) also showed that whole social networks could be influenced in deinstitutionalization because the contagion of strategy abandonment occurs

through the influence of an organization's social reference groups. Therefore the movement of institutional entrepreneurs from one organization to another is one way that intra-organizational deinstitutionalization can occur (Zilber, 2002: 236; Hardy & Maguire, 2008: 205). Finally, the overturning of existing institutions within their new organizations is facilitated when these institutional entrepreneurs come from different backgrounds with different values and assumptions (Kraatz & Moore, 2002). Indeed, the multiplicity of the interests and activities of the institutional entrepreneur, and the existence of alternative institutions, are additional explanations for deinstitutionalization (Farjoun, 2002: 851). Influential actors can also lie outside the field – as in the case of challenges to DDT (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), and within this case study, two of the three institutional entrepreneurs were firmly situated within the institutional field and could be termed ‘insiders’ whereas the remaining institutional entrepreneur occupied a more peripheral position – and was more prepared to explore and exploit sports science practices occurring outside the aegis of the institutional field of the EPL.

Emerging ideas concerning the institutional work carried out to disrupt institutions highlight the lack of concrete descriptions of the institutional work that actors must engage in to accomplish this task (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 235). They argue that empirical studies concerning institutional disruption and deinstitution are relatively rare – hence a longitudinal case study such as this has the capability to demonstrate the dynamics associated with deinstitutionalization and to add to extant knowledge concerning the antecedents of this phenomenon (Oliver, 1992) via the aegis of institutional entrepreneurs and agents. Whilst there is an agreement between Oliver’s (1992) assertions that deinstitutionalization is a distinctive process with its own antecedents and the views of Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009) that the disruption of institutions involves work that is distinct from that used to create and maintain them, this study demonstrates additional forms of institutional work carried out to disrupt institutions which highlight the affective, and from the practice perspective illustrates that the antecedents of deinstitutionalization can be found within the ways an institution is created and maintained.

## **Research methods**

Answering the research questions required an extended period of data collection that lasted over seven years. Because the study sought to understand and capture institutional and deinstitutional processes over this period, involving a process of substantial change, a case study approach was deployed. It was chosen because the essence of a case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision, or set of decisions and the rationales for their enactment as well as their results. It has the ability to illustrate or explain the motivations that underlie the observed processes thus providing a rich, multi-dimensional picture of the organisation being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Remenyi et al, 1998; Yin, 2003;). It also involved an extensive immersion in the organization by the first author involving extended periods of time being spent at the organization. The ‘‘everyday’’ thinking of the ‘subjects’ of the research is especially useful when seeking to uncover how organizational actors institutionalize and deinstitutionalize practices over an extended period of time. An ethnographic approach such as the one adopted here, in alliance with the case study, provided a rare opportunity to observe the complex interaction of sports science practices and institutionalization within a setting the actors had been substantially responsible for creating. Three main data collection strategies were used: non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival data gathering. Multiple techniques allowed us to ‘triangulate’ findings from different sources of data for the purpose of understanding the organization and

the sports science institution. As stated, the study is based within a single organizational setting

### *Documentary search*

We collected a wide range of documents. These included internally generated materials such as presentations made by a range of senior figures within Club X on a range of issues concerning the club's strategic planning and fiscal status, associated documents pertaining to aspects of the club's business strategy as well as plans for the season generated by the football department. In order to gain an understanding of perceptions at the level of the institutional field concerning Club X's *modus operandi* we also reviewed national and local newspapers as well as relevant materials produced by the game's governing bodies. We sought to understand whether the development and deployment of the sports science institution was perceived as being legitimate within the institutional field and cohered with or departed from existing field-level institutional logics. These documents were also important in developing a timeline for the study concerning both institutionalization and deinstitutionalization phases.

### *Interviews*

Primary data was collected via 79 recorded, semi-structured interviews with 39 respondents, carried out from 2003 to 2011. The respondents were located at Club X and were mostly located within the Sports Science and Medicine Department, or they were members of staff whose work was infused by sports science activities. These interviews varied in length, but most took an hour to 90 minutes. The interviewer transcribed each recording. Many sports science staff also took part in multiple interviews – especially if they had stayed at Club X when the institutional entrepreneurs departed and thus experienced the deinstitutionalization of sports science practices.

### *Observations*

Non-participant observations facilitated immersion in the regular routines of sports science activities and provided a means by which to assess through regular observation the extent to which sports science was institutionalised. They also enabled us to obtain insights into the role of the key institutional entrepreneurs. The observations included training sessions with players, post match debriefs with the football staff, as well as being permitted to observe pre-match activity taking place among the staff and between staff and players.

### **Data analysis**

The primary data were used to identify the institutional work carried out to create, maintain and disrupt the institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In order to achieve these accounts of institutional and deinstitutional work, we systematically analyzed all of the interview transcripts, field notes and other relevant documents in order to identify first-order concepts (Van Maanen, 1979) concerning practical actions respondents engaged in that (first of all) pertained to the creation and maintenance of sports science, and then, latterly, to its deinstitutionalization. In the second stage of analysis, we engaged in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to build up more abstract and robust descriptions of institutional work. Once these categories were developed, they were fleshed out with examples of quotes taken from the primary data.

### **Findings**

*The creation and maintenance of sports science*

When Manager A joined Club X as their First Team Manager in 1999, he was tasked with getting the club back in the Premier League (they were then located in a lower league), but with no money for the purchase of elite players as the club was carrying a substantial debt. At the field level, the dominant institutional logic in terms of securing team performance sees this objective being attained through the purchase of the best possible players (Deloitte, 2011). Because of lack of funds, Manager A attained and sustained performance through the customization of sports science – whilst always seeking to employ the best players he could, given budgetary restrictions. Sports science is concerned with the study and application of scientific principles and techniques with the aim of improving sporting performance and typically incorporates knowledge and practices from a range of disciplines such as biomechanics, biochemistry, biology, and psychology as well as the use of information technology to assist performance analyses. The overall aim of Club X’s sports scientists was to achieve an integrated, multi-disciplinary platform to enhance performance and evolved over 3-4 years through the establishing of specific disciplinary areas when finances afforded the employment of relevant staff, and then installing and embedding the specific practices associated with each discipline. It began with a focus on medical and psychology disciplines and then spread from this base to specialise in a range of sub-disciplines:

‘The development of the function occurred over time from sports science and medical with a little bit of psychology...to a focus on the sub-disciplines...We have players where the standard deviation of ability, mentality and technique and the player’s ability can be quite varied. So we developed an infrastructure, a philosophy and a model within the staff that could absorb any player with any issue’.  
(Respondent 3, Performance Coach)

‘We cover different bases using different types of exercise scientists; we have specialists in football fitness, speed, power and endurance, someone that specialises in strength and flexibility. So the team of sports scientists don’t do the same job, they do something specific and specialist in their field’.  
(Respondent 2, Head of Sports Science and Medicine)

It was also accompanied by rigorous evaluation of the impact of sports science regimes on player and team performance. The scope of its work spread to include scouting, player recruitment as well as the club’s Academy, which developed players from the ages of 7-18. The varied aspects of sports science work: policies, practices, data capture and analysis were integrated by a sophisticated IT system (The Template). An overview of the sports science disciplines and basic practices are outlined in Table 1.

*Table one about here please*

Three institutional entrepreneurs were involved in the creation and maintenance of the institution: Manager 1; Respondent 2, the Head of Sports Science and Medicine and Respondent 3, the Performance Coach. The institutional work carried out to create and maintain the institution rested on four intersected components: the customization of sports science; the continued secrecy concerning customization; securing inimitability via customization and secrecy with these processes being underpinned by the operation of social complexity within the sports science department.

*Customization*

Simply deploying sports science disciplines would be insufficient to ensure advantage over time because this mode of competition would be available to all Premier League clubs. Sustained advantage would come through customizing the institution not only to ensure density of deployment and its integration across disciplines, but to ensure its appropriate use within a specific, football context (Zajac, Ansari and Fiss, 2010).

‘The invention of the Red Zone...We developed it ourselves so we know what level to take the players with regards to fitness level; taking them into that zone for that amount of time in each daily training session’.  
(Respondent 7, First team physiotherapist)

‘We look at something and measure ourselves, and do it ourselves and see if we can be the first ones to do it. So we were the first team in the Premiership to do dynamic flexibility, we were the first people to start drinking a pint of water...We were the first team in Europe to use heart rate monitors as a full system’.  
(Respondent 2, Head of Sports Science and Medicine)

The sports scientists also visited other high performing sports teams in order to examine their use of aspects of sports science. Whilst such visits might deploy a wide lens, seeing how the club used sports science in totality, over time, organizations were also selected on the basis of their use of a specific sports science practice.

‘One of the staff has come back from America and Australia and was questioned closely by Manager 1 and Respondent 2 on what seems like tiny details concerning what he found out about team hydration and rehydration at the clubs he visited. Was that *it*? Was he sent half way round the world just to access those tiny details?’  
(Field note, April 2004 – emphasis in original notes).

The outcome of customization led to Club X being viewed as exemplary within the institutional field – and beyond – with sports scientists from other sports coming to the club to see how they integrated the varied disciplines. This process of customization is also entwined with two other categories: those of secrecy and inimitability. For purposes of competitive advantage, it was important that the precise means by which the institution had been adapted was kept secret. Keeping the adaptation of the sports science institution secret was assisted by its customization because it led to it being inimitable and therefore hard to copy and replicate by other sports franchises and particularly by other clubs in the Premier League.

### *Secrecy and inimitability*

By the end of the 2003-4 season, Club X had reached the final of one of the most prestigious cup competitions in English football and seen their end of season league status improve from being in the relegation zone in the previous seasons to qualification for one of the European cup competitions based on league position. Their performance achievements were now starting to attract national media attention and Manager 1 used his customization and use of sports science to not only account for their performance gains, but to enhance his social capital within the institutional field. As this aspect of Club X’s success gained more attention and exposure, whilst welcoming the attention and inviting inspection, the institution had to be hard to copy and kept confidential at the practice level. This also included keeping the club’s administrative personnel at a distance, so whilst they knew that the deployment of sports science was fundamental to the team’s success – and had been persuaded by evidence of it

working and thus were happy to continue to invest in it – their knowledge as to how it actually worked was limited.

‘They know we’re doing something a bit special but they don’t know exactly what we’re doing which is right...they (the club’s administration) are keen to know, but they never know...’

(Respondent 6, Prozone technician)

Traditionally, the relationships between the playing and administration aspects of a football club consist of a fundamental tension. Whilst the relationship between Manager and Chairman are seen as being central to managerial tenure, Managers typically resist any intervention in their department by the Chairman, CEO, Board members or other administration staff. Yet these personnel are often very keen to open up the ‘inside’ workings of the football department for various reasons, with these attempts being strongly resisted as managers assert their control over their own domain and its environment.

Whilst the IT system (The Template) was a substantial knowledge repository concerning sports science which all sports science staff had access to the ways by which sports science practices were enacted were less transparent. Although the sports science department had expanded from two to 28 staff over the period of the study, it was generally stable in terms of its membership. This stability allied to the ways the staff worked together resulted in the formation of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), underpinned by a high degree of social complexity.

#### *Social complexity*

The sports scientists were a relatively homogeneous group of staff:

‘All the fitness coaches were the youngest fitness coaches, 24, 25, 26 and they grew up together over a 5-6 year period. And therefore I think that they had more social cohesion. They got on well as friends as well as colleagues...young guys, that first generation trying to make its mark; sports scientists trying to break into football. So it was a special time, an exciting time for them’.

(Respondent 5, Psychologist)

All of them had attained their professional qualifications via the UK higher education system. They were all sports science graduates, some possessed Masters Qualifications, and others were also members of associated professional bodies. More significantly, they were tightly bonded due to the long hours they worked over the duration of a season as well as the requirement to share accommodation and workspaces, as well as the substantial amount of time they spent together travelling to matches. Because of their emotional impact on players and on each other, the Performance Coach, Respondent 3, spent a substantial amount of time focused on ensuring their cohesiveness.

‘It was a positive, happy, creative environment where people felt comfortable to try new things and to innovate. And with that comes excitement – trying to push the boundaries. It has its moments, I’m sure, but generally I thought it was a healthy, positive environment’.

(Respondent 5, Psychologist)

Additionally, the motif of ‘family’ was heavily evident within the data – with an expectation that those spending time with the department (including the first author) be quickly incorporated within it. This motif was strongly associated with Manager 1 who played a key role in establishing the warmth that sustained the family and in resolving disputes; especially those concerning sports scientists and coaching staff who typically are less schooled in sports science philosophies and practices.

### **The deinstitutionalization of sports science**

In May 2007, Manager 1 left Club X and was swiftly employed by another club. Respondent 2, as well as some of Club X’s sports scientists, swiftly joined Manager 1 and Respondent 3 was headhunted by another EPL team soon after. Manager 2 who had been employed as Manager 1’s Assistant Manager for 18 months prior to his departure succeeded Manager 1. The deinstitutionalization of sports science was largely achieved within six months with the deinstitutionalizing work falling into four categories: asserting dominant institutional logics; reconfiguring institutional vocabularies and the contents of conversation; destabilizing the affective environment, and disrupting a community of practice.

#### *Asserting dominant institutional logics*

Whilst Manager 2 was initially keen to maintain the sports science institution, respondents argue that he did not really understand it; or at least that he failed to understand its customization at Club X. Certainly there is no evidence within the data of him seeking to engage with it prior to his managerial appointment. Given this lack of understanding of the institution by the new manager, it is therefore unsurprising that he reconfigured the intra-organizational logics concerning the ways by which high performance outcomes are seen as being achieved: disrupting the existing institution of sports science by promoting another one which held a powerful position within the institutional field. Hence Manager 2 emphasised the importance of developing a different playing strategy, accompanied by a more attractive style of football. In doing so, Manager 2 also drew on his own cultural capital as a former player at a club that had been successful in the 1980s.

‘Everything was going to change, so we had better start playing what Manager 2, perceived to be football at the time...a lot of passing and moving...and I think that they saw football as being totally, totally dominant without it being sports science in football’.

(Respondent 9, Player Liaison Officer)

Some respondents suggested that the institution of sports science had become too powerful and that the shift in logics was a deliberate attempt to regain control:

‘Sports science had got too powerful; a powerful mixed environment had been created that couldn’t be ignored and that was seen to be a challenge to Manager 2, to the Board and the Chairman’.

(Respondent 10, Scout)

However, it needs to be stated that the sports scientists were realists and were fully aware of the dominant institutional logic operating within the field which emphasised the need for elite players and their purchase as well as the aforementioned focus on styles of play and match strategy. Of itself, this shift – whilst disappointing – was not deadly to the institution.



However, when combined with the other forms of deinstitutionalizing work, it became significant.

### *Reconfiguring the institution*

When faced with the departure of several sports scientists, Manager 2 hired replacement staff from his old club; people he knew and trusted. However, this strategy led to a disjuncture occurring between Club X's sports scientists and the new arrivals. This was due to a difference in philosophical approaches to sports science existing between the two groups of staff and divergent practices brought in to the existing ones.

'Sports science and medicine is often reactive in the way it operates but the Club X approach optimised a player's performance through an investment in multiple areas like biomechanics, nutrition, training regimes and performance focus. Manager 2 didn't understand this...and brought in old school physios focused on rehabilitation...but it was completely at odds with the philosophy developed by the previous regime and as understood by the rest of the back room staff which was focussed on prevention'.

(Respondent 8, Physiotherapist)

'Everyone has a physio, a fitness coach or a match analyst, but within that there are ways of doing things and Respondent 2's way is very, very good and other ways are maybe more traditional and don't have the same impact. Within the sports science discipline, those little things that went on came together to make something really special...the guys who came in were more traditional in their methodology and that didn't create what was there previously'.

(Respondent 12, Psychologist)

This difference was noted (generally unfavourably) by the players and this exacerbated tensions between the two sets of sports science staff. Again, it is possible that these differences could have been bridged, but this reconfiguration occurred within an emotional context that made this almost impossible.

### *Reconfiguring institutional vocabularies and the contents of conversation*

This category of institutional work changed the tenor and nature of conversations: defining what it is acceptable to say and the effective silencing of any disagreement or critique of managerial action and managerially sanctioned activities. As stated by several respondents, conversation was important to the sports science institution. First, it was the means by which the institutional work was created, established and maintained; second, it was the means by which practices were changed; third, it was a key mechanism in sustaining the community of practice – especially with reference to the securing and maintenance of affective bonds. The deinstitutionalizing phase saw this plurivocality and free-flowing conversations diminish. As the shift in logics occurred, and institutional practices were reconfigured, conflicts arose. These conflicts were exacerbated by the creation of a working environment where multiplicity and inevitable disagreement was perceived by the manager as an expression of opposition:

'It rapidly became clear that if you disagreed with Manager 2, you were seen as being against him...suggestions were seen as opposition'. (Respondent 12, Academy staff member)

The intertwining of these three categories undermined the institution by silencing it and preventing it from operating in an interconnected way with the new dominant logic. The shift in logics and the disjuncture existing between the old and new sports science practices continued to be negatively perceived by the players. This feedback intensified Manager 2's growing distrust of the sports science institution and the 'old' sports science staff; exacerbating the divide between the sports science department, which in turn, destabilized the affective environment that had nurtured the institution as well as the community of practice.

#### *Destabilizing the emotional environment and disrupting the community of practice*

The growing staff tensions led to the disruption to the community of practice. Destabilizing the emotional environment involved the disruption of the organization's emotional climate. Disruption to the community of practice can be seen as a reconfiguring or putting an end to the existence of a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

'Respondent 3 and Respondent 2 developed what they did over ten years and when they all moved on, and others moved on you had different guys, different ages, different backgrounds and so the dynamics changed hugely'.  
(Respondent 12, Psychologist)

'They (the new management regime and sports scientists) saw shadows round every corner...So if a player said something, we had to analyse it to the last detail or if a member of staff tidied his desk, it was taken as a sign that they were leaving. Utter, utter chaos and paranoia at all times'.  
(Respondent 13, General Manager)

The effective silencing of opinions, differences and debates exacerbated the disjuncture existing between the existing and new sports scientists. Not only did the emotional dynamics change significantly, but also so did the practices. Manager 2 continued to place an emphasis on the development of a new playing style that players found hard to adjust to in the time available to them. Once the season resumed, results were poor and Manager 2 was sacked after eleven Premier League matches.

### **Discussion**

The overall focus of this study was to identify how an institution, maintained and extended over time and seen to be key to sustaining performance was deinstitutionalized; to identify the antecedents of deinstitution at Club X and to analyse the institutional work that was carried out to create, maintain and disrupt the sports science institution. Here, the implications of the findings for institutional theory are outlined. The implications for organizational practice are explored in the closing conclusions to the paper.

Research on institutionalization often implies that it is a 'once and for all process' (Davis et al., 1994: 550), composed of enduring social patterns which are perceived as legitimate by those who enact and reproduce them. Given these conceptualizations of institutions, the rapidity and extent of deinstitutionalization witnessed in this case is unusual. This could lead to assertions that the institution could not have been institutionalized – although the data and researcher experiences over time suggest otherwise. An alternative explanation is that the ways the institution was created and embedded made it more prone to deinstitutionalization via the intersection of customization, inimitability, secrecy and the affective bonds seen in the category of social complexity. It also required the persistent existence of actors who are

tasked and able to continue the institution's work. Our data show that sufficient actors remained after the staff departures to continue the sports science work; however the continuity of the institution and the accompanying institutional practices were destroyed by the forms of deinstitutionalizing work outlined in the findings.

#### *The role of institutional entrepreneurs and organizational actors*

This institutional decline Club X was corroborated by the Nexis UK searches, which illustrate a marked drop in the number of articles linking Club X to sports science post May 2007 (circa 150 before, and 16 after Manager 1's tenure). This suggests that institutional entrepreneurs who seek to absorb an emerging institution into their own personal capital might (unwittingly or deliberately) reduce the impersonal, and hence portable, elements of that institution and make it more fragile to intra-organizational deinstitutionalization. If there is no succession plan with sufficient potential managers/leaders possessing the requisite knowledge and skills to maintain it, then the institution is more prone to intra-organizational deinstitutionalization. If the institution also has competing logics at the field level, then this exacerbates the fragility of the institution because if there is no suitable internal successor, recruiting those capabilities externally might be difficult. This dual role of the institutional entrepreneur has yet to be explored empirically or theoretically within institutional theory generally, or more specifically, within institutional entrepreneurship.

One of the factors facilitating the prominence of institutional entrepreneurs is performance pressures and the extent to which a field is affected by technical performance – with new institutional entrepreneurs potentially offering new and better ways of raising performance (Hardy & Maguire, 2008: 203). Institutional theory would predict that the influence of performance is greatest when institutionalization is low (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Performance was and remains central to the institutional field and a club's status within it. A number of factors can influence the link between institution and performance and a degree of causal ambiguity persists even with the rigorous adoption of sports science regimes and their persistent measurement and evaluation because the outcomes of matches are essentially uncontrollable. Therefore the more a practice promises and can more regularly deliver higher performance, the higher the incentive to customise it through social complexity and to keep it secret. This suggests that the higher the performance imperative within a field, the more likely the institution as a *generic* concept will be deinstitutionalized and be more likely to be appropriated and *customised* in order to gain inimitability and thus competitive advantage.

Previous research has established that a practice becomes delegitimized when key practitioners perceive it as being difficult to use (Zbaracki, 1998). Manager 2's problematic relationship with sports science seems to resonate with Selznick's (1957) comment that institutions arise and persist only when their leaders are drawn from a homogeneous group that shares common values and backgrounds. Previous work has suggested that ambiguity is a good ground for deinstitutionalization (Leblebici et al., 1991); suggesting that intra-organizational deinstitutionalization is more likely in organizations with conflicting, multiple identities – especially when identities of one of the parties (here, the sports scientists) is only just beginning to be fully established at the field level. Put differently, intra-organizational deinstitutionalization may therefore be facilitated by conflict between dual identities (e.g. Zilber, 2002). The data shows there was a change from a balancing of the two departments and institutionalized beliefs and practices of sports science and coaching and the findings depict how this balance disintegrated with the departure of the institutional entrepreneurs and several actors, contributing to deinstitutionalization of sports science at Club X.

### *The role of emotion in deinstitutionalization*

Although organizational scholars have argued for making the role of emotions in institutional processes more explicit, little is known about how institutions are experienced (Suddaby, 2010). The institutional work involved in creating, maintaining and disrupting sports science was imbued with emotion. Highlighting the emotional content of institutions and institutional work arguably supplements the cognitive aspects of institutions and institutional work – particularly given that institutional processes are likely to be driven as much by lived-affective factors as cognitive-reflective ones – and allow individuals to be seen as more integrated human beings whose desires, emotions and engagement in forms of institutional work are not reducible to the pursuit of rational interest (Voronov and Vince, 2012). This study illustrates that institutions are inhabited by people who bring their emotional selves to the experience and enactment of institutions (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Gutierrez, Scully & Howard-Grenville, 2010). Given the role of emotion in this study, it could be argued that analyses of individuals' roles in institutional work are arguably incomplete unless the focus on the cognitive work on institutional work is supplemented by attention to the affective, and that individual emotional investment or disinvestment in a dominant institutional order may also be a critical antecedent of all manner of institutional work, and as such is worthy of focus in future research (Voronov and Vince, 2012).

### **Conclusions**

This account illustrates how institutional entrepreneurs and agents may play a role in disrupting the very institutions they have been personally involved in creating and maintaining. It is a defining characteristic of an institution that it is impersonal and generalizable and thus portable across time and space. But the role played by performance pressures and the need for inimitability highlights that there might be reasons why institutional entrepreneurs might be disruptive to institutions with which they are associated. The three institutional entrepreneurs in this case study incorporated the institution as part of their own inimitable practice and social capital. Whilst this secured competitive advantage, the ways by which the institution was constructed and maintained largely by customization, secrecy, inimitability, and social complexity meant that when they departed, the continuity of the institution was at risk if there was no effective succession. In this way the antecedents of deinstitutionalization lie in how the institution was created and maintained. A potential contribution to organizational practice from this study therefore lies in the role effective human resources staff could play in ensuring the continuity and extension of an institution. Had the HR function been cognisant of the dual identity that Manager 1 possessed, and the importance of his personal understanding of the sports science institution – as well as the institutional work involved to create and maintain it – then it is possible that a more effective leader succession plan might have been put into place which could have identified a more appropriate successor. It might also have ensured that better induction and personal development activities could have been provided for him and potentially ensured the continuation of an institution allied to organizational performance.

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Table 1: Overview of sports science disciplines and basic practices at Club X

<b>Overview of sports science disciplines and basic practices</b>	
<b>Sports science &amp; player recruitment/retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing recruitment, selection, induction, exit/loan practices for talent management purposes</li> <li>- screening processes developed to assess potential players physically &amp; psychologically</li> <li>- technical scouting system instigated &amp; integrated between Prozone/match analysts &amp; scouts</li> <li>- incorporation of rules embedding the principles of supreme fitness in every player contract.</li> </ul>
<b>Physiotherapy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- routines established to improve player condition.</li> <li>- collection of panel data over time to assist decision-making concerning daily routines in other disciplines ensuring integration with other data to assist player development</li> <li>- develop prevention strategies for individual players</li> <li>- diagnosis &amp; prescription of treatment</li> <li>- mobilization programmes instigated</li> <li>- reflexology &amp; massage work enhanced and developed</li> <li>- rehabilitation &amp; treatment practices installed &amp; documented for injured players</li> </ul>
<b>Exercise science</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- develop prevention over rehabilitation strategy on individual player basis</li> <li>- focus on strength, flexibility, speed, power &amp; endurance collectively &amp; individually</li> <li>- detailed player database supplemented with knowledge gained from reviewing other elite sports</li> </ul>
<b>Nutrition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing nutritional regimes for players ensuring appropriate provision at player homes, the training ground &amp; at hotels when playing away</li> <li>- daily assessment of player body-fat indexing, anti-oxidant measurements and general dietary health</li> <li>- development of detailed player database held on The Template</li> </ul>
<b>Psychology work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>detailed psychological profiles of players &amp; staff</li> <li>- ongoing sessions with players prior to games</li> <li>- motivational &amp; developmental videos for match-day preparation</li> <li>- one to ones with staff and players</li> <li>- OD work on organization structure, group work, and team culture infused with psychology content</li> </ul>
<b>Medicine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- invest in primary care</li> <li>- engage in aspects of complementary medicine</li> </ul>

**Integrative methodology I: Capture**

Development of IT system (the Template) to hold and disseminate sports science policies & practices as well as documenting player interventions medically and physiologically.

**Integrative methodology II: Performance analysis**

- installation & development of Prozone systems to analyse player and team performance statistically & strategically
- Prozone systems used to analyse opposition performance & incorporated with match preparation
- integration of Prozone statistics & information with coaching work (one-to-one reviews of player performance/group reviews of performance such as defensive players reviewing performance), match preparation, psychological intervention & exercise scientists to improve performance where needed.

**Integrative methodology III: Evidence of sports science efficacy – justifying institutional investment**

- IT systems capture data and facilitate evaluation and quantitative evidence of efficacy of institution.