

Celebrating 30 years of Organization: Epistemic pluralism, caring for our community and politics of hope

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the special issue celebrating 30 years of Organization. We first reflect on the continued relevance of our mission against the background of a management and organization studies field that is at once more open to the themes, epistemologies and methodologies we care about, and more dominated by a market logic and surveillance enforced through datafication technologies. Amidst this contradictory condition, we ask ourselves the important questions: What difference *can* we make and *how* do we best make it? We then renew our commitment to curating a space of epistemic pluralism, caring for our transnational, inclusive community and nourishing a political project of hope. For each of these ambitions, we mention the concrete actions we have been taking and those we plan to take in the near future. We conclude with an invitation to our readers, reviewers, board members and associate editors to participate in all activities ahead of us to build Organization further.

Keywords

Anniversary, epistemic pluralism, inclusive community, politics of hope

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This last issue of 2023 celebrates 30 years of *Organization* with renewed political awareness of its relevance amidst deepening social and economic cleavages, ecological destruction and political and military conflicts. In 1993, this journal was launched as an intellectual forum and an academic community openly defiant of disciplinary norms grounded in a positivistic ontology and functionalist orthodoxy and of the long-standing belief in ideals of linear progress towards the ‘good society’ and social order. *Organization* pioneered intellectual curiosity, epistemic pluralism, critical inquiry, inclusion and reflexive engagement with the world of management, organizations and organizing.

At the time, only a few years after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the post-WWII bipolar order, the founders of *Organization* argued that organization studies should resist the temptation to increase internal consensus in view of establishing intellectual hegemony, following the example of other disciplines such as economics. Among ‘rapid and disjunctive change’, they took a stance for embracing exploration, to nurture the ‘intellectual renewal and regeneration’ of organizational scholarship. Already back then, they envisioned a journal in which this exploration would be carried out collectively, by a geographically and epistemically diverse community including senior and junior scholars and governed through practices fostering an ‘amorous language’, a dialogue respecting difference. Expressing unseen ambition and optimism, their words remain to date at the heart of our work and deeply resonate with our current predicament.

Our intellectual, political and ethical legacy

Over the past decades, *Organization* has played crucial role in broadening the organizational research agenda by ‘pushing the envelope’. We have expanded the repertoire of management and organization studies thematically, epistemologically, theoretically, ethically, methodologically and stylistically. We have directed attention towards social phenomena that were previously largely marginalized or completely neglected. Think of topics such as corporate power, gender, racial and intersectional oppression and inequality, resistance, postcolonial and decolonial struggles, neoliberalism, global value chains, environmental disasters, grassroots organizing and alternative economies, degrowth, activism, and ethics in their manifold manifestations, to name only a few.

To unsettle, *Organization* has engaged with a wide variety of – mainly critical – traditions of thought that had previously been excluded from the field conversation. These traditions have helped us see management, organizations and organizing in new ways, question taken-for-granted truths, unveil power and inequalities and explore resistance and alternatives to the status quo. The scholarship we have curated has advanced distinctive vocabularies to talk about and understand the challenges contemporary organizations, societies and our planet face. These vocabularies have countered the depoliticization of management and organization studies by mainstream perspectives that too often eschew contradictions in order to advance normative stances and/or technocratic solutions to problems. One can think of the literatures on Corporate Social Responsibility, Grand Challenges, the Sharing Economy, the Circular Economy, Corporations with a Purpose and the Sustainable Development Goals, and many more. Yet envisioning desirable and viable alternatives and strategies to achieve them stands or falls on confronting of such contradictions. This is a responsibility we cannot abdicate, as late capitalistic institutions are notoriously resilient and co-optation is regrettably the norm, not the exception.

Organization has increasingly been the home of research that has the overt ambition, next to developing critique, to inform practice sustaining change towards organizing life in more socially and environmentally just and viable forms. Importantly, this practice begins with us and our ability to self-reflect about our own role, as producers of academic knowledge that does not merely represents but rather performatively reproduces or confronts the status quo. We have provided a place

where our experiences of research-related work, both in the field and in the telling, work in the classroom, in the business school and in society more broadly can be shared and learning can take place. Looking for more self-reflective and responsible ways to engage with each other and others, striving to ‘walk the talk’, is at least as defining of who we are as the topics, the worldviews and the theories that trigger our imagination and our action. Although change is never only about ourselves, it does start with the recognition of the challenges of our ‘organizational selves’ and the roles we play, the challenges inherent in mundane practices through which we become scholars, colleagues, authors, reviewers, editors, activists. . . It is in this doing that contradictions and ethical dilemmas come to the fore, the many ways in which we too often fail to live up to our own ethics and utopias, while still remaining deeply committed to them.

A more (in)hospitable present

Looking around, persisting inequalities, hierarchies and struggles notwithstanding, we would dare to say that the broader scholarly field of management and organization studies is overall more diverse and open to what we have to contribute than it used to be when *Organization* was launched. Our editorial boards, editors and contributors reflect a wider community, more diverse in terms of intersecting geographies, gender, sexuality, color, class, culture, religion, language, abilities. . . and epistemes. We engage with a broader variety of societal issues than we used to be. We are also, importantly, more self-reflective about how we partake in reproducing inequalities and privileges as part of globalized academia.

And yet, this openness comes with an extremely high price. Many will agree with us that the management and organization studies landscape is today also more, not less, fierce. ‘Progress’ is not only a theoretically deceptive grand discourse, it is also one that in the facts poorly captures the conditions of our every-day experience. Some of the worrying evolutions of academic publishing addressed by the last anniversary editorial, 10 years ago, have not only set forth but have accelerated, fundamentally redefining academia. This is an ongoing process whereby, despite policy narratives of Open Access and social impact, the grip of multinational corporations on the process of academic knowledge tightens. They increasingly control data and set the rules by which we exist, are evaluated and rewarded as individuals, departments, business schools, universities and, of course, journals.

For sure, academia was never a level-playing field and *Organization* has been, from the very beginning, part of it. Nonetheless, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that how we organize the production, quality control and the sharing of our work has not become more equal and fair. Fast evolving digital technologies offer increasing possibilities to track how academic knowledge circulates and is used on a global scale. Companies, universities, funders and the state have thus unprecedented means to monitor, evaluate, rank and discipline us. The public nature of much of these metrics entails that we are all involved in disciplining each other, which largely occurs through our own individual practices of engaging with these metrics. This means that we are all increasingly required to make sure we ‘score’. We are expected to brand ourselves and our work, on social media and elsewhere, to accelerate its circulation, increase its visibility and curate its likability and shareability, activities that have become key to be part of academia. Independent of our ethical stance about AI, we will be increasingly tempted to let it write for us to increase our chances of getting the message across and reach a broader public. Some also see inclusionary potential in this evolution, for both authors and audiences, but we remain cautious.

Combined with the deepening precarization of academic work, these evolutions are particularly nefarious for those who are entering academia today and trying to establish themselves as scholars. Increasingly reorganized as ‘gig’ work and in the name of its ideology, academia becomes

increasingly inhospitable for the most vulnerable among us (in terms of seniority but also, relatively, of precarity, networks, geo-political location, language, capital. . .). They are summoned to conform to make a chance of getting the next publication out, an extra citation, funding or any type of recognition that might help to secure a decent job. At the same time, we are aware none of us is immune from these transformations. Nor are journals such as *Organization*.

To the extent that we partake in neoliberal global academia, we are all under increased pressure *not* to unsettle, discouraged precisely from exploring and taking those risks that are so foundational to us as a critical community. Or better, unsettling is legitimate only to the extent that is conducive to getting published and traction through citations, the currency that renders us valuable or valueless. Naming the political economy within which we exist and are made intelligible to others exposes the contradictory nature of this intellectual and political project and its inherent fragility. Needless to say that we are highly aware of these contradictions. They probably constitute the ethically most challenging dimension of our roles as editors. They make us doubt about whether our decisions are not only defensible relative to the principles and the values we have chosen to abide by, but occasionally even whether they matter at all in the end.

But there is more. Members of our community, *Organization* as a journal (although we are certainly not alone), and our intellectual project have been the target of more overtly violent and repressive backlashes. We refer here to the recent shutting down of well-established departments and the sacking of renowned scholars working in critical traditions and/or on gender and power issues in various countries. And to virulent attacks, often through social media but not only, towards authors and journals, including ourselves. Not to mention the digital and live threats, mobbing and attacks experienced by our colleagues who have publicly denounced harassment, inequalities and oppressions, or who simply do their job in the classroom. Or the inconvenient truth told by the uninterrupted sequence of scandals about abusive behaviour and sexual harassment in higher education. Often, this violence is legitimized by politicians' public support for 'free speech' and the 'neutrality' of academia. In some contexts, they pass new laws to censor books, erase whole areas of research and teaching and ban the people involved in them.

These events are by no means limited to specific national contexts, they are diffuse. They tell us that, despite the current renaissance of conversations drawing from critical intellectual traditions across disciplines and the historical expansion of organizational scholarship informed by them, we are amidst heightened struggle and need to remain vigilant and engaged. It is painful to realize that institutions, including academia, have as a whole not become *more* hospitable but *less*. Even behind 'progressive-liberal' discourses of equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion, interdisciplinarity and sustainability, to name only a few, gloomy practices persist, are tolerated and even purposively fomented.

The difference we want to make and how we try to make it

Against the background of this intellectually more diverse yet institutionally highly inhospitable context, as editors, board members, authors, reviewers and readers of *Organization*, we keep asking ourselves the questions: What difference *can* we make and *how* do we best make it?

Today, we renew our commitment to make a difference in three important ways. First, we pledge to curate an intellectual space of epistemic pluralism and dialogue where curiosity and exploration remain central and the unsettling becomes, if anything, more radical. Second, we will continue to strengthen our transnational, inclusive critical community that cares for its members and supports them. Third and last, we commit to an affirmative political project of hope. Let us elaborate before we move to introducing the contributions to this anniversary special issue.

Curating and protecting an intellectual space of epistemic pluralism

Organization was born as a ‘neo-disciplinary’ project to create and support ‘new analytical narratives and ethical discourses’ from a ‘critical, reflective, and engaged’ position against established ‘knowledge interests’. This project has of course not merely been one of expansion of management and organization studies research beyond the ‘canon’. It has also been, importantly, one of taking an overt stance *against* that canon by unveiling what it hides from view that we should want to see. (Think for instance of the anti- and de-colonial approaches and the feminist work we have championed.) We did not only counter the expectation that our scholarship mimic the natural sciences and economics, we also explicitly refused, from early on, to be the handmaid science of capital. While the multiple crises we live by have increased the currency of this stance, back in time it was largely seen as an illegitimate one, placing us *outside* the academic conversation.

We are of course aware that fostering epistemic pluralism is an open-ended, unfinished project, a dot on the horizon. Such pluralism requires us to continuously interrogate our own assumptions, the norms and practices that shape our conversations: How can we organize so that Organization keeps embracing multiplicity and queering knowledge in late capitalism and the Anthropocene? How should this intellectual space look like for multiple voices to bring to the forefront other, marginalized ways to see, tell and reshape organizing? How can we increase their legitimacy and value them? How do we ensure that these traditions, which originate in other disciplines, across the globe and in the lived experiences of subordinate groups help us unpack, denaturalize, critique and re-envision the social differently not only in words but also in practice? And most importantly: How do we protect this intellectual space?

These are not abstract rhetorical questions, they are the very concrete ones that guide our work. In the past few years and months, we have attempted to strengthen this space through appointing associate, social media and management editors who, we trust, will help us extend and further anchor that pluralism in the journal through their outstanding expertise, networks, reputation and, crucially, their commitment to this pluralistic project. We are also inviting them to more proactively take up, individually or collectively, this space and co-shape it, beyond their (important) role in the peer-review process and special issues. As a result, Organization and its editors have increasingly been visible in PhD summer schools, seminars, workshops and conferences, most recently in Canada, Chile and the Philippines to reach out to new audiences, including the Academy of African Business and Development.

In collaboration with academic communities with similar ambitions, we have long been recognizing innovative critical work through the sponsoring of awards. And we have offered a forum for remembering and celebrating those whose work has left an indelible mark on this space can be remembered and celebrated after they much too early left us. We have also put quite some efforts and energy into protecting this space: Organization has been vocal at those times when its ideas and values, as well as of scholars who identify with it were attacked through social media and when departments were closed and scholars sacked because of their critical work in the name of corporate restructuring.

Nurturing a transnational inclusive critical community

Our conversations take place among a community without which such epistemic pluralism would not exist. From the very beginning, Organization has not only been about *what* we publish, but also, importantly, about *who* gets to talk and *who* gets to listen. We ask ourselves which practices can help us mitigate those institutionalized power inequalities which we cannot ourselves fully redress, and which privilege some bodies and geographies by constituting them as producers of

knowledge and turning other ones into its receivers. We remain painfully aware that being part and parcel of neoliberal academia, we are ourselves inevitably marked by patriarchy, racism, ableism and the multiple forms of domination that constitute this global institution deeply rooted in Western history, traditions of thought, colonial politics and capitalism. Although we receive manuscripts from across the globe and many find their way to the pages of the journal, there is still a long way ahead to ensure that scholars and scholarship from the Global South become a substantial part of our community, making it truly transnational.

As mentioned, we have been working to expand our community through the renewal of our associate editors' team and our editorial board, and will keep doing so in the years to come. This is reflected in the pledge we recently made to carry the ethical and political momentum generated by the transnational anti-racist movement spurred by Black Lives Matter, MeToo# and other activist groups that fight worldwide for social justice, such as the Indigenous Rights Movement, in the management and organization studies community and beyond. Our board recently decided to switch to a full first name in the reference list to better acknowledge authors. Moreover, we now offer authors the possibility to add, next to the abstract in English, a version in another relevant language, such as for instance the language of the subjects where the fieldwork was conducted, to make the research more accessible.

When COVID-19 hit, we facilitated the creation of CMS In Touch, a virtual forum organized by a fully autonomous team which we have sponsored since. Led by incredibly committed colleagues, this initiative supported the community throughout the pandemic and is today providing the digital, organizational and communication infrastructure for transnational academic activities at no cost to all those interested. As we believe it is particularly important to create more accessible opportunities for early career academics to find a place in the broader critical community Organization is part of, starting in 2024, we will make additional support available to scholars belonging to minoritized groups working in critical traditions who wish to submit to the journal and make use of this support.

Committing to an affirmative political project of hope

No longer episodic and discrete, crises – social, economic, cultural, ecological and, ultimately existential – have become a permanent and defining state of affairs that interrogates us, from our specific positions of highly unequally distributed vulnerability. We ask ourselves how this time impinges on our role as a critical community and journal: How should we respond? Crisis, we stress, should not become a mere rhetorical *dispositif* to signal one's allegiance, a tool to sustain detached, abstract thought that thrives on critique and sustains paralysis. Nor should crisis operate as a fetish to cling on to avoid confrontation with a painful truth, making it more bearable for us to carry on with academic business as usual, endorsing a form of passive nihilism.

We believe that Organization should be a place where we jointly confront crisis by building a politics of hope rooted in praxis, to use Ana Cecilia Dinerstein's words. We are of course not naïve and very aware of the contradictions of knowledge production amidst neoliberal capitalism. As an academic outlet, we still will produce inequalities and exclusions. What we seek to challenge, however, is the propensity not to engage in admittedly imperfect practices under the guise of avoiding the risk one might not live up to one's principles. Recognizing the tensions in which we are immersed, as critical scholars in the management and organization studies academia, should not lead us to undermine our own project. Cynicism is a too easy individual way out of the multiple contradictions that afflict us, an option many do not have if they want to survive. We choose to take responsibility and to embrace small and big acts of engagement with the challenges of the present, with the explicit ambition to make a difference through our work, our expertise and the power of

our community. Organization has an essential role in exploring, unveiling, creating and promoting new vocabularies of practice that can help action and activism for social justice.

At a time of renewed awareness of the violence of global capitalism both on humans and life on earth, we purposively solicit scholarship that explores alternative ontologies to it – such as indigenous, feminist, post-capitalist, queer, non-ableist, metabolic. It is in these ‘critical affirmations’ grounded in other ontologies, that we can generate collaborative, solidary and sustainable practices, subjectivities and relationalities to radically re-envision institutions. This type of work has featured prominently both in regular papers, Speaking Out, Acting Up articles and special issues over the years. It also involves reflecting more often on our own academic praxis as teachers, activists, administrators, facilitators, agitators, etc. We invite the critical community to make use of Organization to challenge existing institutions and prefigure better organizing for better future livelihoods. It is with the ambition of triggering our imagination that we have recently expanded our reviews with Media and Artefacts Review and the classical Book Review sections, through which authors can contribute to a politics of hope. During academic year 2023–2024, we will be working with our community at a new Organization Manifesto to renew and actualize our mission. This mission will be at the core of the first Organization virtual conference to be held in late 2024 and, we hope, biannually from then onwards.

Our many ways forward

With these ambitions in mind, we invited those who have contributed to making Organization over the past few years to share their reflection on an object of inquiry, a theoretical perspective, an area of study, an institution or anything which in their eyes deserves our attention. The 15 short contributions to this special issue therefore set a stage, open up avenues to be explored in the future. They are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrations of promising theoretical and political possibilities. We invite readers and authors to engage with these reflections and build on them in ways that, again, push the boundaries of what it means to be a critical scholarly community today.

The first two essays discuss the legacy and the future of feminism in organization studies. Susan Meriläinen, Janne Tienari and Mrinalini Greedharry’s ‘Feminist theorizing in organization studies: A way forward with Marta Calás and Linda Smircich’ opens with a reconstruction of the seminal contribution of two of Organization’s founders to feminist management and organization studies and their call for a ‘boundary-crossing feminist theorizing’ that is globally meaningful. In ‘To be accountable: The whiteness of feminist organisation studies’, Elaine Swan then develops a radical critique of feminism in our field, arguing that we need to discuss much more the privileges, hierarchies and exclusions associated with white feminism.

The next three essays plead for epistemic pluralism and justice and show what they can bring to the conversation. Nidhi Srinivas’s ‘Locating the global south in Organization’ analyses how the Global South has been portrayed in our journal and the need for our community to engage more deeply with the knowledge and traditions of thought originating in the Global South on their own terms, in a dialogue that is multidirectional and more balanced. In a similar vein, Ana Maria Peredo’s ‘The unsettling potential of indigenous organization’ calls our attention to how developing organizational research on indigenous organizing based on traditional knowledge and practices can help ‘unsettle the settled’ conversations in management and organization studies. In ‘Organization and the Arts: Critical Conversations on Expanding Meanings and Understandings of Who Matters’, Suhaib Riaz argues that engagement with the arts, and the arts from the Global South in particular, expands meanings by problematizing taken-for-granted perspectives. His analysis reveals the role of affect and exploring the experiences of marginalized communities.

Reflecting on the current ecological predicament, Julie Labatut's 'Toward a biosocial turn in management and organization research? Proposals for a paradigm shift' challenges mainstream understandings of the environmental crisis and its solutions. She proposes a 'biosocial' perspective where nature is no longer simply a context, but deeply entangled with organizational life. This relational approach seeks to transcend traditional boundaries between the environment and society to better account for the role of organizations in the Anthropocene.

The two next contributions offer critical analyses of new technologies and their impact on organizing. In 'The politics of post-human technologies: Human enhancements, artificial intelligence and virtual reality', Ismael Al-Amoudi calls our attention to the need to advance reflexive research on post-human technologies to attempt to make them more inclusive and democratic. Moreover, he expands the discussion on technologies towards the central democratic question of who should manufacture and control these tools to make room for a needed conviviality. In 'Digital Financialization and Surveillance Capitalism in the Global South: The New Technologies of Empire', Ghazal Mir Zulfiqar discusses the digital colonization of finance as a technology of the empire enacting a new form of surveillance capitalism.

Honouring Organization's interdisciplinarity, Kyoung-Hee Yu and Andreas Pekarek bring to our readers a contribution to the strengthening of the longstanding dialogue between Critical Management Studies and Industrial Relations. In 'Bridging Industrial Relations and Critical Management Studies: Work, resistance, and alternate imaginings in late capitalism', the authors remind us of our common roots and interest in work and its continuous transformation. They propose different forms of cross-fertilization that we hope will encourage authors to reenergize this conversation in our journal.

The three next contributions reflect more broadly on the limits of the conventions surrounding journal articles as the main genre for the production of knowledge in management and organization studies and the business school as the place where such knowledge is produced. 'What's up with our obsession with the theoretical contribution: A means to an end or an end in and of itself?' by Ajnesh Prasad and 'What is the point of method sections?' by Nick Butler and Sverre Spelstra both question traditional conventions of academic publishing. In 'The good Business School', Carl Rhodes and Alison Pullen echo and expand the debate around the neoliberal business school and offer ways to re-assess its purpose.

A commemorative special issue of *Organization* would not do without controversial texts. Damian O'Doherty's 'And a note on "Some Notes for Anniversarifiers"' and Martin Parker's 'Our magazine, or, why does no-one read us?' provide a counterpoint in their own unique and eloquent ways, sketching what one could easily name the anti-Organization as we have depicted our journal in this editorial.

Finally, we end with a bang. Alexandra Bristow's 'From the archive with love: A tribute of memory and hope for the future of *Organization*' celebrates the formidable work by editors, reviewers and authors in these first 30 years of *Organization*. A 'must read' deep dive into our history.

An invitation to join and enjoy

The contributions to this special issue recollect and reflect on the journey of *Organization* until today and point to important directions for the future. In a world facing unprecedented challenges, we renew our commitment to a critical organizational scholarship that embraces epistemic pluralism, advances solidarity and inclusive practices and offers hope for the future.

Aware that there is nothing self-evident about *Organization*'s existence or its mission, we would like to conclude by expressing our deep gratitude to all those that have contributed to making this

community what it is today: intellectually and politically vibrant and caring. It is the vision, courage and perseverance of many colleagues before us that have taken us here. We are referring to those who led the journal in the past, but also, importantly, to all those without whose work Organization would not have been: past and current associate editors, managing editors, book, media and artefacts editors, social media editors, guest editors, authors, reviewers, the publisher's staff and, last but not least, our readers.

We look forward to seeing you at the digital workshop celebrating this anniversary and starting the process of writing our Manifesto, which will be held at the beginning of December and in all the events ahead to build the future of this journal and our critical community of scholars and activists. . . Join and enjoy!


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Patrizia Zanoni is a full professor of Organization Studies at the new School of Social Sciences of Hasselt University (Belgium), which she is currently building from scratch with a team of enthusiastic scholars, educators and administrators. Her research, teaching and policy advisory work deals with difference under capitalism. She is interested in critique as much as the political practice of building alternatives. She was associate editor of Organization between 2012 and 2019 and has been co-Editor-in-Chief since 2020. Patrizia believes in this journal and the strength of the community that makes it.

Marcos Barros is professor at Grenoble École de Management (France) and co-Editor-in-Chief of Organization. His research interests include alternative forms of organization, technology, and critical perspectives on identity and resistance. Organization has been his home since his early PhD, initially to discover a new world of ideas that connected to and enriched his critical view of the world, and, afterwards, as a community where he could enter in conversation with like-minded passionate colleagues and develop his own contribution towards a more inclusive and equal society.

Rafael Alcadipani is a full professor of Organization Studies at FGV-EAESP (Brazil) and a fellow of the Brazilian Scientific Council (CNPq). He was awarded his Ph.D. by the Manchester Business School. His research is inductive and problem-centered which has led him to analyze issues of power, resistance, and identity in and around organizations. He is associate editor of Organization, Human Relations and Gender, Work and Organization. To him, Organization is a breath of fresh air in a field dominated by many orthodoxies. It is an eye-opener for our field on issues of power, inequality, exclusion, domination, and colonialism. Organization is also a vehicle for hope in our field and the world.