

Call for Papers

First Colloquium on Philosophy and Organization Studies (PHILOS)

Affiliated with the International Symposium on Process Organization Studies

5-6 September 2021

Conveners:

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Keynote Speakers:

Barbara Czarniawska, Senior Professor of Management Studies at Gothenburg Research Institute, School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, author of *Narrating the Organization* and *A Theory of Organizing*.

Theodore R. Schatzki, Professor of Geography, Philosophy, and Sociology, University of Kentucky, USA and Professor of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK, author of *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* and *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*

Rationale

Although not often discussed, generating theories about organizational phenomena inevitably involves philosophical questions. These are *meta*-questions that focus on the frameworks, categories, and concepts, that is, the dominant ways of thinking about, researching, and justifying knowledge claims within organization studies (Mir, Willmott and Greenwood, 2016; Tsoukas and Chia, 2011; Van de Ven, 2007). As such, philosophical questions are generated from *outside* the scholarly practices within which organization scientists ordinarily carry out their research.

Scholars can of course carry out their research without ever having to bother with philosophical meta-questions. However, when they stumble in their efforts to make sense of the empirical world; their theories are challenged by rival ones; or there are calls for conceptual clarity and integration as perspectives and theories proliferate, hitherto tacitly accepted frameworks and concepts of organizational inquiry come under scrutiny. Philosophical questions enter the scene (Powell, 2001).

Philosophical questions are essentially conceptual in character (Uygor, 1964): they are concerned with the nature (or meaning) of the concepts we use to describe, interpret, understand, and explain organizations (including the concepts 'describe', 'interpret', 'understand', 'explain' and 'organizations'). For example, questions such as how we should

think about organizational change, routines, strategy, learning, decision making, leadership, organizational ethics or aesthetics are not empirical but conceptual. They, therefore, invite us to think more clearly, systematically and/or creatively about the conceptual categories we habitually use to make sense of phenomena of interest. A philosophical approach to organization studies aims to scrutinize, critique, and elucidate key concepts, modes of thinking and researching, as well as ways of justifying knowledge claims commonly used in the scholarly practice of organization studies.

Similar to other institutionalized practices, organizational research legitimates and takes for granted particular ways of engaging with, observing, and talking about the world. Insofar as this is the case, some closure of meaning is inevitably brought about. Philosophical inquiry helps to counter such closure by questioning commonly accepted meanings underlying research practices, as well as cultivating an inquisitive disposition and openness. As Foucault (1985: 9) so eloquently put it: philosophical inquiry is first and foremost an “endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimizing what is already known.” Philosophical inquiry does so in three main ways (see Tsoukas, 2019).

Cultivating the attitude of “wonder”. “For it is owing to their wonder that men [sic] both now begin and at first began to philosophize,” notes Aristotle in *Metaphysics*. An attitude of wonder finds the ordinary to be extraordinary, the usual unusual. Once in “wonder”, one must *think* - new concepts need to be invented and fresh distinctions to be made. What is taken for granted needs to be questioned and what has withdrawn from focal attention is brought back to scrutiny (Tsoukas, 2019). Wonder seeks to create a form of inquiry in which the phenomenon of interest may reveal its *be-ing* (Heidegger, 1994). For example, rather than study particular distinguishing features of organizations (centralization, formalization, etc.), such inquiry may show how organizing is accomplished (Weick, 1979). Instead of assuming that routines are stable, it could show how stability is accomplished (Feldman et al., 2016).

Questioning received images of thought. Taken-for-granted frameworks, categories, and concepts constitute “images of thought” (Deleuze, 2004) that guide inquiry. An image of thought, notes Deleuze (2004:167), is a presupposition that takes the form “everybody knows that...”. Images of thought are tacitly accepted and non-reflectively practised in academic research. However, when researchers step back from their research practices to inquire about their theories (e.g. How can we think differently about and study organizational change, strategy or routines?), they enter the realm of meta-theory, where philosophical questions gain currency (Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2003; Tsoukas and Chia, 2011). Through meta-theoretical – philosophical – questioning, received images of thought (and their associated concepts) come to the fore and are open to “problematization” (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, 2013).

Enabling new images of thought for theory development. New conceptual distinctions enable novel theorizing to emerge. It is here that a philosophical approach to organization studies is most constructive: drawing on particular philosophical resources, more refined theoretical distinctions may be made, new theories suggested, and new ways of conducting research and evaluating knowledge claims advanced. Philosophical inquiry can thereby have a “genuinely originitive and constructive [...] function” (Geuss, 2017: 11).

For example, process philosophy furnishes a new image of thought – change is immanent – that is able to do justice to the experience of ongoing change in organizations and which helps lay the ground for more sophisticated theorizing (Helin et al., 2014; Hernes, 2014; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Langley et al., 2013; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). Phenomenology, seeking to overcome the mind-body and agent-world dualisms, provides another image – entwinement,

absorption – that enables us to better understand skillful action (Sandberg et al., 2017), sensemaking (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020), competence (Sandberg 2000, Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009); mindfulness (Kudesia, 2019); strategy (Chia and Holt, 2006, 2015; Nayak, Chia and Canales, 2019), reflection-in-action (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009); organizational knowledge (Hadjimichael and Tsoukas, 2019; Tsoukas, 2009), and so on.

In a similar way, several other philosophies have enabled the development of new theory in the field, including (to name but a few): a Wittgensteinian perspective on strategizing (Mantere, 2015); pragmatist explorations of organizations (Cohen, 2007; Dionysiou and Tsoukas, 2013; Lorino, 2018; Simpson, 2009); hermeneutical, narrative and discursive perspectives on organizational life (Cooren, 2007; Czarniawska, 1997; Grant et al., 2004; Morgan, 1997); a “realist” reconceptualization of entrepreneurial opportunities (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016); practice-based approaches to organizing, strategy and theorizing (Nicolini, 2013; Gherardi, 2006; Golsorkhi et al, 2015; Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011); ordinary-language philosophy for understanding organizational mind (Weick and Roberts, 1993); virtue ethics (Akrivou and Sisson, 2016; Moore, 2018; Tsoukas, 2018); discourse ethics (Scherer and Patzer, 2011; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015); aesthetics (Strati, 2019); poststructuralist, postmodern and feminist studies (Linstead, 2004; Fotaki and Harding, 2017); new approaches to theorizing (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, 2013; Suddaby, Hardy and Huy, 2011; Thompson, 2011; Tsoukas, 2017), and so on.

Studies like these highlight that articulating and problematizing conceptual categories and frameworks through philosophical questioning, enables scholars to generate new modes of theorizing, make fresh distinctions, create new concepts, and open up originative inquiry spaces that lead to the development of novel and impactful theories. A philosophically sensitive practice of organization studies can be immensely creative, which is exactly what PHILOS aims to achieve.

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Purpose, Venue, and Organization

The aim of the PHILOS Colloquium is to consolidate and further develop ongoing efforts to advance a philosophical approach to organization studies. The aim is *not* to contribute to philosophy itself, but to advance *a more philosophically oriented organization studies* that will pursue both critique and new conceptual advancements in the field.

We invite papers from researchers who, drawing from any philosophy, wish to critique and/or further develop current understandings about any organizational topic or type of theorizing in organization studies. The intention is for the Colloquium to be as broad as possible, not to favour any particular philosophical perspective or theme.

PHILOS is affiliated with the International Symposium on Process Organization Studies (PROS). It aims to be an annual event that will take place in the same week and at the same venue as PROS.

The **First PHILOS Colloquium** will take place on **5-6 September 2021** at the **Sheraton Rhodes Resort**, in the island of Rhodes, Greece (<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rhosi-sheraton-rhodes-resort/?program=spg>). 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.

In 2021, the Symposium will run in a **hybrid** mode – both face-to-face and online for anyone who does not want to, or cannot, join the conference in person. Technical details will be announced later. The conference fees for each mode will be different. In the aftermath of the good news about the vaccines, we are optimistic that, by early September 2021, the coronavirus pandemic will be under control and travel restrictions will have been lifted so that Symposium participants will be able to join in face-to-face, if they so wish. If, however, this scenario is not realized, the Symposium will run exclusively online. The final decision will be made by May 30th, 2021.

For 2021, all papers already accepted for the postponed 2020 Colloquium, will be *automatically accepted*. Authors of accepted papers will be asked to confirm their intent to participate separately. Meanwhile, we welcome *new submissions*. We particularly encourage submissions from scholars who intend to submit a paper to the Special Issue of *Organization*

Studies “Philosophy and Organization Studies: How Does Philosophy Illuminate the Study of Organizations?”, guest-edited by Haridimos Tsoukas, Jorgen Sandberg, Anne-Laure Fayard, and Mike Zundel. (https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/OSS/SI_Philosophy_and_Organization_Studies-1587474206743.pdf).

Comments received during the Colloquium will hopefully be useful to prospective *Organization Studies* submitters.

Submissions

Interested participants must submit an extended abstract of about 1000 words for their proposed contribution by **March 31, 2021** through the following link:

<http://www.process-symposium.com/philos-abstractsubmitform/philos-abstractsubmitform.html>

The submission should contain authors’ names, institutional affiliations, email and postal addresses. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **May 3rd, 2021**. Full papers must be submitted by **August 1st, 2021**.