

# Call for Papers

## Fifteenth International Symposium on Process Organization Studies

[www.process-symposium.com](http://www.process-symposium.com)

**Theme:**  
**Improvisation, resilience, and the ongoing (re)construction of  
organizations**

General process-oriented and theme-focused papers are invited

**24-27 June 2024**

### **Conveners:**

**Michelle Barton**, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, USA

**Miguel Pina e Cunha**, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal.

**Paula Jarzabkowski**, University of Queensland, Australia

**Mark de Rond**, University of Cambridge, UK

**Ann Langley**, HEC Montreal & University of Warwick, Canada

**Haridimos Tsoukas**, University of Cyprus, Cyprus & University of Warwick, UK

### **Keynote Speakers:**

**Brian Massumi**, Université de Montréal, Canada, author of *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

**Ann Miner**, Wisconsin School of Business, USA

**Kathleen M. Sutcliffe**, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, USA

### **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 is animated by what the late Stephen Toulmin called an “ecological style” of thinking.

### **Purpose, Venue, and Organization**

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

PROS is an annual event, organized in conjunction with the publication of the annual series *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies* (published by Oxford University Press), and it takes place in a Mediterranean (usually 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](http://www.process-symposium.com).

The **Fifteenth Symposium** will take place on **24-27 June 2024**, at the **Coral Beach Hotel and Resort, Cyprus** (<https://coral.com.cy/>). The first day of the Symposium, 24 June, will consist of the *Paper Development Workshops* (for details see below).

The Symposium venue, comfortable, relaxing, and situated by the sea in one of the most beautiful parts of Cyprus, will provide an ideal setting for participants to relax and engage in creative dialogues.

Around 140 papers are usually accepted, following a rigorous review of submitted abstracts by the conveners. 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.

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* 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. More recently, several scholars have taken further the process approach by applying a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies on a large number of topics. Current studies that take an explicitly performative (or enactivist/relational/practice-based) view of organizations have 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, 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 design, routines, leadership, trust, coordination, change, innovation, learning and knowledge, accountability, communication, authority, materiality and technology, etc., which have often been studied as “substances”, from a process perspective can 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 **2024**, the theme and a synopsis are as follows:

### **Improvisation, resilience, and the ongoing (re)construction of organizations**

Over the past decades, process views have gained prominence reflecting a recognition that organizations are continually constructed through the behaviors of their members. As Weick (2012:7) notes, “when we talk about organizing rather than organization, we acknowledge impermanence (we accept that coordination and interdependence are not stable but need to be reaccomplished).” This perspective has particularly resonated for scholars grappling with the realities of an increasingly dynamic and uncertain world. The ability to organize in the face of volatile, unpredictable or novel environments requires processes that embrace impermanence, uncertainty and change. Studies of improvisation and resilience have been particularly generative in recent years, as both consider the ways in which organizing is dynamically accomplished through the mindful interaction of actors with one another and their context.

Improvisation is understood as deliberate but unplanned actions, converging planning and execution (Cunha et al., 1999; Moorman & Miner, 1998). Weick (1993a, 1998) brought attention to improvisation as an inevitable and necessary practice in a dynamic world – and one which he viewed as essential to organizational resilience (Weick, 1993b). The construct of resilience has endured more ontological debate, but has coalesced around the process by which an organizational entity is able to maintain functioning within, and recover from, adversity (Linnenluecke, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). While both processes involve emergent and adaptive action, one important distinction is the role of adversity. Whereas most scholars agree that resilience cannot occur in the absence of adversity (e.g., Caza, Barton, Christianson, & Sutcliffe, 2020), improvisation is both a response to adversity and an approach to generating or leveraging opportunity (Mintzberg, 1996). Interestingly, both processes initially gained prominence in response to accidents, disasters and other crises (e.g., Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Powley, 2009) but have more recently been recognized as common in organizational life (Abrantes, Cunha & Miner, 2022; Bonnano, 2004; Linnenluecke, 2017).

One trend arising from the organizing lens is a move towards understanding organizational processes, including routines, as mindful efforts to (re)accomplish organizing, rather than mindless repetitions of static rules. Furthermore, as people organize, they bring into existence new structures, events and meaning (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1988), changing the context in which process is next re-enacted. Thus, in complex organized systems, novelty and change are pervasive and first-time events are the rule, rather than the exception (Tsoukas, 2019). This perspective has had important implications for the conceptualization of both improvisation and resilience.

First, improvisation and resilience are increasingly seen not just as responses to extreme and isolated events, but rather as processes fundamental to keeping the organization going in a constantly changing world. For example, if most things that happen to us happen for the first time (Tsoukas, 2019) then improvisation must be deeply embedded in organizational everyday life (Cunha et al., 2023) – an infra-ordinary occurrence (Cunha & Clegg, 2019), marked by a combination of invisibility and pervasiveness. Similarly, in an uncertain and volatile world, resilience organizing is a means of maintaining performance over time (Hollnagel & Woods, 2006), by absorbing strain during, not just after, adversity (Barton & Kahn, 2019; Kahn et al., 2018). Second, as acts of organizing, both these processes enact the contexts in which they occur. For example, a recent study of resilience organizing in teams found that actors not only responded to adversity, but also shaped it through their interdependent interpretations and behaviors (Barton & Sutcliffe, 2023). Similarly, new product development is often characterized by jazz-style improvisation in which members co-construct an emergent idea by building on semi-structures and tacit knowledge gained through practice and habituation (Bastien & Hostager, 1988, Kamoche & Cunha, 2001). Finally, insofar as an organizing lens privileges interrelating over structure, improvisation and resilience represent what Weick and Roberts (1993: 36) refer to as “mind as activity and not mind as entity”. That is, organizing occurs *between* people, as they co-construct knowledge about the emergent reality and their experience with it (Pakarinen & Huising, 2023). Thus, people co-construct improvisation capabilities via the shared understanding of a practice and its social rules. Recent scholarship has similarly shed light on a similar search for the relational mechanisms that underlie resilience organizing (Barton & Kahn, 2019; Kahn, Barton and Fellows, 2013; Olekalns, Caza, & Vogus, 2020).

Beyond these theoretical advances, the reality of the 21st century has rendered improvisation and resilience – and their interconnectedness – more salient. Heightened work demands, complicated global systems and multiple long-term global crises have created an organizational environment rife with disruption and uncertainty. The improvisation-resilience nexus has been articulated before (Coutu, 2002; Giustiniano et al., 2018; Rerup, 2001) but during the Covid-19 pandemic, this became even more evident. The world suddenly entered improvisational mode (Simpson et al., 2023; Wiedner, Croft & McGivern, 2020) and organizations continue to grapple with making sense of and managing a constantly disrupted world (Christianson & Barton, 2021).

We invite papers that engage with the processes of improvisation or resilience. We especially welcome studies about the interface between these. Some of the questions that would be appropriate include:

- How do these processes unfold over time? What evidence do we have for the mechanisms that drive their emergence? Does the way they unfold change over time?
- How does the nature of adversity, and context in general, impact these processes – and vice versa? For example, in what ways is resilience or improvisation in the face of long-term trauma or crisis (e.g., Covid) different from resilience or improvisation in the face of episodic threats/opportunities? What other contextual variables shape these processes? In what ways do these processes shape context?
- Are there *different* forms of resilience or improvisation? For example, do some entities enact these processes differently than others? If so, what determines this?
- How are these processes enacted *across* organizational levels (i.e., individual, group, organizational and interorganizational)? When might enacting resilience or improvisation at one level facilitate vs undermine them at another level? What are the processes for resilience and improvisational organizing across levels?
- There are many theoretical tensions in process organizing. We could do more to understand some of these, for example the tension between positive emotions vs. facing down reality, plausible vs accurate sensemaking, bricolage vs. contingency planning.
- How and why can these processes be learned?
- How do resilience and improvisation intertwine? When does one process facilitate the other? When and under what circumstances do they oppose?
- How does context and adversity impact the way improvisation is used in resilience organizing? For example, how do processes of resilience differ when improvisations are triggered in response to threats vs opportunities?
- How do mundane, seemingly trivial interactions participate in the construction of improvisation/resilience?

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## **Paper Development Workshops (XXXX, June 2024)**

### ***Aim***

The Paper Development Workshop (PDW) consists of (a) “in progress” papers and (b) panel discussions. 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 will 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 I contribute to, and how? (c) What do I mostly need feedback on? Draft 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 & Workshops***

Will include one or more panel discussions. Their aim is to provide a forum for scholarly discussion about process-related issues, especially those connected to the 2024 conference theme.

We invite submission proposals for panel discussions related to any process-related topic. 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 2 submissions. Interested participants must submit an extended abstract of about 1000 words for their proposed contribution by **February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024** through our main website:

[www.process-symposium.com](http://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 PDW. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **February 28, 2024**. Full papers must be submitted by **June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024**.