

Call for Papers: The Handbook of Organizational Transformation. *Transforming organizations and organizations of transformation*

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Our main question revolves around the issue of **what kind of organizing or organizations is required to accomplish a transformation of our economic, societal and environmental structures and culture.**

The book starts from an understanding of the current situation as a situation of transformation or at least a call for such a transformation. Transformation refers to a comprehensive or second order change that encompasses not just individual actors or particular structures but paradigmatic changes of how societies operate and what they aspire to. In particular, transformation changes the assumptions and truth regimes normally used to *reflect upon* societal change.

The book and its main question are motivated by our observation of long existing problems in the conceptualizing of organizational change, the debates about the ontological status of change as well as the current discourse about ‘grand challenges’ in the field of management and organization studies and its rather naive framing of transformation. We are therefore calling for papers on three distinct, though interrelated, problems.

‘Grand challenges’

In large parts of the eponymous debate, ‘grand challenges’ are rendered as technical problems to be solved within the dominant paradigm: a bug to be hacked, a problem to be solved, rather than something requiring fundamental, structural alterations to underpinning economic modes of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, to organization, lifestyles, and subjectivity itself. We believe that such changes require a transformation that may very well be revolutionary, and yet our current organizational theories are ill-equipped to deal with such transformations.

This implies that we do not want to add to the literature on societal ‘challenges’ or on socio-technologies invented to ‘fix’ the economic, societal and environmental problems currently

discussed. Rather, we aim to understand – beyond tinkering, re-glossing, hyperbole and fads – what kind of societal (re-)organization, both as process and as outcome, would be required to address problems such as the ones outlined by the United Nations. We also aim not to ‘be realistic’ in our assumptions of what can be changed and not to assume a priori that even long-established structures and habits cannot be overcome.

We understand these problems as historically, institutionally and morally situated and are therefore looking for accounts honouring this complexity and the scope required to tackle them. We distance ourselves from the sports metaphor of the ‘grand challenge’ implying a clearly delimited race to the finish without a history before the starting line. We also denounce the idea that the social sciences can serve as engineers of the social world whose aim is to find a solution to any given problem without questioning the parameters as set. What is more, we believe that this attitude will ultimately lead to the social sciences being found wanting, as our strength is to reflect rather than impose, to question rather than answer.

Despite, or because of, this rather ambitious understanding of transformation, we reject – and seek to detect – the misappropriation of ‘revolutionary’ change for simple exercises of power in which the status quo remains untouched, after all is said and done. We seek conceptions of transformations that move beyond seeing revolutionary change just as any other change only happening on a bigger scale but still manageable using appropriate change management techniques.

The ontology of transformation

Ontologically, the postmodern term in organizational theory entailed a gestalt shift from change understood as a movement from one stable-state to another stable-state, to the idea that change is the normal condition of social organization, and any stability is illusory or the result of managerial efforts to constrain change and stabilised organization. Whilst the first of these is still the dominant unfreeze-change-refreeze model found in OB textbooks, the second is, among others, exemplified by Robert Chia’s (Chia 1999; Tsoukas and Chia 2002) version of postmodernism and organization as a rhizomatic becoming in which all is change.

The problem that the second, ontological perspective poses is that if everything is change, we struggle to differentiate grades of change (Weik 2011), from the quotidian changing of a printer cartridge to more structurally or institutionally significant transformations of the kind embedded in the recoding of gig-economy workers from employees to self-employed, climate change, or a shift from the post-war Keynesian political consensus of the planner-state (Negri, 2005) to the ascendent neo-liberal orthodoxy of the late 1980s. Addressing MacKenzie Wark's (2019) recent provocation, how would we know if the overall mode of economic domination was still capitalism, or if we were witnessing a molar transformation that had replaced capitalism by something even worse?

In such a context, we need an organizational theory that can make sense of transformation, as distinct from everyday change. And if that sounds rather grand, just think of your most recent experience of managerially induced 'strategic transformation.' It was probably anything but transformative, except for those poor souls made redundant in the process. Change itself, today, follows a predictable playbook, with scenarios and strategies recycled and circulated across industrial sectors by consultants and career mobile 'senior' managers so that the new change feels more like déjà vu or a glitch in the Matrix, than anything capable of delivering the kind of change required to meet such grand challenges as climate change. Even worse, the idea of permanent change has turned into a managerial obsession with change, where organizations are 'doomed to continuous, often irrational, change processes' (Morgan and Spicer 2009: 259) resulting in exhaustion, precarity and a permanent state of emergency.

The politics of transformation

In their introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Organizational Change*, Boje, Burnes, and Hassard critique the mainstream, managerialist approach to change, suggesting that Bennis' (1961) *The Planning of Change* misappropriated Lewin's proto-stakeholder approach, which 'saw the planning of change as the responsibility of all the parties involved' (Boje *et al.*, 2012: 2). Bennis and colleagues instead claimed the planning and execution of change as the responsibility of management, who became the key agents of change, representing the interests of all other stakeholders. This simultaneously concealed the vested interests of management, as they adopted the position of a neutral mediator of other, competing interests, and delegitimated the direct,

unmediated articulation of workers' voices, which became recoded as resistance to the rational, disinterested interest of management. Boje, Burnes and Hassard position their approach against this managerial perspective, bringing together a group of writers who 'advocate a multi-voice, polyphonic approach to stakeholder involvement [...] which sits easily with Lewin's approach,' and in those 'emerging post-modern network organizational forms where issues of participation, democratic discourse and trust-building dialogue are critical to the change process' (Boje *et al.*, 2012: 2). For this, stakeholders need to be a part of the change process, not merely represented by management.

This call for a participatory and democratic idea of change is repeated in the *Oxford Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation* published in 2021. In their discussion of critical approaches to organizational change, Rosie Oswick, Cliff Oswick and David Grant differentiate between a traditional, top-down approach to organizational development (OD) characterised by an understanding of change as a scientific process achieved through diagnosis and intervention, and a dialogical approach to OD, where change is achieved through dialogue and co-construction. Oswick *et al.* believe that the dialogic approach is the most popular approach since the 1980s onwards. A third, critical approach emerged in the 21st century, seeing change as a political process which is achieved through mobilization and attempts of emancipation. In sum, Oswick *et al.* observe a development of change management concepts from change of employees to change with employees and finally change by employees.

Although published within this decade, the idea that dialogue, co-construction, democracy and trust, as well as 'emerging' post-modern network forms of organization are becoming more important, has not aged well. We have seen the rise of authoritarian government but also the move towards, or recognition of, technology as reinforcing barriers and boundaries, tapping into unconscious, affective responses to manipulate, through branding and social media. In the most mundane terms this has led to algorithmic management or even 'algorithmic surveillance' (e.g., Newlands 2021), such as that seen in the gig-economy, and paradigmatically Uber, where trust is replaced by ratings, and democratic, horizontal networks are replaced by a social citizenship score.

Based on these three problems, we envisage possible (though not exclusive) chapter themes and questions as follows:

Part 1: From ‘Grand challenges’ to transformation

- Away from ‘grand challenges’ towards ‘complex problems’: The role of history, philosophy and many other disciplines
- The discourse about ‘Grand challenges’: pitfalls, ideology, limits and potentialities
- How can (do) academics change the world?
- Hacking as ideology in and against late capitalism
- Is there a role for the University (or business school) as an institution for change beyond impact and innovation?

Part 2: The ontology of transformation

- The politics of ontology or regimes of truth: Have the social sciences and humanities got anything meaningful to add to the everyday ontology of genomes and tipping points?
- Can we achieve large-scale transformation through re-contextualisation, localisation and concretisation? Is there a concept of human bodies beyond biological machines or particular loci of affect and experience?
- The role of ontology in political action: Can ontologies be constructive/destructive? What if the primary ontological process takes us to our demise?
- The role of human agency in an ever-changing cosmos: from Sun King to marginal tinkerer?
- Process theory and the Anthropocene: Are human beings at the centre or the margins of the cosmos?
- Is there an ontology of life, as different from an ontology of being?

Part 3: The politics of transformation

- Can we leverage resilience – understood in broad terms – to theorize how organizations and social systems respond to and recover from the various threats they face?
- Liminality and the temporal and the spatial dimension of collective transformation: How can liminality constitute a paradigm for understanding transformation on organizational and societal levels?
- Re-imagine agency: How can we illuminate the polyvocal nature of transformation?
- Transformation as struggle: Is struggle destructive or constructive? Where does struggle lead us?
- Post-growth, de-growth and organisational transformation
- Organizational transformation and the business school: What role can and should business schools play in researching & teaching organizational transformation? What role do business schools play in preventing transformation? Is it time to shut down the business school and to found schools of organizing and transformation?

- Normativity, Ethics and Transformation: One major problem of popular concepts of organisational change and transformation is the bracketing of normative and ethical questions of the ends or the means of transformation. What are the ways to conceptualize the relationship between normativity, ethics and transformation? How does the normative foundation of transformation proposals (by academics) sit with democratic processes of decision making and participation?
- Consumption and consumer society: how is change possible?
- Reimagining stakeholders' involvement in transformations: Can stakeholders be reconstituted from narrowly defined interest groups to actors representing broad interests of society and institutions? Are stakeholders instrumentalized or can they themselves play an active role in transformational processes?
- Dissent: How can dissent, conflict, struggle and resistance become productive for the process and the result of transformation?

Timeline

Expression of interest by authors (1 page on theme and authors discussed)	31 st May 2022
Decision on acceptance by editors	mid-June 2022
Handbook workshop (presence) with chapter presentations by authors (based on draft chapter of 3000-4000 words)	end-September 2022
First draft submitted by authors	end-December 2022
Max. two rounds of reviews (cross-reviews by other authors) and editing	throughout 2023
Submission to de Gruyter	end of 2023

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