

Call for Papers

Seventeenth International Symposium on Process Organization Studies

www.process-symposium.com

Theme:

Designing Organization – Organizing Design: A Process Perspective

General process-oriented and theme-focused papers are invited

25-28 June 2026

Minoa Palace Resort, Chania, Crete, Greece

<https://www.minoapalace.gr>

Conveners:

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Keynote Speakers:

Caroline Hummels is a Professor of Design and Theory for Transformative Qualities at the department of Industrial Design at the Eindhoven University of Technology. She focuses on being-in-the-world theories, imagination, and participatory sensemaking. She researches and questions transforming practices and societies through theoretical lenses, in which philosophy informs design practice and design practice is used to philosophise to tackle imminent societal challenges.

Brian Pentland, Brian Pentland is the Main Street Capital Partners Endowed Professor in the Department of Accounting and Information Systems at Michigan State University. He is a leading scholar in the study of organisational processes and routines and has published extensively on how their dynamic evolution transforms organizational life.

Jennifer Whyte is the Director of the John Grill Institute for Project Leadership and a Professor in the School of Project Management in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Sydney. She conducts interpretive research on practices and has published on future making as emancipatory inquiry, visualization and complex project organizing.

Rationale: What is Process Organization Studies?

Process Organization Studies (PROS) is a way of studying organizations that is grounded in process metaphysics – the worldview in which processes take precedence over substance. A process view rests on a relational ontology, a performative epistemology, and a dynamic praxeology; focuses on becoming, change, and flux, and pays particular attention to forms of agency; prioritizes process over outcome, activity over product, novelty over stasis, open-endedness over determination; invites us to acknowledge, rather than reduce, the complexity of the world and, in that sense, it is animated by what philosopher Stephen Toulmin called an “ecological style” of thinking.

Purpose, Venue, and Organization

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

PROS is an annual event, which takes place in a Greek island or resort, in June every year. Details of all hitherto Symposia, including topics, conveners and keynote speakers, can be seen at www.process-symposium.com.

The **Seventeenth Symposium** will take place on **25-28 June 2026**, at Minoa Palace Resort, Chania, Crete, Greece (<https://www.minoapalace.gr/>). The Symposium venue, comfortable, relaxing, and situated by the sea in one of the most beautiful Greek islands, will provide an ideal setting for participants to relax and engage in creative dialogues. PROS is renowned for offering participants the opportunity to interact in depth, exchange constructive comments, and share insights in a stimulating, relaxing, and scenic environment. Around 140 papers are usually accepted, following a review of submitted abstracts by the conveners.

As is customary by now, the Symposium is organized in two tracks – a *General Track* and a *Thematic Track*. Each track is described below.

1. The General Track includes papers that explore a variety of organizational phenomena from a *process* perspective.

More specifically, although not necessarily consolidated under a process philosophical 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 was an early and decisive contribution in the field. Early management and organizational research by Henry Mintzberg, Andrew Pettigrew and Andrew Van de Ven was also conducted from an explicitly process perspective. In the last couple of decades, several organizational and management scholars have applied variations of process-related issues in their research. Current studies that take an explicitly performative (or enactivist/relational/practice-based) view of organizations have similarly adopted, in varying degrees, a process vocabulary and have further refined processual understanding of organizational life. 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, crisis-ridden, globalized world.

Since a process worldview is not a doctrine but a sensibility – a disposition towards the world – it can be developed in several different directions. For example, traditional topics such as organizational routines, leadership, trust, coordination, change, innovation, learning and knowledge, accountability, power, communication, authority, materiality and technology, etc., which have often been studied as “substances”, can from a process perspective be approached as *performative accomplishments* – as situated sequences of activities and complexes of processes unfolding in time. A process view treats organizational phenomena not as *faits accomplis*, but as created and recreated through interacting embodied agents embedded in socio-material practices, mediated by institutional, linguistic and material artifacts.

Papers exploring any organizational research topic with a process orientation are invited for submission to the General Track.

2. The Thematic Track includes papers addressing the particular theme of the Symposium every year.

For **2026** the theme is:

Designing Organization – Organizing Design: A Process Perspective

Organization design refers to ‘how work is cut up and how you put it back together again’: how work is organized in production processes and how these processes are controlled and coordinated to enable an organization to achieve its goals and produce the intended outcomes in interaction with its environment (Dunbar & Bechky, 2017). Stimulated by Simon’s (1969) seminal work, there has been a long-standing debate about design as the science of how ‘things ought to be’, of finding satisficing alternatives to the current status for products, processes, organizations or systems. It has inspired the development of design methods from the 1960s onwards, which sought to formulate systematic approaches to shaping complex systems. Yoo, Boland & Lyytinen (2006) argued for treating organization design as a verb and an ongoing activity, based on their analysis of the architectural practices of Gehry Partners that create architectural designs that respond to the unique resources and constraints of each project while also producing a recognizable gestalt that serves as the Frank Gehry signature. In turn, organizational approaches to job design have been applied to the work of product designers to create conditions for heedful interrelating in design practice (Lauche, 2005). The question of how organizations can and should be designed is also of high practical relevance – it has been argued that managers are in fact designers who need to develop workable alternatives rather than simply understand the status quo (Boland & Collopy, 2004).

Popularised under the over-used term of ‘design thinking’, scholars and practitioners have been drawn to the idea that the messy, iterative process of imagination could serve as a template for what managers should do when dealing with complex organizational issues. The debate moved away from developing rational approaches to acknowledging the ‘thrownness’ – *‘Geworfenheit’* in Heidegger’s terms – in the midst of things, with no clear beginning, no stable representation and a constantly evolving situation (Weick, 2004).

Most mainstream approaches draw on the idea of not only a sound configuration but contingent fit (Galbraith, 1974; Thompson, 1967): a fixed structure that best corresponds to the combination of environmental demands and organizational goals. This conceptualisation sees organization design as an expert solution resulting in a blueprint for a new structure, typically with limited attention to how this new structure comes about, how it is implemented, and enacted or resisted on the ground. In this account of organization design, these fixed, idealised structures are very clearly seen as entities rather than processes: even if authors acknowledge that organization is an ongoing task, they talk about the need for a formal design and its components – goals, strategy, structure, production processes and coordination – from an ontology of substances (Burton et al., 2021). Most accounts do not question what organizations are for, in whose name the design is being developed, and who stands to benefit from it. Their stepwise instructions explicitly or implicitly accept the broader socioeconomic (i.e., capitalist) world order. Such approaches deserve critical scrutiny and debate not only for their philosophical underpinnings but also for their societal consequences.

Arguably, the roots of sociotechnical systems theory were characterised by a more processual conceptualisation of how organizations as a web of social and material relations came about and were shaped and enacted by managers, designers of technology and workers (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). The idea that organizations should be designed by focussing on their primary task and that creating semi-autonomous ‘flows’ supported by ‘minimum critical specifications’ would reduce disturbances and make work more meaningful carried with it an implicit weak process understanding. Sociotechnical systems theory has been heavily invested in what would later be called ‘workplace studies’ (Barley & Kunda, 2001) – often ethnographical accounts of how work is actually carried out and accomplished. The understanding that the social and the technical jointly constitute organizations has been further refined as ‘sociomateriality’ (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). While contemporary versions of sociotechnical systems theory mostly propose design principles that come with an implicit entitative ontology (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2009; Kramer et al., 2020), the roots of sociotechnical thinking, properly reworked, could still provide fertile ground for a processual perspective. Such a processual perspective needs to steer clear of the often-implicit forms of technological and structural determinism: Implementing a new software does not in itself create new patterns of action (Pentland & Feldman, 2008).

The need to rethink organization design also stems from recent developments in management. New organizational forms (e.g., temporary or networked organizations) and approaches (e.g., agile management) have created more flexible ways of organizing with a stronger focus on work

processes and routinised forms of coordination. Philosophically, this emphasis on processes still regards them as entities. More processual accounts of how organizing is designed and accomplished can be found in studies of bottom-up organizing, such as how insider activists design their collaboration and support across organizations (Stöber & Girschik, 2024).

Weick's (1979) notion that 'there are processes which create, maintain, and dissolve social collectivities, that these processes constitute the work of organizing, and that the ways in which these processes are continuously executed *are* the organization' has inspired many of us to explore forms of organizing. Strategy-as-practice scholars have questioned Chandler's iconic sequence of structure *following* strategy and instead emphasised processes of becoming and sustaining. The more recent debate about 'future making' (Comi et al., 2025; Wenzel et al., 2020) necessarily touches on questions about designing organizations and organizing design.

Finally, a body of scholarship in communication theory labelled "communication as constitutive of organization" (or CCO) (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), has offered a processual view of organizing that deserves greater attention from process researchers interested in design and organizing more broadly. Amongst other ideas, scholars in this stream of work have coined the term "organizationality" to express the idea of organization as an adjective – as a matter of degree (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019), suggesting that designing organizations and organizing design are precarious processes that may be more or less fully accomplished as they are enacted through communicative practices.

PROS 2026 will thus stimulate the debate about organization design from a processual perspective at the intersection of different academic traditions. There have been some inroads into organization design from an organizing and process perspective (Whittington & Melin, 2003; Dunbar & Bechky, 2017) that emphasize the ongoing work of adjusting, tweaking, redesigning how an organization operates as a contested learning process. Yet this remains unfinished business and there has been limited interaction between the academic communities of organization design and process research. There have been attempts to understand managing as designing that have drawn inspiration from how architects go about designing the materiality of organizations, most notably Frank Gehry (Boland et al., 2008).

Unknown to most organizational scholars, designers – both scholars and practitioners – have also approached questions of organizing, in particular in their attempts to address societal problems, and have reflected and theorized on what the process of designing involves (Hummels et al., 2024). While organizational scholars mostly analyze what has already happened and dissect why it went wrong, 'designerly' ways of thinking (Cross, 1982) can help to explore possible futures. Schön (1983, p. 79), who inspired both organizational and design scholars, conceived of the work of a designer as "he shapes the situation, in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation 'talks back,' and he responds to the situation's back-talk.' Also Dewey's work and pragmatism have become an influential research community that could inspire the dialogue between the academic communities (Dixon, 2023; Dixon & Kaszynska, 2024).

From a philosophical and engaged scholarship perspective, thinking about how we design ways of organizing also calls for the courage to engage in a debate about values that we seek to design for and compassion for those whose lives are affected by organizational design decisions (Howard-Grenville, 2021). Organizational design is not merely an academic debate – it requires ‘staying with the trouble’ and imaginative ways of rethinking how we engage with limited resources and fragile ecosystems (Haraway, 2016). This also asks for a sensitive and reflexive methodological approach in how we study practices and processes of designing change (Lauche et al., in print).

For PROS 2026, we invite papers that grapple with the following questions:

- How can a focus on designing help us to understand key organizing challenges in organizations?
- What are the implications of a stronger orientation towards organizational design for theorizing organizing?
- Which organisational processes and practices affect designing in organisations?
- Which values do or should guide organizational design practice today?
- How can we design for organizational reliability or resilience?
- How does organisational design research conceptualize the duality of stability and change?
- What is or can be the role of sociotechnical systems theory in designing organisations?
- How are technology and designing processes intertwined?
- What kind of design understanding underlies action design research, popular in IS research?
- What can be the role of systemic interventions in a theory of organizational design?
- How does organizational design play out in time and space? What is the role of place in designing organizations?
- To what extent does a design orientation require considering material, emotional, and bodily aspects?
- What is the role of design in the emergence of communities, ecosystem, networks, fields, etc.?
- How do communicative and material practices enact organizational design and organizationality?
- How do change processes and designing processes conceptually and empirically relate to each other?
- How do organizing design within and beyond organizational boundaries compare?
- What does it imply to design temporary organizations?

This list of questions is not exhaustive. It is offered to stimulate reflection, not to narrow debate, and we invite innovative, thoughtful, scholarly contributions from a diversity of perspectives to help advance our understanding of organizational designing.

Paper Development Workshop (25 June 2026)

Aim

The Paper Development Workshop (PDW) takes place on the first date of the Symposium and it consist of (a) “in progress” papers, and (b) panel discussions and keynote addresses. PDWs are designed to enable participants to: (i) refine their understanding of process thinking; (ii) share some of the methodological and theoretical challenges they have encountered in conducting, theorizing, and teaching process research, or putting process insights to practice in organizations; and (iii) elicit/offer suggestions about how researching, theorizing, and teaching process may be advanced.

PDW Papers

The aim of those sessions is to provide a stimulating, interactive context for researchers to develop their ideas and writing projects.

We invite submissions of extended abstracts from researchers who have papers at a relatively early stage of empirical research and/or theory development, on which they would like helpful feedback as to how their papers may be further developed and published. These papers will be presented and extensively discussed in a roundtable format. Leading scholars will chair the roundtables and join other participants in providing feedback on papers.

For PDW papers, we ask that presenters articulate their responses to three questions as part of their submission: (a) What is my research question and why is it important? (b) What scholarly conversation will do I aim to contribute, and how? (c) What do I mostly need feedback on? Papers need to be sufficiently thought-through so that participants can grasp and be able to respond to a coherent line of thinking. Papers that will already be under review at the time of the Symposium are *not* eligible.

PDW Panel Discussions

The PDW day will also include one or more panel discussions. Their aim is to provide a forum for scholarly discussion about process-related issues. We invite submission proposals for panel discussions related to any process-related topic, especially those connected to the 2026 conference theme.

An ideal submission will aim to discuss a topic of broad relevance to process research and the challenges it presents; consolidate, update and further advance our knowledge of it; or introduce new topics that process-oriented researchers need to know about.

Panel discussions can focus either on theoretical or methodological topics. Up to two panel discussions will be accepted. Topics related to the conference theme are particularly welcome. Proposals will be evaluated in terms of clarity, novelty, relevance for and attractiveness to the process studies community, and developmental possibilities for its participants. A PDW Panel Discussion will last for 90 minutes.

Submissions

General process-oriented papers, theme-focused papers, as well as PDW papers and panel discussion proposals are invited. Each author may make up to 3 submissions. Interested participants must submit an extended abstract of about 1000 words for their proposed contribution by **3rd February, 2026** through our main website:

www.process-symposium.com

The submission file should contain authors' names, institutional affiliations, email and postal addresses, and indicate the Track for which the submission is made (General or Thematic) or whether the submission is intended for the PDL. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **2nd March 2026**. Full papers must be submitted by **8th June 2026**.

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