

Call for Papers

Third International Symposium on Process Organization Studies

Theme: How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts and Materiality in Organization Studies

www.process-symposium.com

16-18 June 2011, Corfu, Greece

Conveners:

Paul R. Carlile, Boston University, USA (carlile@bu.edu)

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Keynote Speakers:

Karen Barad, Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness, University of California at Santa Cruz, USA, author of *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*

Wanda J. Orlikowski, The Eaton-Peabody Professor of Communication Sciences and Professor of Information Technologies and Organization Studies, Sloan School of Management, MIT, USA

Lucy Suchman, Professor of Anthropology of Science and Technology, Department of Sociology and Co-Director, Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, UK, author of *Human-Machine Reconfigurations*

Rationale: What is a Process Perspective?

Process Organization Studies (PROS) is a way of studying organizations that unfolds from process metaphysics – the worldview that sees processes, rather than substances, as the basic forms of the universe. A process orientation prioritizes activity over product, change over persistence, novelty over continuity, expression over determination. Becoming, change, flux as well as creativity, disruption, and indeterminism are the main themes of a process worldview.

Seeing process as fundamental, such an approach does not deny the existence of states, events, and entities, but insists on unpacking them to reveal the complex processes -

sequences of activities and transactions - that are involved in and contribute to their constitution. As process philosopher Nicholas Rescher notes, “the idea of discrete “events” dissolves into a manifold of processes which themselves dissolve into further processes”. A process point of view invites us to acknowledge, rather than reduce, the complexity of the world and, in that sense, it is animated by what philosopher Stephen Toulmin calls an “ecological style” of thinking.

A process view rests on an anti-dualist and relational ontology, namely the recognition that everything that is has no existence apart from its relation to other things. Therefore, long established dualisms such as mind and body, reason and emotion, humanity and nature, individual and collective, organism and environment, agency and structure, ethics and science, need to be overcome. Focusing on *inter*-actions is preferred to analyzing self-standing actions.

A process orientation is sensitive to the constructive role of embodied-cum-embedded agency in bringing about the world we come to experience as an independent structure and to the experiences generated by human and non-human agency. Unlike substances, which do not include one another but are seen as nested, standing under one another – *sub-stantia* -, experiences include other experiences and grow out of the integration of bodily and mental events into something new. Cognition and symbolic interaction are understood to be embedded into ways of life and arising from embodied interactions with the world, mediated by artifacts. Temporality is a constitutive feature of human experience, and processes unfold in time. Human phenomena cannot be properly understood if time is abstracted away.

Purpose, Venue, and Organization

The aim of this Symposium is to consolidate, integrate, and further develop ongoing efforts to advance a sophisticated process perspective in organization and management studies.

The Process Symposium is an annual event organized by the new annual series *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies* (Series Editors: Ann Langley and Haridimos Tsoukas), published by Oxford University Press, and it takes place in a Mediterranean island, in June each year. The theme of the first Symposium (in June 2009, Pissouri, Cyprus) was “Sensemaking and Organizing” and of the second (in June 2010, Rhodes, Greece) was “Constructing Identities in and around Organizations” (the latter’s structure, themes and abstracts can be seen at www.alba.edu.gr/pros).

About 60 papers are usually accepted, following a review of submitted abstracts by the conveners. Authors of accepted papers will have the opportunity to interact in depth and share insights in a stimulating, relaxing, and scenic environment.

The Third Symposium will take place on **16-18 June 2011**, at Aquis Corfu Holiday Palace Hotel (<http://www.aquisresorts.com/hotels/corfu/holiday-palace-hotel>), Corfu, Greece. The Symposium venue, comfortable, beautiful, and situated by the sea, will

provide an ideal setting for participants to relax and engage in authentic and creative dialogues.

The Symposium is organized in two tracks:

1. One is the General Track, which includes papers that explore a variety of organizational phenomena from a process perspective.

More specifically, although not necessarily consolidated under a process metaphysical label, several strands in organization and management studies have adopted a more or less process-oriented perspective over the years. Karl Weick's persistent emphasis on *organizing* and the important role of sensemaking in it is perhaps the best known process approach. Henry Mintzberg's, James March's, Andrew Pettigrew's, and Andrew Van de Ven's work on the making of strategy, decision making, organizational change, and innovation respectively, also shows an clear awareness of the importance of process-related issues. Current studies that take an explicitly performative (or enactivist or relational) view of organizations have similarly adopted, in varying degrees, a process vocabulary and have further refined a process sensibility. Indeed, the growing use of the gerund (*-ing*) indicates the desire to move towards dynamic ways of understanding organizational phenomena, especially in a fast-moving, inter-connected, globalized world.

Since a process worldview is not a doctrine but an orientation, it can be developed in several different directions, exploring a variety of topics in organizational research. For example, traditional topics such as organizational design, leadership, trust, coordination, change, innovation, learning and knowledge, accountability, communication, authority, self-organization, technology, etc, which have often been studied as "substances", from a process perspective can be approached as situated sequences of activities and complexes of processes unfolding in time. Perspectives drawing on post-rationalist philosophies, social constructivism, discourse and narrative theory, practice theory, actor network theory, path-dependence theory, complexity science, Austrian economics, socio-cultural, discursive and ecological psychology, activity theory, business history, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interaction are examples of a *process* orientation to the study of organizational phenomena that treats them not as *faits accomplis* but as (re)created through interacting agents embedded in discursive practices, whose actions are mediated by institutional, linguistic and objectual artifacts.

2. The second is the Thematic Track, which includes papers addressing the particular theme of the Symposium every year.

For 2011 the theme is: **How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts and Materiality in Organization Studies.**

A description of the theme and its importance follows below.

“Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter” (Karen Barad, 2003; p. 801).

The idea that objects should be included in theoretical accounts of organizing is not new. More than half a century ago, for example, Tavistock researchers introduced the idea of “socio-technical systems”, to indicate that organizing processes entail both people and material technologies and artifacts (Trist and Bamforth 1951; Passmore 1988; Pickering 1995). The notion of “socio-technical systems”, in various guises, has subsequently become a distinguishing feature of contemporary social studies of technology (Latour, 1996; Law, 1994; Knorr Cetina, 1997; Mol, 1999). One of the distinctive traits of this approach has been treating human practices as constellations of both intersubjectivity and interobjectivity (Latour, 1996; Orlikowski, 2007; Nicolini, 2009). In Barad’s terms, human agency always follows from the constitutive entanglement between materiality and sociality (Barad, 2003). This sociomaterial (no dash) lens, in turn, makes it possible for a different approach, quite different from the humanist preoccupation with the individual actor living in a world separate from things (Suchman 2007, p.261).

In spite of these developments, however, the purchase of such sociomaterial attitude in organization and technology studies has been limited, mainly to a focus on boundary objects (Star, 1989; Carlile 2002; Bechky, 2003). While the latter are important, additional aspects of materiality have been engaged with only to a limited extent. Organizational phenomena, even when understood processually, are still largely conceived of as a confluence of minds and intentions, or as purely communicative undertakings. It is for that reason that Barad’s epigraph above is both timely and relevant, and that it is particularly critical to ask in which ways objects, artifacts and materiality actually matter in organizational activity.

This Call for Papers is an attempt to bring together researchers from different backgrounds and traditions, from organization to technology studies, who share an interest in thinking through not only what materiality means in the study of organizations, but, more importantly, the consequences that this may generate in how we conceptualize and conduct empirical research in organization studies. We believe that making materiality “matter” is more complicated than it sounds for it is not just a backdrop to the social, or “things” that generate consequences for what actors do. A focus on materiality and objects requires in fact that we revisit key concepts such as individuality, agency, social construction, action, representation, recursivity, technology, and structure. It pushes us to question “thingness” and the associated representational idiom, and substitute them with action and performativity. By questioning the social-material distinction and focusing instead on how these two are mutually constituted, we are forced to shift from thinking in terms of essences (material or social) to thinking about the world as the result of acting. Rather than seeing the world in terms of dualities, we are pressed to accept “intra-actions” (the idea that it is only through a specific practical engagement that the boundaries and properties of any phenomenon become determinate) as the fundamental condition of being. Very soon, we are forced to shift from pre-formed substances to *performed relations* and to abandon the consoling reassurance of stability for the notion that durability is the contingent outcome of work and effort. A coherent

attention to objects, artifacts, infrastructure and materiality, what Orlikowski (2007) has called the inherent sociomaterial nature of organizational practices, opens a sort of Pandora's box that reveals a whole new realm of conceptual and empirical possibilities.

In the Third Process Symposium we invite participants to join us in the exploration of the content of this Pandora's box. Topics for discussion may include (but are not limited to):

- What is meant by the entanglement of the social and material in everyday organizational life and how can such entanglements be studied?
- What are the consequences of materiality for organizational processes?
- How should technology be studied from a coherent sociomaterial perspective?
- How do we compare, if at all, different sociomaterial performances?
- How do we think about affordances of the material world on what actors can or can't do? How does this affect performativity? And what does this add to our understanding of "technology"?
- Does bringing in materiality make us conceptualize structure and agency or objectivity and subjectivity in new ways? Or are we just putting new wine into old bottles?
- Will bringing in materiality in a more direct fashion "improve" our efforts as researchers and how can we know? What new questions can we pose? What new insights can be developed?

We welcome both theoretical and empirical explorations from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary traditions. We hope that this Symposium will inspire not only organization theorists but also scholars of innovation, communications, information technology, strategic practices and other fields whose researchers are interested in the sociomateriality of organizing. Our only requirement is that the contributions are thought-provoking, innovative, focused, and rigorous.

Following a rigorous review process, a selection of papers will appear in the third volume of *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies* in 2012.

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Submissions

Interested participants must submit to Haridimos Tsoukas (process.symposium@gmail.com) an abstract of about 1000 words for their proposed contribution by **January 31st, 2011**. The submission must be made via email and it must be a Word attachment. It should contain authors' names, institutional affiliations, email and postal addresses, and indicate the track for which the submission is made (General or Thematic), while the subject matter line of the email should indicate "Process Symposium". Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **February 28th, 2011**. Full papers will be submitted by **May 23rd, 2011**.