



## Industrial Relations Unit (IRRU)

Seminar Speaker Series – Autumn 2025 (Term 1)

**Speakers:** Umar Boodoo (Warwick Business School)

**Research  
Team  
(alphabetical  
order)**

**Title:** Justice-Oriented Institutional Work: Power, Inequality, and Contested Sustainability Transitions

**Date:** Wednesday 26 November 2025

**Venue:** WBS, room 3.215 (and online via Teams/Zoom)

**Time:** 14:00 – 15:30 (GMT), light buffet lunch served at 13:15

**Abstract:**

Market-driven sustainability transitions consistently reproduce social and economic inequalities, a pattern existing management theories cannot adequately explain. We argue this stems from limitations in institutional work theory, which under-theorizes power as a constitutive force and treats justice commitments with insufficient granularity. To address this, we develop a theory of justice-oriented institutional work focusing on the actions of collective organizational actors in contested sustainability transitions, defined by power asymmetries and incompatible visions of justice. We propose a typology where actors' power positions and targeted justice dimensions (distributive, procedural, recognitive) combine to produce distinct mechanisms of institutional work. We theorize three primary forms: (1) appropriative work by high-power actors concentrating benefits and authority; (2) legitimation work by intermediate-power actors managing symbolic-material contradictions; and (3) resistance work by low-power actors challenging exclusionary arrangements. We further specify how these actor-level mechanisms scale up through field-level amplification processes, creating dynamic cycles that determine whether transitions reproduce or transform inequality. Our framework contributes to institutional work, sustainability transitions, and organizational justice research by revealing the systematic micro-foundations of inequity and offering a more politically-aware theory of institutional agency in the face of existential challenges.

**Registration:** Email [IRRUoffice@wbs.ac.uk](mailto:IRRUoffice@wbs.ac.uk) to reserve your space