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Special issue

A World of Meta-Organizations:

Dynamics and Complexities of Meta-Organizing

Guest editors

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Call for Papers

Meta-organizations—that is, organizations that have organizations as their members—are an entrenched phenomenon of significant and increasing importance. Nowadays, there are hundreds of thousands of diverse meta-organizations: their number has been escalating and their forms have been evolving rapidly (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Many meta-organizations gather firms (e.g. Global Business Initiative or Airlines for Europe), some gather sustainability standards and accreditation bodies (e.g. the standard association ISEAL), or a combination of universities, businesses, civil society initiatives in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations (e.g. Fair Labor Association). Sports associations are meta-organizations. All international governmental organizations, standards organizations or industry associations can be treated as meta-organizations. Associations of fab labs, living labs and cooperatives also constitute examples of meta-organizations. Hence, almost all individual-based organizations and virtually all states join multiple meta-organizations, thus meta-organizing their environment through several layers. The meta-organizational phenomenon appears therefore far-reaching and heterogeneous, playing various crucial roles in modern society but raising dramatic governance challenges, as the exemplar cases of the European Union or FIFA show.

Meta-organizations can have different purposes, from representing and defending collective interests or goals, to producing information or regulating members (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Spillman, 2017). They increasingly help to tackle complex global problems: addressing grand challenges like climate change (Chaudhury et al., 2016), governing sustainable innovation (Berkowitz, 2018), or global value chains (Acquier, Valiorgue, & Daudigeos, 2015; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2018). Meta-organizations also play emerging roles such as governing cities' transition towards sustainability, facilitating peacebuilding in conflictual regions or managing specific negative externalities (Rasche, 2012).

With their work, Ahrne and Brunsson laid the ground for a new understanding of an increasingly broad and heterogeneous variety of this modern organizational phenomenon – organizations of organizations. Building on this, scholars have, for instance, started inquiring a broad variety of meta-organization-related phenomena such as Corporate Social Responsibility (Berkowitz, Bucheli, & Dumez, 2017), social movements (den Hond, de Bakker, & Doh, 2015; Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015), trade associations (Rajwani, Lawton, & Phillips, 2015), coopetition (Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018), sustainability (Valente & Oliver, 2018), organizational change and inertia (König, Schulte, & Enders, 2012), organization without actorhood (Grothe-Hammer, 2018), partnerships (Cropper & Bor, 2018), categories (Brankovic, 2018) or the European Union (Kerwer, 2013; Murdoch, 2015).

Meta-organizing happens on different levels (meta-meta-organizations and more) and can have varying degrees. Internally, meta-organizations are often only partially organized (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Järvi, Almpantopoulou, & Ritala, 2018). For instance, meta-organizations often lack monitoring and sanctioning instruments. Partial meta-organizing can be strategic for member-organizations and may take a broad diversity of forms. Externally, meta-organizations often organize among each other in various kinds of partially organized constellations – combining different degrees and layers of organization and meta-organization (Brunsson, Gustafsson, & Hallström, 2018). Moreover, there seem to exist partially organized interorganizational constellations that cannot be adequately grasped by conventional network approaches but have not been acknowledged by meta-organization theory so far (Grothe-Hammer, 2018).

However, despite this emerging body of works, the majority of organization scholars remain focused on individual-based organizations as a level of analysis, thereby relying on the entrenched institutional and network approaches to study what exists beyond and outside of individual-based organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Murdoch, 2015). As a consequence, we still know surprisingly little about the phenomenon of meta-organization and its consequences (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016).

This special issue wants to embrace and advance the work on meta-organizations. We welcome submissions on all aspects of meta-organization. Submissions can be theoretical, empirical, or methodological in nature. They can address the following types of questioning (but are not limited to):

- Motivations, natures and processes of *meta-organizing*: when and why are meta-organizations created and what are the reasons for their specific form? How are they governed, i.e. how are decisions made in meta-organizations and what are they about? What are the similarities and dissimilarities of governing a meta-organization compared to an individual-based organization? How do meta-organizations evolve, and how does their evolution affect their members? What are the effects of entry and/or exit of members? What are the roles and impacts of resources?
- *Governance by meta-organizations*: how do meta-organizations contribute to shaping industries, fields and other actors like cities? How efficient are they at regulating their members? And how to assess meta-organizational efficiency? Who are meta-organizations and their members accountable to and how to ensure their accountability?
- *Meta-organizing for sustainability*: Under which conditions can meta-organizations enhance sustainability? Which societal issues and grand challenges do meta-organizations help address? At which levels (local, regional, transnational, global) do

meta-organizations operate to tackle certain challenges? To which degrees are meta-organizations a more efficient device to provide solutions than more traditional forms like state bureaucracies?

- The *dark side* of meta-organizing: how and when do meta-organizations become dormant? Under which conditions do they fully disappear? How do the increase and complexity of (partial) meta-organizing affect environments and member-organizations? What does irresponsible meta-organization or irresponsible meta-organizing mean?
- Varying degrees and levels of (*partial*) meta-organizing: To what extent are meta-organizations partially organized? Why do members selectively combine certain elements of partial organization when they meta-organize? What are the effects of multiplying membership in meta-organizations? Of multiplying degrees and levels of partial meta-organizing? In which constellations do meta-organizations (partially) organize themselves? What are the categorical boundaries of meta-organizations?

We look forward to receiving submissions by experienced as well as early career scholars. Contributors may also submit to the Toulouse School of Management “Meta-, Macro-, Partial Organization” Workshop in Toulouse in May 2019 and to the 2019 EGOS Sub-theme 37: “the Intricacies of Meta-Organizations” or sub-theme 60 “Organization and Decision: The Theoretical Challenge of a Changing World”.

If you have an idea for a possible paper that may fit this call and would like to discuss it initially, do not hesitate in contacting one of the guest editors.

Submission Process

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Submission period: November 1st, 2019 to December 1st, 2019

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Please mention in the cover letter that your submission is for the special issue on MO

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