

# PROPOSAL FOR A NEW VOLUME SERIES “PERSPECTIVES ON PROCESS ORGANIZATION STUDIES”

## What is it?

In this document we want to propose a new book series entitled Perspectives on Process Organization Studies (PPROS). Professor Ann Langley, HEC, Montreal and Professor Haridimos Tsoukas, ALBA, Greece and University of Warwick, UK, will be the General Editors.

The series we propose will be linked to the *International Symposium on Process Organization Studies*, which is an annual event, organized in June every year, in a Mediterranean island. We envisage PPROS to be drawing papers already competitively selected for the Symposium, some of which, after further reviewing, will be published in an annual volume.

The Series is modeled on volumes such as *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (JAI Press/Elsevier), *Advances in Strategic Management*, *Advances in Organizational Behavior*, and other similar titles. Each volume will be numbered, just like these volumes are.

## Why is PPROS needed?

Process Organization Studies (PROS) is a way of studying organizations that unfolds from process metaphysics – namely, the worldview that sees processes, rather than substances, as the basic forms of the universe. A process orientation prioritizes activity over product, change over persistence, novelty over continuity, expression over determination. Becoming, change, flux as well as creativity, disruption, and indeterminism are the main themes of a process worldview.

Seeing process as fundamental, such an approach does not deny the existence of events, states, or entities, but insists on unpacking them to reveal the complex processes involved in - the sequences of activities and transactions that take place and contribute to - their constitution. As process philosopher Nicholas Rescher argues, “the idea of discrete “events” dissolves into a manifold of processes which themselves dissolve into further processes”. A process point of view invites us to acknowledge, rather than reduce, the complexity of the world. It rests on an anti-dualist and relational ontology, namely the recognition that everything that is has no existence apart from its relation to other things, and, therefore, long established dualisms such as mind and body, reason and emotion, humanity and nature, individual and collective, organism and environment, agency and structure, ethics and science, need to be overcome. Focusing on *inter*-actions is preferred to analyzing self-standing actions.

A process orientation is sensitive to the constructive role of embodied-cum-embedded agency in bringing about the world we come to experience as an independent structure, as well as to reality comprising experiences. Unlike substances, which do not include one another but are seen as nested, standing under one another – *sub-stantia* -, experiences

include other experiences and grow out of the integration of bodily and mental events into something new. Cognition and symbolic interaction are understood to be embedded into ways of life and arising from embodied interactions with the world, mediated by artifacts. Temporality is a constitutive feature of human experience, and processes unfold in time. Human phenomena cannot be properly understood if time is abstracted away.

Process thinking is intimately connected with what philosopher Stephen Toulmin calls an “ecological style” of thinking. The latter seeks to embrace complexity by reinstating the importance of the particular, the local, and the timely; it is sensitive to context, interactivity, experience, and time; and it acknowledges non-linearity, emergence, and recursivity.

Although not necessarily consolidated under a process-metaphysical label, several strands in organization 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 that has inspired several organizational researchers. Henry Mintzberg’s, James March’s, Andrew Pettigrew’s, and Andrew Van de Ven’s early work on the making of strategy, decision making, organizational change, and innovation respectively also shows an awareness of the importance of process-related issues. Current studies that take an explicitly performative (or enactivist, or relational) view of organizations focusing on, for example, routines, trust, innovation and change, strategizing, naturalistic decision making, learning and knowing, communication, sensemaking, and the enactment of technological change in organizations have similarly adopted, to 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, leadership, trust, coordination, change, innovation, learning and knowledge, accountability, communication, authority, self-organization, technology, etc, which have often been studied as “substances” (or self-standing “events”), from a process perspective can be approached as situated sequences of activities and complexes of processes unfolding in time. Perspectives drawing on post-rationalist philosophies, social constructivism, discourse and narrative theory, practice theory, actor network theory, path-dependence theory, complexity science, Austrian economics, socio-cultural, discursive and ecological psychology, activity theory, business history, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interaction are examples of a *process* orientation to the study of organizational phenomena that treats them not as *faits accomplis* but as (re)created through interacting agents embedded in discursive practices, whose actions are mediated by institutional, linguistic and objectual artifacts.

The proposed series will consolidate current research on process organization and management studies and will create a forum in which process-oriented accounts may be further developed. While there is a robust philosophical vocabulary about process (see for

example the work of Whitehead, Bergson, James, Deleuze, Rescher, etc), it is not equally matched by a robust organization and management science that takes process seriously. Yet several leading scholars, such as Weick, Porter, Van de Ven, Orlikowski, Feldman, Czarniawska, Chia and others have called for more sophisticated accounts of process and for an investigation of several organization and management topics from a process perspective. The proposed series will fill in an important gap in the development of the field.

### **Who will be interested?**

The readership of such a volume will be: organizational and management scholars, doctoral students, and advanced undergraduates. The volume will compete with the likes of *Advances in Organizational Behavior*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, etc. The originality of its focus, the Symposium it is linked with, the gap it fills, and the entrepreneurial and professional spirit with which it will be run by the General Editors are envisaged to establish the volume in the community fairly soon.

### **How will it be structured?**

Ann Langley and Haridimos Tsoukas will be the General Editors. Both are internationally respected scholars, from different sides of the Atlantic, with significant editorial experience. Ann Langley organizes a Process Forum at the forthcoming AoM in Chicago, and both of them (along with Andrew Van de Ven and Clive Smalman) will be the editors of a forthcoming *Academy of Management Journal* Special Issue on Processual Approaches to Organizational Change (to be confirmed). Ann Langley has done significant research on change, decision making and strategizing published in the leading journals of the field, while Hari Tsoukas has published extensively on process issues.

An Editorial Board will be compiled and endorsements from leading process organization and management researchers will be sought. We have already contacted a number of people and their responses have been extremely encouraging.

Every annual volume will include a Themed Section, which will be edited by the Conveners of the Symposium. The First International Symposium on Process Organization Studies is taking place between 11-13 June 2009, in Cyprus. The Conveners are: **Tor Hernes**, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark and Norwegian School of Management, Norway, [tor.hernes@bi.no](mailto:tor.hernes@bi.no); **Sally Maitlis**, Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia, Canada, [maitlis@sauder.ubc.ca](mailto:maitlis@sauder.ubc.ca); and **Haridimos Tsoukas**, ALBA Graduate Business School, Greece & University of Warwick, UK, [pros@alba.edu.gr](mailto:pros@alba.edu.gr). The keynote speakers will be: **Keith Ansell Pearson**, Professor of Philosophy, University of Warwick, UK, author of *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life*; **Kenneth J. Gergen**, Mustin Professor of Psychology, Swarthmore College, USA, author of *Relational Being: Beyond the Individual and the Community*; **Kathleen Sutcliffe**, Gilbert and Ruth Whitaker Professor of Business Administration and Professor of Management and Organizations, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, USA, co-author of *Managing the*

*Unexpected.* The Symposium is entirely self-funded. More details about the Symposium may be obtained at [www.alba.edu.gr/pros](http://www.alba.edu.gr/pros)

The huge interest in the Symposium as well as the quality of accepted submissions bode well for the success of the volume. 143 submissions have been made for the first Symposium, 70 of which have been accepted, after reviewing from the Conveners. A selection of those accepted, following a double-blind review process, will be published in the first volume.

**When will PPROS appear?**

The first volume is envisaged to appear in late May 2010. The plan is for each volume to be ready before the next Symposium.

**What are the likely contents of the first volume?**

It is envisaged that up to 15 papers will appear in the volume (130000 words). Some papers will be invited contributions (such as those, for example, from the keynote speakers in the Symposium) and some will be competitively selected after reviewing. Although it is too early to make a final list of the papers that will appear in the first volume, since papers have not been submitted yet and reviewing is naturally pending, the attached list presents all accepted abstracts, from which 16 have been highlighted as the most promising (see attachment).

**What are the costs involved?**

General Editors will not receive an honorarium. The Symposium is self-funded and therefore it will incur no costs to OUP. The only cost will be for a secretary, to carry out associated administrative work, which is estimated to be 3000 Euros per year.

**General Editors: Who-is-who**

**Ann Langley** is professor of management at HEC Montréal and Canada research chair in strategic management in pluralistic settings. Her research focuses on strategic change, leadership, innovation and the use of management tools in complex organizations with an emphasis on processual research approaches. She has published over 50 articles (e.g., in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, *Strategic Organization*) and two books, including *Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) with Gerry Johnson, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington. She is adjunct professor at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration and the Department of Health Administration at University of Montreal.

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**Haridimos Tsoukas** is the George D. Mavros Research Professor of Organization and Management at the Athens Laboratory of Business Administration (ALBA), Greece and a Professor of Organization Studies at Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, UK. He obtained his PhD at the Manchester Business School (MBS), University of Manchester, and has worked at MBS, the University of Warwick, the University of Cyprus, the University of Essex and the University of Strathclyde. He has published

widely in several leading academic journals, including the *Academy of Management Review*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Organization Studies*, *Organization Science*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and *Human Relations*. He was the Editor-in-Chief of *Organization Studies* (2003-2008) and serves on the Editorial Board of several journals. His research interests include: knowledge-based perspectives on organizations; the management of organizational change and social reforms; the epistemology of practice; and epistemological issues in organization theory. He is the editor (with Christian Knudsen) of *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory: Meta-theoretical Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2003). He has also edited *Organizations as Knowledge Systems*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 (with N. Mylonopoulos) and *Managing the Future: Foresight in the Knowledge Economy*, Blackwell, 2004 (with J. Shepherd). His book *Complex Knowledge: Studies in Organizational Epistemology* was published by Oxford University Press in 2005. He is also the author of the book *If Aristotle were a CEO* (in Greek, Kastaniotis, 2004).

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