



Volume 29, 2026

**PSYCHODYNAMICS AS A CASE FOR EPISTEMIC
HEGEMONY IN MAINSTREAM WESTERN WORK AND
ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY:
A DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS**

Davide Giusino

University of Foggia, Foggia, Italy

davide.giusino@unifg.it

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This paper investigates the marginal presence of psychodynamic perspectives in contemporary Western Work and Organizational Psychology (W-WOP), addressing concerns that such approaches remain overlooked despite their relevance to understanding the emotional and unconscious dimensions of work.
Background	Drawing on a Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) perspective, the study examines how epistemic norms and disciplinary assumptions shape the visibility of psychodynamics within mainstream scientific venues.
Methodology	A documentary analysis of the most recently available conference programs from EAWOP and SIOP was conducted. Titles, countries of origin, psychodynamic topics, and contribution types were extracted and analyzed descriptively using frequency counts.
Contribution	The paper empirically maps the representation of psychodynamic scholarship in two major W-WOP conferences and offers a critical interpretation of its marginalization through the lens of epistemic hegemony. As a key theoretical insight, it suggests that the marginalization of psychodynamic approaches reflects broader patterns of epistemic hegemony, whereby certain paradigms are privileged while others are systematically excluded, shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge.
Findings	Out of 2,620 reviewed contributions, only nine (0.34%) explicitly referenced psychodynamic approaches. These appeared mostly as low-visibility posters, covered fragmented topics, and originated from a small set of countries. No psychodynamic content was integrated into high-profile programme formats.

Accepting Editor Francesco Tommasi | Received: November 17, 2025 | Revised: January 5, January 9, 2026 | Accepted: January 10, 2026.

Cite as: Giusino, D. (2026). Psychodynamics as a case for epistemic hegemony in mainstream western work and organizational psychology: A documentary analysis. *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, 29, Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5695>

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Recommendations for Practitioners	Practitioners are encouraged to incorporate psychodynamic concepts when addressing organizational issues related to emotion, conflict, identity, and other processes that may relate to unconscious phenomena.
Recommendations for Researchers	Researchers are urged to engage with psychodynamic frameworks to expand epistemic diversity and to critically reflect on dominant assumptions shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge in W-WOP.
Impact on Society	Broadening W-WOP's epistemological horizons may enhance the discipline's capacity to address complex forms of suffering, inequality, and emotional strain in contemporary workplaces.
Future Research	Further studies should examine publication patterns, editorial practices, and doctoral training to better understand the institutional mechanisms driving epistemic marginalization.
Keywords	psychoanalysis, epistemic injustice, critical psychology, conference analysis

INTRODUCTION

Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) has long aimed to understand and improve human functioning in the context of work and organizations. In recent decades, however, the field has been increasingly confronted with the growing visibility of emotional suffering, anxiety, identity strain, and moral distress in contemporary workplaces. Phenomena such as burnout, insecurity, trauma, narcissism, and affective conflict have become central to organizational life, yet they are often addressed through frameworks that privilege conscious cognition, behavioral regulation, and rational decision-making (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Mumby, 2019).

Psychodynamic approaches offer a distinctive perspective on these issues by foregrounding unconscious processes, emotional dynamics, and the symbolic dimensions of work and organization (Arnaud, 2012; Gabriel, 1998). Drawing on clinical, interpretive, and systems-oriented traditions, psychodynamics has generated influential insights into leadership, organizational culture, authority relations, and collective defenses (Fotaki et al., 2012; Kets de Vries, 2024; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2022). Despite these contributions, psychodynamic perspectives appear to occupy a marginal position within mainstream Western Work and Organizational Psychology (W-WOP), particularly within the discipline's most visible institutional arenas.

This apparent marginalization raises important epistemological questions about what kinds of knowledge are recognized, legitimized, and disseminated within W-WOP. From a critical standpoint, such patterns may reflect broader forms of epistemic hegemony, whereby positivist, cognitive, behavioral, and quantitative paradigms dominate definitions of scientific legitimacy, while clinical, interpretive, and qualitative approaches are relegated to the periphery (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Gerard, 2016; Islam & Sanderson, 2022). As Hornung (2025) notes, mainstream W-WOP remains largely governed by a functionalist paradigm oriented toward objectivity and regulation, often neglecting conflict, power, and subjectivity. These epistemic dynamics are especially consequential at a time when W-WOP is increasingly called upon to address complex, affect-laden, and ethically charged challenges at work.

The aim of this study was to examine the presence and positioning of psychodynamic approaches within mainstream Western Work and Organizational Psychology. Specifically, the paper investigates the extent to which psychodynamic topics are represented in the scientific programs of two major W-WOP conferences – the 21st European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EA-WOP; <https://eawop.org/congress/past-congresses>) conference held in 2023 and the 2025 Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP; <https://archive.org/details/SIOPConfPro->

[grams/](#)) Conference – and interprets these patterns through a Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) perspective (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). To achieve this aim, the study pursues three objectives: (a) to map the prevalence of psychodynamic contributions using documentary analysis; (b) to examine their thematic, geographical, and structural characteristics; and (c) to interpret the findings in light of epistemic hegemony and dominant assumptions of the workplace as a rational system, which tend to privilege conscious and measurable processes over unconscious and affective dynamics (Pratt & Crosina, 2016).

The paper proceeds by outlining the theoretical foundations of psychodynamics in relation to work and organizations, followed by a description of the study's methodology and results. The discussion situates the findings within critical epistemological debates and considers the implications for research and practice, concluding with a discussion of limitations and directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

WHAT IS PSYCHODYNAMICS?

Psychodynamics is a broad psychological tradition concerned with the role of unconscious processes, affective life, and relational experience in shaping human behavior and subjectivity (Erdelyi, 1992; Horowitz, 1988). Originating in Freud's theorization of the unconscious and the dynamic organization of mental life (Freud, 1961), subsequent developments by authors such as Jung (1991), Adler (1927), Klein (1946), Winnicott (1965), and Kohut (1971) progressively expanded the framework beyond classical drive theory. These contributions emphasized meaning-making, object relations, identity formation, and the regulation of affect within interpersonal and social contexts, thereby broadening psychodynamics from a theory of individual psychopathology to a general perspective on human functioning (Fulmer, 2018; Horowitz, 1988).

A defining metaphor that captures the essence of the psychodynamic conception of the mind is that of an iceberg (Figure 1). In this representation, the small, visible portion above the waterline symbolizes the conscious mind – the domain of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions accessible to awareness. Beneath the surface lies the much larger, submerged mass of the iceberg, representing the unconscious; that is, the repository of desires, fears, memories, and conflicts that remain inaccessible to conscious introspection yet shape the individual's experience and behavior. This image underscores the psychodynamic proposition that the unseen dimensions of the mind exert a determining influence on visible conduct, and that psychological understanding requires a descent into these deeper, less accessible strata of mental life.

Indeed, despite their theoretical diversity, psychodynamic approaches share a core assumption – that psychological experience and behavior cannot be fully understood without considering unconscious conflict, ambivalence, and emotionally charged relational patterns (Marmor, 1980; T. R. Rice & Hoffman, 2014). From this standpoint, emotions, defenses, and fantasies are not peripheral or disruptive elements of human functioning but central organizing forces that shape perception, motivation, and action. This orientation distinguishes psychodynamics from dominant cognitive-behavioral and positivist paradigms, which tend to prioritize conscious processes, rational choice, and observable behavior while marginalizing subjective and unconscious dimensions of experience.

Importantly, these psychodynamic assumptions render the approach particularly relevant for the study of work and organizations. The enduring relevance of psychodynamics not only lies in its capacity to reveal the invisible forces that structure intrapsychic life, but also interpersonal and organizational systems. Psychodynamics offers an indispensable lens through which to explore the emotional and unconscious dimensions of informing processes within human systems. Organizational life is pervaded by dynamics that are often managed implicitly rather than explicitly. Psychodynamic per-

spectives illuminate how such dynamics are sustained through unconscious processes, collective defenses, and shared fantasies, operating beneath the surface of formal roles, procedures, and rationalized organizational narratives (Gabriel, 1998; Marks, 2020; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2022).

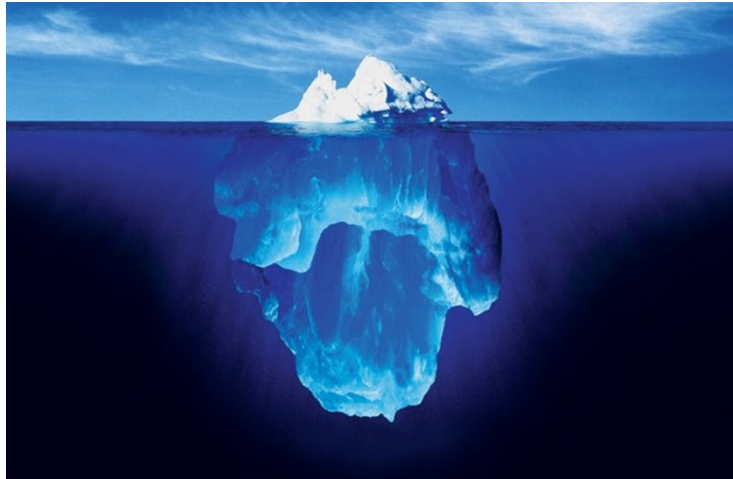


Figure 1. The iceberg metaphor

PSYCHODYNAMICS IN WORK AND ORGANIZATIONS

Psychodynamics, initially formulated to explore the unconscious determinants of individual behavior, has evolved over time into a rich, interdisciplinary framework for understanding organizational life. Its application to the study of work and institutions has generated a substantial body of scholarship that examines how unconscious processes, emotional dynamics, and collective defenses shape organizational functioning. From the early Tavistock experiments to contemporary leadership studies, psychodynamic thought has illuminated how anxiety, desire, and fantasy are woven into the everyday realities of work, leadership, and institutional life. The main streams of work in this field are overviewed in the next paragraphs.

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

The work from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, United Kingdom, has been foundational in this field (Abraham, 2013; Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Rustin & Armstrong, 2019). Over time, the Institute has been developing an applied psychodynamic approach that integrates psychoanalysis, systems theory, and social science (e.g., A. K. Rice, 1969; Trist & Bamforth, 1951). The Tavistock tradition views organizations as open systems, in which emotional and unconscious dynamics interact with structural and technological arrangements. Pioneers such as Wilfred R. Bion (1961) and A. K. Rice (1965) examined how groups deploy social defenses against anxiety, leading to patterns of dependency, fight-flight behavior, or collective denial. These insights evolved into what is now known as systems psychodynamics (Fraher, 2004), which interprets organizational phenomena, such as resistance to change, leadership dilemmas, or role conflicts, as expressions of unconscious processes within the system as a whole. The Tavistock approach also introduced experiential methods such as group relations conferences, designed to help participants explore authority, boundary, and task as lived, affect-laden experiences. This methodology, combining research and intervention, remains foundational to psychodynamic consultancy and organizational learning.

Building on this lineage, Gordon W. Lawrence (Lawrence, 2005; Lawrence et al., 1998) extended psychodynamic inquiry to the collective level through his concept of social dreaming. Lawrence proposed that dreams, when shared in groups, provide access to the social unconscious – the network of shared anxieties, wishes, and meanings that shape organizational and societal life. In a social dreaming matrix, participants exchange dreams and associations to reveal the emotional undercurrents of collective experience. This practice has been employed in organizations to surface hidden concerns,

stimulate creativity, and facilitate systemic insight (Fubini, 2019; Morgan, 2007). Through social dreaming, psychodynamics moves from an intrapsychic to an intersubjective and even transpersonal mode of understanding the unconscious.

Contemporary psychodynamic practitioners trained at Tavistock have also explored the everyday enactment of unconscious processes at work. Naomi Shragai (2021, 2023) argues that many workplace conflicts arise from the repetition of unresolved childhood patterns – employees unconsciously transfer familial dynamics onto colleagues and authority figures. Recognizing these transferences allows individuals to disentangle past emotional scripts from present relationships, fostering greater freedom and self-awareness. Similarly, the integration of attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1982) into organizational studies (Giusino, 2019; Scrima et al., 2017) has enriched the understanding of how early relational experiences influence adult responses to workplace experiences.

The Institut de Recherche en Psychodynamique du Travail

A parallel major contribution to this field comes from Christophe Dejours, director of the Institut de Recherche en Psychodynamique du Travail in Paris, France, whose psychodynamics of work offers a psychoanalytic rethinking of labor as a site of subjective investment, suffering, and creativity (Dashtipour & Vidaillet, 2017; Debout, 2014; Deranty, 2009, 2010; Marks, 2020). One of the central premises of psychodynamics is the idea that ‘real’ work often remains invisible. Work is, in this sense, enigmatic, since the investments made by individuals in their work may be expressed in drives and forms of sublimation of which they are not consciously aware (Marks, 2020). Rejecting purely economic or managerial conceptions of work, Dejours situates it within the realm of affect and recognition. For him, work represents a fundamental means of constructing one’s identity through the transformation of drives into creative action (Dejours, 2006, 2014). However, this process is inherently conflictual (*ibidem*): all work entails psychic suffering (fear, humiliation, moral distress) which can only be mitigated, not eliminated. The possibility of transforming suffering into meaning and vitality depends on the existence of work collectives, where solidarity and mutual recognition help sustain subjective health. When neoliberal management practices erode these collective supports, individuals are left vulnerable to isolation and moral disorientation (Dejours, 2006; Marks, 2020). Thus, the psychodynamics of work emphasizes that the affective life of the worker is not incidental to productivity but constitutive of it.

The International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations

The International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO), administratively located in New York, USA, has also been central in consolidating psychoanalytic approaches to organizational research and practice. ISPSO scholars emphasize the relevance of unconscious dynamics, affect, and fantasy in organizational life, advancing the field’s theoretical and methodological sophistication (Fotaki et al., 2012; Sievers, 2009). One major theme is the recognition of unconscious organizational dynamics – the hidden processes that structure behavior, shape leadership, and generate resistance to change (Vince, 2019). Concepts such as institutional illogics capture how shared fantasies and defenses underpin organizational rationalities, often producing paradoxical or self-defeating outcomes. Another important strand concerns affect and emotion, with scholars exploring the centrality of emotion in organizational work and subjectivity (Arnaud, 2012; Gabriel, 1998). Psychoanalytic approaches also provide nuanced analyses of leadership and identity, showing how projection, identification, and fantasy bind leaders and followers in mutually constitutive ways (Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022; Ozturk et al., 2020). For instance, even in “leaderless” organizations, unconscious power dynamics persist, revealing the fantasy of leaderlessness as an illusion (Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022). Methodologically, ISPSO-related research often employs visual, ethnographic, and interpretive techniques to access the emotional and symbolic dimensions of organizational life that traditional positivist methods overlook (Arnaud, 2012). Finally, ISPSO scholarship positions psychoanalysis as a critical and emancipatory theory – a means to challenge instrumental rationality, expose hidden power relations, and promote more humane and reflective organizational practices (Fotaki et al., 2012).

A key figure in bridging psychoanalysis and management is Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, whose extensive work examines the psychological foundations of leadership and organizational dysfunction (Kets de Vries, 2024; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). His clinical paradigm treats organizations as living systems animated by unconscious processes, and leaders as subjects whose personal histories and internal conflicts profoundly influence their organizations (van de Loo, 2000). Kets de Vries highlights the psychological complexity of leaders, arguing that irrationality and vulnerability are intrinsic to human, and therefore executive functioning. Effective leaders, he contends, are those who can confront and integrate their own “madness,” transforming anxiety into creativity (ibidem). His analyses of the dark side of leadership – narcissism, entitlement, and authoritarianism – warn of the destructive potential of uncontained power and collective regression (Kets de Vries, 2024). From a developmental perspective, Kets de Vries advocates self-reflective leadership, emphasizing personal insight, feedback, and emotional learning as central to effective leadership development (Kets de Vries, 2010). His recent work addresses phenomena such as golden larva syndrome – self-sabotage among high-potential individuals – and the psychology of entitlement, extending psychodynamic insights to broader social and cultural concerns (Kets de Vries, 2023a, 2023b). Through his integrative model, Kets de Vries has established psychoanalysis not only as a diagnostic lens but also as a transformative framework for leadership and organizational health.

Lacanian approaches to organizational studies

Finally, Lacanian approaches to organizational studies (e.g., Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2017) reorient psychoanalytic inquiry from the clinical and individual toward the discursive, relational, and political dimensions of organizational life. As Contu et al. (2010) argue, Lacan’s framework – anchored in the concepts of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real – provides organizational scholars with a rigorous lens for analyzing how subjectivity and desire are constituted through language and power. Within organizations, subjects are interpellated into symbolic structures (hierarchies, rules, and discourses) that promise coherence and recognition, yet inevitably produce lack. This absence fuels desire and drives identification with organizational ideals. The imaginary realm, where ego and image are constructed, sustains fantasies of unity, leadership, and control that conceal the instability of identity at work.

Meanwhile, the real denotes what resists symbolization – the unconscious, the traumatic, and the disruptive elements that return in symptoms, failures, or organizational crises. Contu (2018) further develops this perspective by framing the Lacanian unconscious as a critical site of resistance, revealing how organizational subjects are both captured by and capable of subverting ideological fantasies that sustain neoliberal management and corporate domination. Rather than treating the unconscious as a pathology to be managed, Lacanian organizational analysis views it as a structural and political force, exposing how enjoyment, desire, and fantasy underpin obedience, complicity, and resistance within contemporary institutions. This approach transforms psychoanalysis from an instrument of adjustment into a practice of critique, inviting scholars and practitioners to confront the contradictions, impossibilities, and excesses that define organizational life.

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Taken together, the diverse psychodynamic perspectives reviewed above reveal a common preoccupation with the unseen dimensions of organizational life. They demonstrate that organizations are not merely rational structures but emotional and symbolic fields shaped by unconscious desires, anxieties, and defenses. By illuminating these dynamics, psychodynamic theory contributes to more reflective and human-centered understandings of work and organizations. Yet, despite this explanatory and practical potential, psychodynamic studies appear to remain largely marginal within contemporary mainstream Western Work and Organizational Psychology (W-WOP). While psychodynamics has made substantial theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the emotional, unconscious, and relational dimensions of organizational life, its presence in the central academic and institutional arenas of the field seems to remain limited. Evidence of this marginalization is visible in both the publication and conference landscapes of the field. In the flagship journals of W-WOP, explicitly

psychodynamic contributions seem to be exceedingly rare. Contributions grounded in psychoanalytic, clinical, or interpretive paradigms seldom appear, while cognitive-behavioral, positivist, and quantitative approaches dominate editorial agendas and citation networks. A similar pattern emerges in the leading professional gatherings of the discipline. As the present article will suggest, only a negligible fraction of presentations at the main W-WOP conferences address psychodynamic approaches and topics.

This study adopted a Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) perspective (Gerard, 2016; Hornung, 2025; Islam & Sanderson, 2022; Tommasi et al., 2024) to examine the presence and positioning of psychodynamic approaches within mainstream W-WOP. CWOP represents an emerging paradigm that seeks to question the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions underpinning dominant psychological approaches to work (Hornung, 2025; Islam & Sanderson, 2022). Building on the broader traditions of critical psychology and critical management studies, CWOP problematizes the field's alignment with managerialist, individualistic, and neoliberal ideologies that privilege control and measurement over reflexivity (Gerard, 2016).

From a CWOP standpoint, the absence of psychodynamic inquiry in mainstream W-WOP outlets can be thought of as not coincidental but structural. In particular, CWOP allows us to interpret such an absence in terms of epistemic hegemony. Epistemic hegemony can be defined as the process by which certain knowledge systems, often those aligned with dominant social, cultural, or political groups, become established as the standard or universal way of understanding the world (Jiménez & Lee, 2022; Knöchelmann, 2021; Machen & Nost, 2021; Mignolo, 2014). This dominance is maintained by marginalizing, delegitimizing, or excluding other epistemologies, often through institutional, cultural, or discursive means (*ibidem*). The result is a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges the perspectives and interests of the hegemonic group while silencing or rendering invisible other ways of knowing. Epistemic hegemony involves the active process of making one way of knowing dominant, while marginalizing or excluding others. This is not just about the prevalence of a particular knowledge system, but about the power to define what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is recognized as a credible knower (Ireland-Blake et al., 2025; Knöchelmann, 2021; Machen & Nost, 2021; Mignolo, 2014). The hegemonic knowledge system is often legitimized through claims to objectivity, universality, and necessity, which serve to conceal its partial and political nature (Knöchelmann, 2021; Machen & Nost, 2021). Academic, scientific, and publishing institutions often reinforce epistemic hegemony by privileging certain languages, methodologies, and cultural norms, further entrenching the dominance of specific knowledge systems (Ireland-Blake et al., 2025; Knöchelmann, 2021).

Thus, the limited representation of psychodynamics within contemporary mainstream W-WOP might be symptomatic of a deeper epistemic imbalance rather than a mere fluctuation of research interests. On this basis, the theoretical contribution of the present study to global research in psychological science was to the ongoing debates within CWOP about paradigm plurality and disciplinary self-reflection in psychological science itself. The following section outlines how this critical lens was applied methodologically to assess the presence and positioning of psychodynamic work within the institutional core of Western W-WOP.

METHODS

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study employed documentary analysis as its methodological approach. Documentary analysis (Danilovic, 2021; Shaw et al., 2004) is a systematic research method for examining pre-existing materials, distinguished by its use of documents as data sources rather than the generation of new empirical data through human subjects research. It involves a four-step structured procedure (i.e., screening materials, extracting data, analyzing data, and distilling findings) for reviewing and interpreting documents. Beyond describing surface-level content, documentary analysis incorporates both descriptive

and interpretative dimensions, enabling the researcher to identify latent meanings, implied assumptions, and underlying ideologies (Shaw et al., 2004).

In line with this method, the present study conducted a documentary analysis of two major W-WOP conference programs, such as the EAWOP 2023 congress and the SIOP 2025 annual conference. These two conferences were selected because they represent the primary institutional venues for the WOP scientific community in Europe and North America, respectively, and therefore function as key indicators of current research coverage and agenda-setting within mainstream W-WOP, thereby suggesting what is currently visible and legitimized within the field. The 2023 and 2025 editions were chosen because they were the most recent available conference programs at the time of the study, providing the most current snapshot of the field's thematic landscape and maximizing relevance to contemporary W-WOP. A further pragmatic consideration was feasibility. Given the documentary nature of the study and single-author coding, focusing on two flagship conferences enabled a systematic and transparent screening of all programme records while maintaining analytic consistency. Extending the sampling frame further into the past would increase volume but also introduce a risk of reduced representativeness for current disciplinary priorities, given shifts in topical emphasis and conference structures over time. Whereas the EAWOP 2023 congress program was autonomously downloaded from the EAWOP website (<https://eawop.org/congress/past-congresses>), a link to the archived SIOP conference programs (<https://archive.org/details/SIOPConfPrograms/>) was provided by a SIOP Member Communications Specialist contacted via e-mail at siop@siop.org.

Both conference programs were reviewed in full. The titles, abstracts, and keywords of all available program records, including posters, oral presentations, symposium contributions, panel sessions, and keynotes, were screened to identify contributions that explicitly referenced psychodynamic approaches, topics, concepts, or constructs. Coding was done by a single coder (D.G.). To ensure consistency, screening was guided by a predefined set of terms (e.g., psychodynamics, psychoanalysis, socioanalysis, fantasy). Each record was manually verified through close reading of titles, abstracts, and keywords to confirm that psychodynamics was invoked as relevant. Records were included when they explicitly referenced a psychodynamic tradition, a recognized psychodynamic approach in organizations, or psychodynamic interpretive concepts as central to the contribution. Records were excluded when they addressed adjacent content (e.g., emotion, identity, stress, personality, unconscious bias) without explicit psychodynamic framing. Borderline cases were managed conservatively. For example, contributions mentioning attachment theory were included only when attachment was presented as a theoretical lens for work and organizational phenomena rather than a generic relational variable, whereas contributions focused on affect or relationships without attachment or psychodynamic framing were excluded. The author conducted both coding and data extraction. Screening and coding were performed in two passes, that is, an initial classification of all records followed by a second review of all candidate records and the final included set. Discrepancies between passes were resolved by returning to the original program entry and applying the written inclusion/exclusion rules. All coding decisions were logged in the spreadsheet as an audit trail, alongside the extracted variables. The following information was systematically extracted from each identified contribution and entered into a structured Excel spreadsheet:

- title and author(s) of the contribution;
- psychodynamic topic(s) or approach(es) represented;
- type of contribution (e.g., poster, oral presentation, symposium paper, keynote);
- country of origin, based on author(s)' affiliation(s).

Data analysis proceeded in two phases. First, a descriptive quantitative analysis was conducted by computing absolute and percentage frequencies for each extracted category, allowing for an overview of the prevalence and distribution of psychodynamic work across the two conferences. Second, the descriptive patterns were interpreted through a CWOP lens – particularly the concepts of epistemic hegemony and the rational-system conception of work – to reflect on how conference structures and

disciplinary norms may shape the visibility and positioning of psychodynamic perspectives. This interpretive step was therefore theory-driven and inferential, rather than a separate qualitative content analysis of programme texts, which was not formally undertaken given the limited depth of conference program entries.

RESULTS

MAIN RESULTS

A total of 2,620 program records were reviewed across the EAWOP 2023 (n = 1,469) and SIOP 2025 (n = 1,151) conferences. Of these, nine contributions explicitly referenced psychodynamic theories, concepts, or approaches, representing 0.34% of all available submissions. Seven contributions (77.8%) were from EAWOP 2023, whereas the remaining two (22.2%) were from SIOP 2025. Table 1 summarizes the data extracted for each psychodynamic contribution.

Table 1. Characteristics of identified psychodynamic contributions

Conference	Author(s)	Topic	Type	Country
EAWOP 2023	Bloem, J.	Attachment theory	Poster	Germany
EAWOP 2023	Degen, J.	Interpretative analysis of fantasies	Symposium paper	Germany, Italy
EAWOP 2023	Fodor, O.	Attachment theory	Oral presentation	Romania
EAWOP 2023	Sherman, R.	Socioanalysis	Keynote speech	USA
EAWOP 2023	Straatman, T.	Attachment theory	Poster	Germany
EAWOP 2023	Tonelli, L.	Systems psychodynamics	Poster	South Africa
EAWOP 2023	Tonelli, L.	Systems psychodynamics	Poster	South Africa
SIOP 2025	LaBella, M.	Socioanalysis	Poster	USA
SIOP 2025	Naudet, E.	Attachment theory	Poster	USA

COVERED TOPICS

The nine psychodynamic contributions identified across the two conferences encompassed a limited but conceptually diverse range of topics. Figure 2 summarizes the frequency distribution of the psychodynamic topics identified. The most frequently represented theme was attachment theory (n = 4), typically applied to leader-follower relationships (Naudet, 2025), individual employee antecedents of organizational outcomes (Fodor, 2023), or employee-organization bonds (Bloem et al., 2023; Straatman et al., 2023). Two contributions reported socioanalytic perspectives, one employing it as an approach to study the effects of leader bottom-line mentality (LaBella, 2025), and the other mentioning it as a part of a broader contribution on personality assessment approaches (Sherman, 2023). Two further presentations adopted a systems psychodynamics approach, focusing on unconscious organizational dynamics in a post-pandemic scenario (Tonelli et al., 2023) and organizational transformations (Tonelli & May, 2023). Finally, one contribution deployed interpretative analysis of fantasies to examine exploitation among information technology workers (Degen et al., 2023).

TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Figure 3 visualizes the distribution of contribution types. The majority of contributions (Bloem et al., 2023; LaBella, 2025; Naudet, 2025; Straatman et al., 2023; Tonelli & May, 2023; Tonelli et al., 2023) appeared as posters (n = 6). One contribution (Fodor, 2023) was delivered as an oral presentation, and one (Degen et al., 2023) was included as a symposium paper. A single keynote speech (Sherman, 2023) referenced psychodynamic ideas.

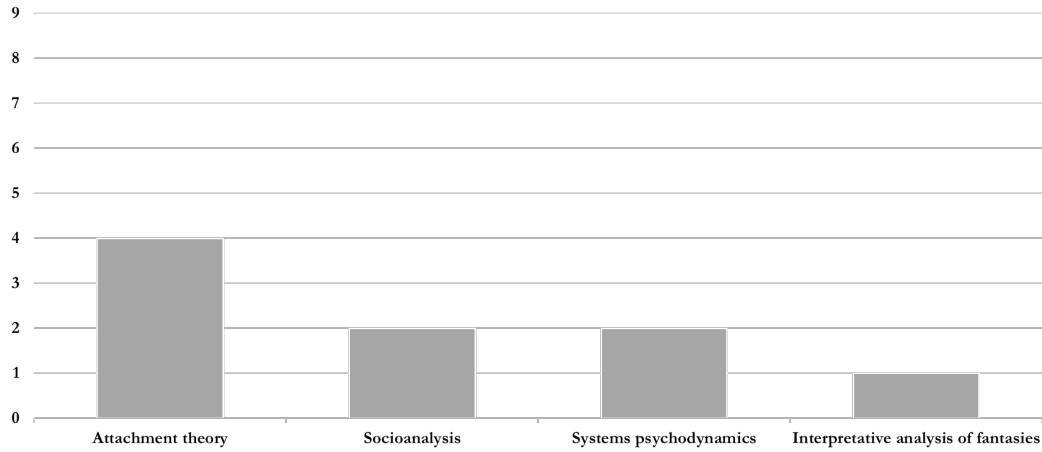


Figure 2. Topics covered by the identified psychodynamic contributions

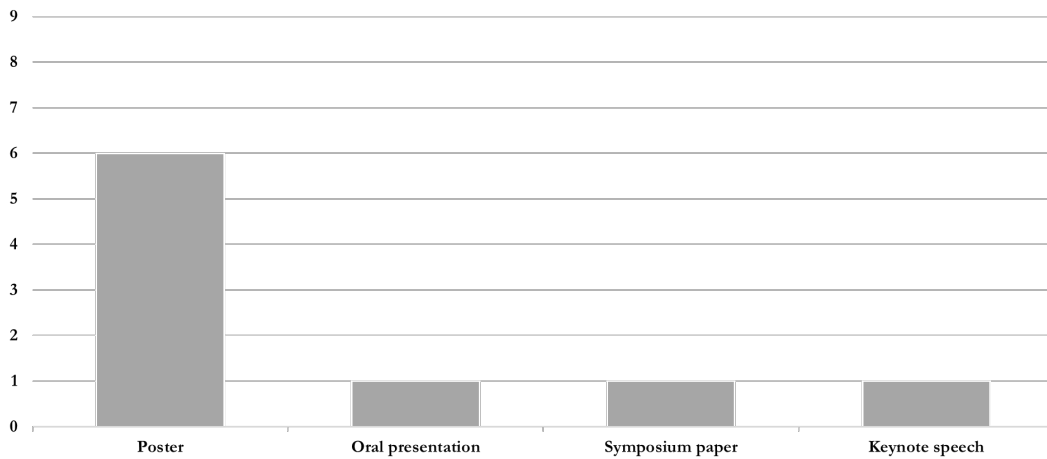


Figure 3. Types of identified psychodynamic contributions

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Figure 4 shows the country distribution of the identified psychodynamic contributions. The largest groups of contributions came from the United States ($n = 3$) and Germany ($n = 3$), followed by South Africa ($n = 2$), Italy ($n = 1$), and Romania ($n = 1$).

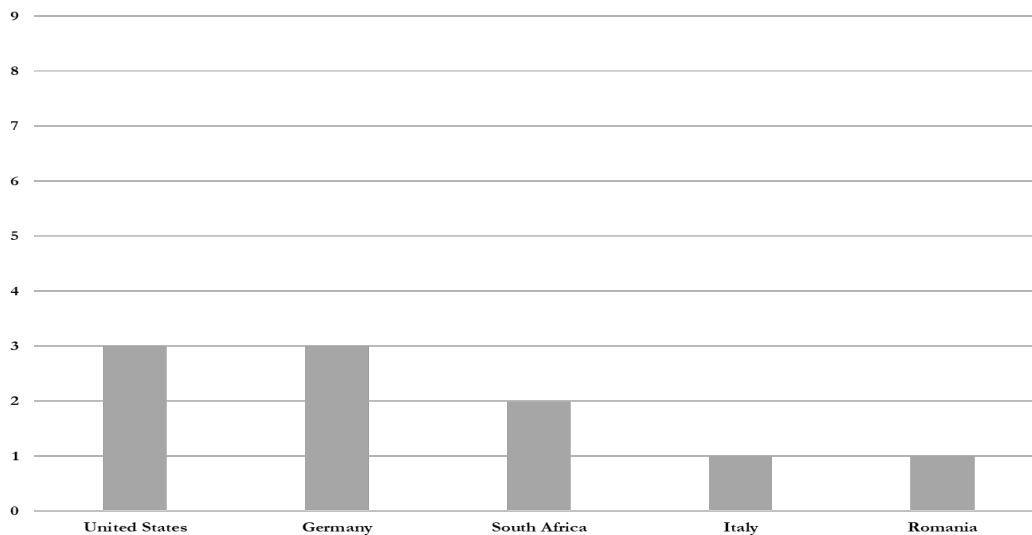


Figure 4. Countries of the identified psychodynamic contributions

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the presence and positioning of psychodynamic approaches within mainstream W-WOP, investigating the extent to which psychodynamic topics are represented in the scientific programs of EAWOP 2023 and SIOP 2025, and interpreting patterns emerging from a documentary analysis through a CWOP perspective (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). Across venues, geographic origins, and presentation formats, the findings converge on the conclusion that psychodynamic inquiry occupies a marginal and structurally peripheral position within mainstream W-WOP. Psychodynamic contributions constituted a very small minority of all programme items. Most appeared as posters, with only isolated instances of symposium papers, oral presentations, and a single keynote reference. Thematically, contributions were diverse but extremely sparse, lacking any sustained cluster of topics or continuity across conferences. Geographically, they originated from a small set of countries, reflecting a fragmented and weakly institutionalized presence across the W-WOP landscape. Taken together, these patterns point to an underrepresentation that might be interpreted as not incidental but structural. Psychodynamic perspectives may not be simply fewer in number but appear relegated to the margins of scientific visibility and agenda-setting in contemporary W-WOP.

EPISTEMIC HEGEMONY IN MAINSTREAM W-WOP

The marginalization observed in the empirical analysis can be interpreted through the lens of epistemic hegemony in mainstream W-WOP. Epistemic hegemony refers to the dominance of particular ways of knowing and producing knowledge such that alternative epistemologies become delegitimized, peripheral, or invisible. In the current context, the overwhelming dominance of positivist, cognitive, behavioral, and quantitative paradigms constitutes the prevailing epistemic order within which W-WOP defines legitimate research problems, valid methodologies, and credible scientific contributions. Psychodynamic scholarship, by contrast, rests on clinical, interpretive, and qualitative modes of inquiry, foregrounding unconscious processes, emotional life, conflict, ambivalence, and irrational dimensions of work. These topics challenge rather than fit neatly within the dominant representational and measurement-oriented logics that structure mainstream W-WOP. As a result, psychodynamic work is not merely underrepresented but positioned as epistemically incongruent with the field's dominant norms. This dynamic mirrors broader critiques within Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP), which argue that mainstream W-WOP systematically privileges epistemologies that emphasize prediction, control, and optimization while neglecting phenomena that resist quantification, regulation, or managerial assimilation (Hornung, 2025).

In this sense, the scarcity of psychodynamic contributions is symptomatic not only of limited scholarly activity but of a deeper epistemic narrowing. Conference structures, including track themes, submission categories, and selection processes, may operate as mechanisms through which epistemic hierarchies are reproduced. The concentration of psychodynamic contributions in low-visibility formats (e.g., posters) and their absence in keynotes or curated symposia illustrates how institutional gatekeeping reinforces what counts as central, rigorous, or desirable knowledge in W-WOP.

Adopting a CWOP perspective, this study contributes to ongoing conversations around epistemic pluralism, showing how the marginalization of psychodynamics is intertwined with normative assumptions about what constitutes “appropriate” organizational knowledge. The findings underscore the need to interrogate disciplinary boundaries not as neutral reflections of scholarly activity but as socially constructed outcomes of epistemic power.

In addition to epistemic hegemony, the observed marginal presence of psychodynamics in mainstream W-WOP may also reflect supply-side constraints and institutional segmentation. First, the pool of scholars trained to conduct psychodynamic research in work and organizational settings may be comparatively small, given that mainstream training and publication incentives tend to favor positivist, measurement-driven approaches and functionalist problem framings (Hornung, 2025; Islam & Sanderson, 2022). Second, psychodynamic scholarship may be partially displaced into alternative venues – including specialist communities and infrastructures linked to systems psychodynamics and psychoanalytic organization studies – rather than being circulated through W-WOP’s central agenda-setting conferences (Fotaki et al., 2012; Fraher, 2004; Sievers, 2009). Third, the separation of W-WOP from clinical-psychoanalytic and critical-interpretive traditions can create institutional silos that render psychodynamic concepts less legible within mainstream venues, even when they address organizational phenomena directly (Fotaki et al., 2012). These complementary explanations suggest that marginalization is likely overdetermined, with epistemic dominance, training pathways, and venue boundaries mutually reinforcing one another.

THE WORKPLACE AS A(N IR)RATIONAL SYSTEM

A second explanatory lens emerges when considering the prevailing conception of the workplace itself within mainstream W-WOP. Drawing on Pratt and Crosina’s (2016) review of nonconscious processes at work, it can be stated that much organizational research implicitly treats the workplace as a rational system – a site where behavior can be explained through conscious cognition, deliberate choice, and controlled processes. This focus on conscious reasoning and observable behavior parallels the dominance of System 2 assumptions in organizational psychology, while rendering the non-conscious, emotional, and irrational aspects of work life peripheral or conceptually disruptive.

Psychodynamic approaches, by contrast, conceptualize workplaces as emotionally charged, conflict-laden, and defended social systems, where unconscious processes are constitutive of everyday organizational functioning. From this vantage point, organizational phenomena such as anxiety, resistance, dependence, aggression, identification, or splitting are not aberrations but foundational dynamics. Yet these dynamics seem to be systematically minimized or reframed as “noise” within rationalist paradigms that prioritize clarity, control, and conscious intentionality.

Pratt and Crosina (2016) highlight that organizational psychology has historically struggled to integrate the nonconscious, precisely because it troubles the field’s normative reliance on conscious, rational, and measurable processes. In this study’s findings, this struggle becomes institutionalized, in that the rational-system imaginary of W-WOP shapes not only theory but also what topics appear conference-worthy. Psychodynamic contributions, by foregrounding unconscious defences, emotional suffering, ambivalence, and symbolic meaning, disrupt the rational ideal of the workplace and its subjects. Their marginalization, therefore, is intelligible not only as epistemic exclusion but as a defence, at the disciplinary level, against confronting the irrational, conflictual, and nonconscious aspects of organizational life.

Thus, epistemic hegemony and the rational-system conception of organizations might operate in tandem, reinforcing a disciplinary order within which psychodynamic scholarship appears unintelligible, impractical, or scientifically marginal.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on the programs of two conferences within a specific two-year period. Although these conferences are influential in setting W-WOP agendas, findings may not generalize to all international venues or longer historical trajectories. Conference programmes reflect both author self-presentation and institutional selection processes and may not fully represent the broader research ecosystem of W-WOP. Moreover, the adopted strategy captures explicit psychodynamic references; therefore, psychodynamically informed work that does not name its lineage may therefore be underestimated. Finally, given the author's scholarly interest in psychodynamics, interpretive bias is possible, although this risk was mitigated by using transparent coding rules, conservative inclusion decisions for borderline cases, and maintaining a documented audit trail of classification decisions.

Second, the analysis is descriptive and interpretive rather than explanatory at a causal level. It maps patterns of representation but cannot definitively infer the mechanisms through which submissions are produced, selected, or rejected. Third, the coding relied on information publicly available in conference programmes, while deeper insights into author intentions, review processes, or thematic fit decisions might provide further valuable information.

Finally, the study focuses exclusively on psychodynamics, whereas other marginalized frameworks (e.g., feminist, critical race, postcolonial, or practice-based approaches) may exhibit similar exclusionary patterns that remain outside this analysis.

Despite the marginal presence of psychodynamic contributions, a notable set of non-psychodynamic conference submissions addressed topics highly compatible with psychodynamic inquiry, such as anxiety, trauma, identity, affectivity, unconscious motivation, narcissism, guilt, grief, perfectionism, envy, anger, mentalizing, and self-awareness. This suggests substantial untapped potential for integrating psychodynamic perspectives into broader W-WOP debates.

To move toward greater epistemic pluralism, several recommendations follow:

- *Strengthen psychodynamic visibility in mainstream venues:* Conference organizers could explicitly include tracks or symposia dedicated to psychodynamic, clinical, or qualitative approaches, increasing visibility and reducing the structural barriers to participation.
- *Encourage cross-paradigmatic integration:* Scholars working on topics involving emotion, identity, trauma, or sensemaking may benefit from engaging psychodynamic theories, which offer sophisticated accounts of unconscious and irrational dynamics often absent in mainstream frameworks.
- *Expand methodological repertoires:* W-WOP would benefit from a broader acceptance of clinical, interpretive, and qualitative methodologies, which are necessary to investigate unconscious processes that cannot be adequately captured by purely quantitative approaches.
- *Investigate epistemic gatekeeping mechanisms:* Future research should examine how review processes, track structures, editorial policies, and institutional norms shape what becomes visible or invisible in W-WOP. Ethnographic or interview-based studies of conference committees could illuminate these mechanisms.
- *Study the nonconscious in organizational contexts:* Future empirical work should systematically explore nonconscious processes at work, including defence mechanisms, projective identification, emotional containment, and systemic anxieties – areas that remain profoundly understudied in mainstream W-WOP.
- *Map the global landscape of psychodynamic W-WOP:* Given the geographic dispersion observed, future studies could analyze institutional networks, doctoral training pathways, and national

traditions to better understand where and how psychodynamic W-WOP knowledge is produced.

Taken together, these directions aim not simply to increase representation but to foster a more epistemically pluralistic and reflexive discipline, capable of engaging with the full complexity (conscious and nonconscious, rational and irrational) of organizational life.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the presence, distribution, and positioning of psychodynamic perspectives within two major Western Work and Organizational Psychology (W-WOP) conferences – EAWOP 2023 and SIOP 2025 – using a documentary analysis of 2,620 programme records. The findings reveal a strikingly limited representation of psychodynamics, amounting to only 0.34% of all contributions. These few contributions were fragmented across disparate topics, dispersed across a small set of countries, and concentrated primarily in low-visibility formats such as posters. Together, these patterns illustrate not only quantitative underrepresentation but also a deeper structural marginalization of psychodynamic scholarship within mainstream W-WOP.

Interpreted through the frameworks of epistemic hegemony and the rational-system conception of the workplace, these findings point to systemic factors shaping what is considered legitimate, desirable, or credible knowledge in the field. Dominant positivist, cognitive, behavioral, and quantitative paradigms continue to structure disciplinary norms, narrowing the epistemological bandwidth through which organisational phenomena are explored. Psychodynamic approaches – attuned to unconscious processes, emotional complexity, irrationality, and conflict – remain misaligned with these entrenched paradigms and therefore struggle for recognition within institutionalized venues of knowledge production. Simultaneously, the persistent conceptualization of workplaces as rational systems diminishes the perceived relevance of psychodynamic inquiry, which foregrounds precisely the nonconscious and affective dynamics typically overlooked in mainstream theorizing.

These challenges highlight the need for greater epistemic pluralism in W-WOP. Expanding the scope of conference tracks, diversifying methodological repertoires, and creating space for clinical and interpretive paradigms would support a more comprehensive understanding of organisational life. Importantly, many mainstream W-WOP submissions already engage with themes, such as anxiety, identity, affectivity, trauma, or motivation, that could be enriched by psychodynamic perspectives. This indicates an opportunity not merely to include psychodynamics as a niche specialty but to integrate its insights into broader disciplinary conversations.

Future research should extend the present analysis by examining additional conferences, publication patterns, editorial structures, and doctoral training pipelines to better understand the institutional mechanisms sustaining epistemic hierarchies in W-WOP. Studies exploring how nonconscious processes operate in contemporary organizations – aligned with psychodynamic and critical perspectives – could substantially deepen the field's capacity to address the complexity of work in a turbulent global landscape.

In closing, the underrepresentation of psychodynamic scholarship is not only an empirical finding but a call to action. Addressing epistemic hegemony and expanding W-WOP's theoretical and methodological horizons are essential steps toward cultivating a discipline that fully engages with the richness, ambiguity, and emotional depth of human experience at work. Promoting psychodynamic inquiry is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a necessary contribution to building a more reflective, inclusive, and humane Work and Organizational Psychology.

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AUTHOR



Davide Giusino, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology. He is affiliated with the Applied Experimental Psychology (AEP) Lab of the Department of Humanities at the University of Foggia, in Italy. His research interests include psychology applied to work and organizational contexts, occupational well-being, and workplace mental health interventions. He is also a psychologist registered with the Order of Psychologists of the Puglia Region (n. 7954) and a socio-constructivist psychodynamic psychotherapist in training.