Special Issue Call for Papers

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Publication of Karl E. Weick’s *The Social Psychology of Organizing*

Submission Deadline: 31 August 2018
Submit to: business.jms@durham.ac.uk

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Karl E. Weick’s *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, first published in 1969, and revised in 1979 (Weick, 1969/1979), is considered a classic in the field of organization and management studies (Anderson, 2006). It has been translated into more than five languages and was designated in 1996 by the US publication Inc Magazine as one of the nine best business books ever written.

The most important theoretical contribution of *The Social Psychology of Organizing* is to have replaced organization as the key analytical category with *organizing*, thus shifting the focus from entities to processes (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017; Bakken and Hernes, 2006). Specifically, Weick did not so much seek to create a behavioral theory of organization, as to offer a psychological, process-oriented account of organizing, centrally concerned with agency and action: *how* organization emerges rather than what organizations consist of (Taylor and van Every, 2000). Czarniawska, 2008; Chia, 1999; Hernes, 2008, 2014; Langley et al, 2013). It is not an exaggeration to say that ever since the publication of *The Social Psychology of Organizing* we have seen the
gerundizing of organization studies: the persistent effort to understand organizational phenomena as ongoing accomplishments (Langley et al., 2013; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017).

The Social Psychology of Organizing was hugely influential in initiating new research programs in organization studies over the last fifty years (Anderson, 2006). Major process-sensitive developments that have focused on organizational culture, cognition, sensemaking, attention, resilience, high-reliability, mindfulness, improvisation, change, strategy, and organizational learning and knowledge, would have been unthinkable without Weick’s seminal contributions (Weick, 1995, 2001, 2009).

At a time of unprecedented inter-connectedness and communication on a global scale, sustainability challenges, awareness of corporate responsibility, and rapid technological and social change, Weick’s “ecological” (Toulmin, 1990; Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011) approach is more relevant than ever. He has sensitized us to look for processes, for ongoing change, for streams of experience, for emergence, for complexity, for novelty, for unintended consequences, for loops (Tsoukas, 2005: Ch.1; Lichtenstein, 2014). In a world of increasing complexity, his advice is very apposite: “complicate yourself” (Weick, 1979:261). Indeed, The Social Psychology of Organizing may be seen as a persistent call for complex thinking and action to deal with ever-increasing complexity in late modern societies (Tsoukas, 2017).

To celebrate the 50th anniversary, this Special Issue addresses, evaluates and explicates the continuing relevance of this work in various fields of management and organization studies. In the spirit of requisite variety, we welcome contributions from a broad spectrum of sub-fields, research communities, and perspectives. Contributions might address, but are not limited to, issues such as the following:

- The Social Psychology of Organizing is underlain by “strong process thinking” (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017:4), drawing mainly on evolutionary epistemology, ethnomethodology, and versions of cybernetics. How might process thinking about organizations be further advanced? What alternative conceptions of process are possible and desirable? Is it preferable to talk about processes rather than the process of organizing?

- It is widely thought that The Social Psychology of Organizing helped launch the cognitive turn in organization and management studies (Narayanan et al., 2011; Meindl et al., 1994). How have subsequent developments moved forward, in a process-sensitive manner, our understanding of cognition in organizations?

- While a psychological treatise, The Social Psychology of Organizing is strong on cognition but short on emotions, the body, materiality, the
pragmatics of language, and, to some extent, the organizing role of communication. Yet, subsequent research has suggested that all of them are important aspects of organizational behavior (Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Dale and Latham, 2015; Hindmarsh and Pilnick, 2007; Catino and Patriotta, 2013; Cooren et al., 2006; Taylor and Van Every, 2000; Orlikowski and Scott, 2015; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Maitlis et al., 2013; Vogus et al, 2014; Whiteman and Cooper, 2011). How should they be incorporated into Weick’s model of organizing? Moreover, how could cognition, emotions, the body, materiality, language, and communication be studied both “conjunctively” (Tsoukas, 2017) and in a process-sensitive manner?

- *The Social Psychology of Organizing* focuses on human behavior and face-to-face interactivity (Patriotta and Spedale, 2009) while being reticent on technologically-mediated modes of communication. How is organizing accomplished in conditions of virtual communication? (Baralou and Tsoukas, 2016; Leonardi, 2011). Moreover, how are distributed forms of organizing, as manifested in open-source software development, spontaneously organized social movements, and agents distributed in space and time, accomplished? (Garud and Karnoe, 2003; Lee and Cole, 2003; Ribes et al., 2013; Puranam et al., 2014)

- Organizations are increasingly thought of as complex systems (Allen et al., 2011; Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011; Tsoukas, 2005). How can further developments of key Weickian themes in *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (e.g. feedback loops, unintended effects, circular causality, emergence) shed new light on organizational complexity and its management? (Lichtenstein, 2014; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011a). Furthermore, how can collective thinking and interpretation in organizations become more complex to tackle complex issues? (Colville et al., 2012; Gavetti and Warglien, 2015). How can organizations enhance their requisite capacity to cope with complexity (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2015)?

- “Enactment” has been a key concept of *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, and has been widely drawn upon in subsequent organizational research, including strategy, organizational learning, sensemaking, etc. (Morgan, 1986; Weick, 1988, 2009; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015; Mintzberg et al., 2008; Patriotta, 2003; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). How has this concept been used so far, in what contexts, with what effects? How can it be further developed, especially in line with insights offered by the enactivist perspective in cognitive science (Stewart et al., 2010; Thompson, 2007; Varela et al., 2017)?
The Social Psychology of Organizing often has a paradoxical feel, or at least makes the reader aware of counter-intuitive paradoxes, the best known of which is Weick’s dictum “how can I know what think till I see what I say?” How have the paradoxes Weick discusses in The Social Psychology of Organizing informed subsequent paradox theory in organization studies (Smith et al., 2017), and how does paradox theory further develop Weick’s insights about the paradoxical nature of organizations?

How can Weick’s model of organizing be used to inform organizational research at different levels of analysis, from groups in organizations to organizations embedded in institutional fields, to networks of organizations? (Abolafia, 2006; Dobbin, 2008; Patriotta et al., 2011; Weber and Glynn, 2006). In particular, what is the relationship between individual interpretive frames and the broader conceptual categories and meaning structures provided by society, or, to put it differently, between cognitive maps and habitus? (Dobbin, 2008). How are institutions, in the form of rules, dominant understandings and norms, drawn upon and reshaped through organizing processes?

Although Weick does not use the term, self-organization – the emergence of organization as an immanent order – is an important implication of his model (Anderson, 1999; Tsoukas, 2015, 2013; Boisot and McKelvey, 2010; Lichtenstein, 2014; Weick, 2001, 2009). How should our understanding of self-organization be understood, at different levels of analysis, in connection with communication technologies that make coordinated distributed agency possible, and in light of relatively recent developments in complexity science?

The process of organizing occurs in time (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Hernes, 2014; Gephart et al., 2010; Patriotta and Gruber, 2015), yet a systematic treatment of time and temporality is missing in The Social Psychology of Organizing. How should they be incorporated in contemporary versions of processes of organizing?

Sensemaking research owes a lot to The Social Psychology of Organizing, yet the connections between Weick’s model of organizing and sensemaking need further investigation (Sutcliffe, 2013). What are the links between sensemaking and organizing, especially if the making of sense is not viewed as a mainly cognitive matter? (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Blatt et al., 2006; Sutcliffe et al., 2016; Patriotta, 2003, 2016; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015; Holt and Cornelissen, 2014).

Issues in the study of organizations, such as power, politics, responsibility and ethics, and institutions, the importance of which is now widely
recognized, are missing in *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). How might they be developed to expand Weick’s process model of organizing? For example, what is the underlying ethics that informs Weick’s organizing? (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015; Sonenshein, 2007) How is power drawn upon in the three stages of the process of organizing (enactment, selection, and retention)?

- Prior to Weick’s work on *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, Simon (1976) and March and Simon (1958) developed the concept of “bounded rationality”. Yet, without dismissing it, Weick underscores the ex post facto justificatory role of rationality (Brunsson, 1982; Cabantous et al., 2010). If so, how is rational action possible? What is the role of rationality in the deliberate creation, maintenance and change of organized settings?

- What style of theorizing has characterized *The Social Psychology of Organizing*? What does Weick’s theory accomplish, and how? What view of theory underlies the book and how is it related to practice? (Cornelissen, 2006; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011b; Tsoukas, 2017). How is the quest for theoretical generality reconciled with the focus on specific, context-sensitive, and agent-dependent processes? How has subsequent process-oriented research tackled these questions?

We encourage theoretical and empirical articles that are creative, integrative, innovative, and/or put forth possible enrichments or challenges to Weick’s ideas.

**Submission process and deadlines**

- The deadline for submissions is **31 August 2018**.
- Manuscripts should be submitted by e-mail to Margaret Turner at business.jms@durham.ac.uk
- Papers will be reviewed according to the JMS double-blind review process.
- Informal enquiries relating to the Special Issue, proposed topics and potential fit with the Special Issue objectives are welcomed. Please direct any questions to the Guest Editors.
References


