

Call for Papers

Seventh International Symposium on Process Organization Studies

www.process-symposium.com

Theme:

**Skillful Performance: Enacting Expertise, Competence, and
Capabilities in Organizations**

General process-oriented and theme-focused papers are invited

24-27 June 2015

Helona Resort, Kos, Greece

<http://www.helona-resort.com>

Conveners:

Jorgen Sandberg, University of Queensland, Australia

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Linda Rouleau, HEC Montreal, Canada (linda.rouleau@hec.ca)

Ann Langley, HEC Montreal, Canada (ann.langley@hec.ca)

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Keynote Speakers:

Harry Collins, Professor of Sociology, Cardiff University, UK, author of *Tacit & Explicit Knowledge* and *Rethinking Expertise* (with R. Evans)

Hubert Dreyfus, Professor of Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley, USA, author of *Being-in-the-World* and *What Computers Still Can't Do*

Silvia Gherardi, Professor of Sociology of Work, University of Trento, Italy, author of *Organizational Knowledge* and *Learning and Knowing in Practice-Based Studies* (with A. Strati)

Margaret A. Peteraf, Professor of Management, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, USA, co-author of *Dynamic Capabilities* and *Crafting & Executing Strategy*

Rationale: What is Process Organization Studies?

Process Organization Studies (PROS) is a way of studying organizations that is grounded on process metaphysics – the worldview that sees processes, rather than substances, as the basic forms of the universe. 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, change over persistence, 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 sophisticated process perspective in organization and management studies.

PROS is an annual event organized in conjunction with the annual series *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies*, published by Oxford University Press, and it takes place in a Mediterranean island, in June every year. Topics in the last three years have included: “Language and communication @ work: Discourse, narrativity and organizing”, “The emergence of novelty in organizations”, and “Organization routines: How they are created, maintained and changed” (details of all Symposia so far can be seen at www.process-symposium.com).

Around 90 papers are usually accepted, following a 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.

The **Seventh Symposium** will take place on **24-27 June 2015**, at Helona Resort, Kos, Greece (www.helona-resort.com). The Symposium venue, modern, comfortable, and situated in a beautiful location by the sea, will provide an ideal setting for participants to relax and engage in authentic and creative dialogues.

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 metaphysical 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 in it is perhaps the best known process approach. Henry Mintzberg’s, James March’s, Andrew Pettigrew’s, and Andrew Van de Ven’s work on the making of strategy, decision making, organizational change, and innovation respectively, also shows a clear awareness of the importance of

process-related issues. 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 a process sensibility. 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 an orientation, it can be developed in several different directions, exploring a variety of topics in organizational research. 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 (re)created through interacting embodied agents embedded in sociomaterial practices, whose actions are 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 **2015** the theme is:

Skillful Performance: Enacting Expertise, Competence and Capabilities in Organizations

A description of this theme and its importance follows.

One of the most intriguing questions since the time of Plato concerns what defines skillful performance in terms of specific expertise, competence or capability. As Frederick Taylor (1911) famously noted, if we had an answer to that question, we would know *what to focus on* and *what to do* to improve the performance of individuals, groups and organizations. The centrality of scientific and specialized knowledge within contemporary organizations (and society at large) has further intensified the search for a better understanding of what skillful performance consists of, and how it is achieved in organizations.

In fact, what Vogel (2012) called the “Competence Perspective” now represents the largest research area within organization studies, consisting of several interconnected streams of research. Thus, in their effort to better understand what underlies organizational performance, perspectives within strategic management, such as the resource-based and knowledge-based views of the firm, and more lately, dynamic capabilities (Helfat et al., 2009; Helfat & Peteraf, 2009) have squarely placed the notions of “knowledge” and “competence” on the research agenda. Moreover, research on competence also forms a cornerstone

within human resources management, as it is seen as the basic building block linking organizational strategy to individual work performance (Wright et al. 2001). In addition, the acknowledgment of organizational learning and knowledge management has helped orient organizational research towards forms of inquiry that seek to explore the processes through which organizations build expertise, utilize knowledge and learn in order to improve their performance.

Although highly diverse, these streams of research tend to conceptualize expertise, competence or capability as an entity characterized by specific attributes. For example, “competence” is seen as made up by a specific set of knowledge, skills and personal traits, while “capabilities” are approached as a unique bundle of knowledge and resources. Consequently, we know a great deal about what characterizes a particular competence, capability and even expertise, but significantly less about *how* they are *enacted* in skillful performance (Danneels, 2010; Sandberg & Targama, 2007; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

Emerging streams of more process-oriented research, such as various practice-based, ethnomethodological and discourse studies, have begun to address this shortcoming in existing literature by conceptualizing “expertise”, “competence” and “capability” not as entities but as *performative accomplishments*. Such a reconceptualization has opened up several new conversations and inquiry spaces about *how* expertise (Collins & Evans, 2007; Dreyfus, 2005; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986), competence (Fauré & Rouleau, 2011; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Sandberg & Pinnington, 2009) and dynamic capabilities (Danneels, 2010, Di Stefano, et al., forthcoming) are accomplished in the skillful performance of individuals, groups, and organizations. These new conversations are also enriched by a renewed interest in skills (Attewell, 1990; Ingold, 2000; Sennett, 2008) and the use of knowledge in organizations (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini et al., 2003; Tsoukas, 2005).

Yet, much research remains to be done. Process perspectives are likely to be beneficial in several important ways. For example, process perspectives have the potential to identify and describe macro and micro dynamics, as well as activities through which expertise, competence and capabilities are enacted in skillful performance. Viewing these concepts as performative accomplishments requires researchers to pay attention to the situated, temporal, embedded, material, and embodied aspects of agency through which performances are carried out.

This year’s *thematic track* attempts to bring together scholars from different backgrounds, traditions and disciplines who share an interest in skillful performance across a variety of work settings, organizational levels and contexts. We invite conceptual, empirical and methodological papers that, in various ways, adopt a process lens to advance our understanding of how expertise, competence and capabilities are enacted in skillful performance. Topics may include, but need not be limited to:

- How do the meta-theoretical assumptions (e.g. ontology and epistemology) underlying different process lenses influence the

conceptualization of expertise, competence and capability involved in skillful performance?

- What do the distinct but overlapping concepts of expertise, competence, capability and even knowledge and skill have in common? How do they differ from each other? How do they inform each other regarding the enactment of skillful performance?
- What specific micro- and macro-processes of expertise, competence, and capability are involved in the enactment of skillful performance?
- How are expertise, competence and capabilities enacted at different aggregates of skillful performance (e.g. individual, group, organization)?
- How do individuals, groups or organizations progress from a lower to a higher level of skillful performance (e.g. from novice to expert)?
- How are (micro) individual skills and competences constituted, maintained and changed in the context of (macro) organizational knowledge bases and capabilities?
- How do processes of learning and knowledge management help build and further refine expertise, competence, and capabilities at the individual, group and organizational levels?
- How are gender, embodiment and emotions involved in the enactment of skillful performance?
- How is the enactment of expertise, competence and capability in skillful performance materially, temporally and historically situated in professional, organizational and/or industrial practice?
- How are expertise, competence and capabilities involved in skillful performance enacted in different types of jobs/professions (e.g. engineers, lawyers) and industries (e.g. IT, mining)?
- How are politics, power and conflict involved in the enactment of expertise, competence and capability in skillful performance?
- What is the dark side of the enactment of expertise, competence and capability in skillful performance, and how is it generated and manifested?
- How are values and ethics underlying skillful performance taken into account by individual and collective actors? How are expertise and mastery related to the ends they serve in practice?
- How can we methodologically identify and describe the enactment of expertise, competence and capabilities in skillful performance?

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Workshops

A new feature of PROS in 2015 is the running of three Workshops, for which submissions are invited. More specifically, the Workshops will be on:

- (a) **Theorizing Process**. This Workshop will be run by **Ann Langley**, HEC Montreal, Canada. Its purpose is to explore how process theorizing may be developed and how relevant papers may be written for publication. We particularly invite submissions from researchers who have papers at an early stage of writing and they would like helpful feedback as to how their papers may be further developed and published.
- (b) **Researching Process**. This Workshop will be run by **Dvora Yanow**, Wageningen University, The Netherlands and Keele Management School, UK. Its primary purpose is to discuss questions of method – process-oriented research designs, data collection and analysis. We particularly invite submissions that deal with methodological issues and challenges.
- (c) **Practicing Process**. The Workshop will run by **Arne Carlsen**, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway. Its purpose is to explore the practical implications of process organizational research. What difference does a process orientation make to how managers, policy makers, and

consultants act? We particularly invite submissions that address the issues and challenges involved in the practising of process.

Workshops will be interactive and developmental, aiming at exploring in depth particular issues related to process-related theorizing, researching, and practicing.

Submissions

General process-oriented papers, theme-focused papers, as well as Workshop papers are invited. Interested participants must submit an extended abstract of about 1000 words for their proposed contribution by **January 31st, 2015** through the following link:

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

The submission 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 any of the Workshops. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by **March 5th, 2015**. Full papers will be submitted by **May 31st, 2015**.

Limited financial assistance is possible for researchers unable to fund their participation in the Symposium.