

## PUTTING CRITICAL PERFORMATIVITY TO WORK

Call for Papers – Special Issue of *M@n@gement*

### Special Issue Guest editors

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**Deadline: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

The notion of “performativity” (and the idea of the “performative”) has recently gained traction in the organizational studies field (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Callon, 2007; Huault & Rainelli, 2009) to the extent that some authors have even talked about a “performative turn” (Muniesa, 2014). Broadly speaking, the notion of performativity points to the idea that discourses (e.g. speech acts, theories) are not merely describing reality but are contributing to enact the reality they describe. It is indeed used by scholars from different research traditions, ranging from Actor-Network theory (Callon, 2007), critical management studies (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009), gender studies (Butler, 1997), etc.

This special issue locates within this broad literature on performativity, and encourages organization scholars to “put critical performativity to work” by revisiting this notion, and moving forward.

An emerging strand of organization theory has sought to bring the ideas of “critics” and “performativity” together, around the concept of *critical performativity*. For example, Spicer and colleagues (2009) outlined the possibilities and pitfalls of critical performativity. They suggest critical performativity involves “active and subversive interventions into management discourse and practice” (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009: 538). They propose some tactics through which this might be achieved such as affirmation, care, pragmatism, engagement with potentialities, and a normative orientation. For them, critical performativity offers a way of critically working with discourses of management towards progressive social change. Doing this, they claim, offers a way out of the pervasive cynicism and studied impracticality, which characterises so much of critical thought. It also offers a way of yoking the booming research agenda around performativity to a more critical and political agenda.

The concept of critical performativity has sparked a small, but rapidly growing literature. Dynamics of critical performativity opens numerous avenues of research, which echo a range of issues in critical management studies such as leadership (Crevani *et al.*, 2010; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), diversity (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), human resource management (Jannsens & Steyeart, 2009), business ethics (Prasad & Mills, 2010), organizational change (Morgan & Spicer, 2009), projects (Daniel *et al.*, 2013), management education (Huault & Perret, 2011) or academic conferences (Bell & King, 2010).

Despite the growing number of studies which try to put “critical performativity” to work, a number of serious questions and limitations can be raised. Drawing on the rich tradition of thinking about performativity (Austin, 1959; Butler, 1997; MacKenzie, 2006), some studies have shed light on the mechanisms whereby theories and models affect practices through embedding in tools and devices (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Callon, 2007; Guerard, Langley & Seidl, 2013). However, it is not clear how the “critical performativity approach” interacts with such perspectives, builds on them or can contribute to them (and vice-versa). For example, from a theoretical or epistemological viewpoint, is critical performativity compatible with an approach such as actor-network-theory (Alcadapani & Hassard, 2010)? How critical perspective can enrich Callon’s “performativity thesis” (Roscoe & Chillias, 2013)? Besides, some have pointed out the extreme difficulties involved in attempting to put critical performativity into practice in the day-to-day running of an enterprise (King & Learmonth, 2014). Others have pointed out that traditional cannons of critical thinking will severely impede this enterprise (Hartmann, 2013). From an empirical viewpoint, what are the “engines” required to foster the ideals of critical management studies (Leca, Gond & Barin-Cruz, 2014)?

Given these road-blocks, a recent contribution has suggested that a more realistic approach would be a kind of toned down performativity aimed at progressive rather than radical social change (Wickert & Schaefer, 2014). These questions suggest that critical performativity might be an idea that is still very much in the prototyping stage.

In this special issue, we want to put the idea of critical performativity to work. We invite theoretical and empirical contributions, which develop, apply and critique the concept of critical performativity. We are particularly interested in contributions, which relate these ideas to issues of management and organizations – broadly conceived.

Contributions to this special issue might cover some of the following indicative, but not exhaustive, issues:

- Applying critical performativity. How can the idea of critical performativity be applied to a range of key concepts in the study of organization and management such as identity, institutions, space, strategy, business models, management tools, the study of markets and finance, technology, social movements . . .
- Strategies for critical performativity. What potential strategies, tactics and practices could scholars and practitioners interested pursuing critical performativity adopt? What might we learn from other areas of practices such as the visual and performing arts about how to practice critical performativity? How successful or useful are these strategies?
- Education for critical performativity. Should critical performativity be built into management education? Can critical management education be performative? In what ways is this possible?
- Studying critical performativity. What methodological strategies might be used to actually study instances of critical performativity? What are the potential insights and blind spots of these methodological tactics? In what ways are some methods like critical action-research, performative?
- Questioning critical performativity. What are some of the shortcomings with the concept of critical performativity? To what extent can research on “critical performativity” build on, and contribute to the broader stream of performative studies? What are potential alternatives to the concept of critical performativity, which might overcome these problems and open up a different set of possibilities?

## Process and Deadline

**Deadline:** Papers must be received by **September 30<sup>th</sup> 2015**

Papers for the special issue should be prepared according to M@n@gement's guidelines for authors ([http://www.management-aims.com/submission\\_en.html](http://www.management-aims.com/submission_en.html)) and must be submitted to the online submission system of M@n@gement, **before September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015:** [http://aims.bepress.com/management\\_submission/](http://aims.bepress.com/management_submission/)

When submitting your full paper, please include a **cover letter** that explicitly states that you would like your paper to be considered for this special issue.

## Biography of the Editors

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A Special Issue has been published in 2013 to celebrate M@n@gement's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary featuring papers from (among others): S. Clegg, P. Jarzabkowski, T. Pinch, A. Langley, L. Rouleau, A. Spicer, E. Vara, H. Willmott. (cf. vol. 16, n.5: [http://www.management-aims.com/vol16\\_en.html](http://www.management-aims.com/vol16_en.html)).

Recent Special Issues of M@n@gement have focused on *Institutional Theory* (Guest editors: B. Forgues, R. Greenwood, I. Martí, P. Monin and P. Walgenbach, 2012, vol. 15, n. 5); *Critical Management Studies and Management Education* (Guest editors: S. Clegg, F. Dany and Ch. Grey, 2011, vol. 14, n. 5); and *Business Models* (Guest editors: X. Lecoq, B. Demil, J. Ventura, 2010, vol. 13, n. 4).

For more information: [http://www.management-aims.com/about\\_en.html](http://www.management-aims.com/about_en.html)

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