

Organizing, Managing, Designing

Double meanings, doings and (new?) dilemmas

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Abstract

This keynote presentation examined some strengths, weaknesses, and above all some ambiguities in the uses and meanings of gerunds and participles, in considering “Organizing, Designing and Managing”, and their overlapping, within current neoliberal times. Principally, gerunds and participles can either invoke agency and agentic action, or can refer to process with less explicit attention to individual agency. Examples of both agentic and process approaches to organizing, managing, and designing are given. The final section addresses dilemmas, possibly new dilemmas, in such approaches, in terms of: the onset of new and/or not so new realities?; the politics and/or the ontology of process itself?; and the local and/or the transnational?

Key words: organizing, managing, designing, neoliberalism, dilemmas, double meanings, ambiguity.

Introduction: the call

The call for this conference read as follows: "... this ... conference calls for critical considerations about "*Organizing, Designing and Managing*". ... to direct the attention towards a *performative aspect of doing and knowing* in relation to ... human services relating to work, health, education, sustainability, public services, social work, innovation, globalization, etc. ... *new* ICTs, public services and similar are designed to support specific instances of, e.g. public relations or working life; but simultaneously take part in designing *new realities* for the actors involved ... we want to critically explore what *altered* issues of *designing, managing, and organizing* work/learning/ living/being that come into place in such *new realities*."

This call can be approached from many angles, and in the light of many influences from sociology, social policy, organization and management studies, gender and sexuality studies, globalization and postcolonial studies, and so on The call does, however, emphasize "... a *performative aspect of doing and knowing*" ... and this suggests some engagement with the capacity of speech and communication not just to communicate but to act or consummate an action, or to construct and perform an identity through effects. It must be noted at the outset that there are very different meanings and uses of performativity (considered very variously from Austin to Goffman to Berger to Butler, amongst many others), and in turn some clear distinctions from both simple performance, and the use of 'performance' as in *performance* indicators in, say, New Public Management (NPM).

In talking of these supposedly or so-called *new realities* for the actors involved, we all know of the apparent current societal trends that bear on the human service organizations:

- new forms of neoliberal (global) capitalism, the extension of capitalism into new commodities, profit-led economic growth, and financialization;
- establishment and extension of the regulatory state, blurring of the public sector, the state, and the political with the private sector, the capitalist, and the economic;
- privatizations, projectizations, short-term contractualism, austerity;
- NPM, managerialism, anti-trade unionism;
- accountability, monitoring, reporting, ICT systems, audit culture;
- merging of economics, politics and culture;
- capitalist, neo-patriarchal performativity, and (illusory) individualist choice.



All of these trends have become the context of contemporary organizing, managing, designing in human service and other organizations. They also usher in various forms of process organization and organizing, and perhaps hence the current love of or fashion for “-ings”. In this presentation I examined three issues: double meanings of gerunds and other -ings; some examples of (new?) doings and processes; and some (new?) dilemmas.

Some double meanings of gerunds and other -ings

In considering “*Organizing, Designing and Managing*”, a first question is: in what order do they go in? And does it matter? Is it organizing, designing and managing? Or designing, organizing and managing? Or is organizing, managing, designing more accurate – even if organizing, designing, managing sounds more rationalist? Perhaps the key point is that each (usually) involves the others; they are bound together in an overlapping relation (Fig. 1).

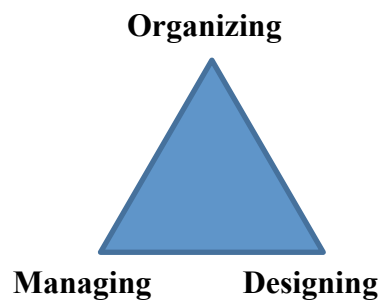


Fig. 1. The interrelations of organizing, managing and designing

There is a clear recent current and fashion for gerunds, or gerunds and present and past participles; moreover, such -ing words have a double meaning, emphasizing doing or process, so *organizing* can refer to:

- i. **doing** organizing, with agency, with practice, perhaps strong consciousness: “*organizing is what I like best ...*”, “because I am now organizing”;
- ii. the **process** of organizing, potentially involving *all*, but more abstract, more conceptual, perhaps more democratic. *Organizing* is one way to understand what happens in organizations, and is specifically unfinished.

Similarly, *managing* can refer to:

- i. **agentic** attempts to manage (which itself means both coping and directing/control/power and authority);



ii. *process(es)* by and through which organizations appear to manage or be managed, which can include all, not just managers ... managing in this sense is unfinished.

And *designing* can refer to:

- i. *agentic* attempts to design (or de-sign, reorder dominant signs)
- ii. *process(es)* by and through which organizations appear to be designed, over time, without specific designer ... and in this sense unfinished.

Put simply, this suggests these six alternative meanings (Fig. 2):

	Organizing	Managing	Designing
agentic/ practice			
processual/ concept			

FIG. 2. Alternative meanings of organizing, managing and designing

Some examples of (new?) doings and processes

The second main part of the presentation considered some of these alternative meanings in terms of the relations of: organizing *social movements*; managing *bureaucracies*; and designing *post-bureaucratic projects*. Again, each (usually) involves the others. In each case, some more detailed examples from my own research, organizational and activist experience were given.

Organizing social movements: AGENTICALLY

The example used here concerns diverse (individual) agentic motivations, for example, stopping privilege, social justice, recognition of difference, and self-interest, for (collective) social movement organizing, with a focus on agentic *organizing* with or without a formal organization. The example of profeminist organizing is used to illustrate these different forms of agency (Holmgren and Hearn 2009).

Studying organizing: as PROCESS

Organizing processes occur within and through social movements. In the long term view, though social movement organizing is initially agentic, the eventual outcomes are not known. Over time, social movement organizing may develop as a social movement campaign, but then lead onto more formalized NGOs, perhaps



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incorporation and deradicalization, and then onto organizations needing more formal agentic managing (Hearn 2014b). This can be seen as a long term historical process, based in changing alliances. Similarly, in mainstream organizations, it may be more useful to see the organization in terms of organizing; the macro context and micro experience of organizations may become more important than the meso-level organization itself. Even defining what the organization *is* may be more elusive than analyzing organizing processes.

Managing bureaucratic organizations: AGENTICALLY

Managing can be done with or without management. Seen agentially, *managing* concerns not only the usual functions of management, such as control of resources but also the detailed everyday life of managing and the adoption of different style or metaphors of managing, such as the “(un)happy family”, “cowboy management” or even “profeminist management” (Hearn 2001).

Studying managing: as PROCESS

Among the contradictions of bureaucracies especially in neoliberal times are the introduction of process organization often in part to save bureaucratic costs. With this, temporary administrative process owners are responsible for different functions, rather than the more formal hierarchical managers. In this situation, bureaucratic commitment to change, such as gender equality, may exist in neoliberal bureaucracies but commitment through such processes of managing may be very hard to maintain and make effective (Hearn et al. 2015a).

Designing post-bureaucratic projects: AGENTICALLY

Again, this raises the question of how *designing* can be done with or without agentic design. Projectization of work and human services is now commonplace in neoliberal diffusion of the state, with rapid short-term designing of projects often being necessary and demanded. My own attempts to design research projects also reflect that; this is often done frantically, for getting money to support the employment of other researchers. Projects can involve more or less collaborative, temporary organizations (Lundin 1995). They can be rigid (post-)bureaucratic extensions of parent organizations’ power and control, sometimes into new fields, even if retaining such knowledge difficult (Bakker et al. 2011). In other cases, projects can be ‘relatively free’ zones where ‘business as usual’ is suspended or played down in setting up project teams and getting projects done – even at odds with dominant practices in parent organization (Hearn 2015b).

Studying designing: as PROCESS

The example here concerns the study of organizations that seem to be subject to very strong *designing*, but may also at the same time seem to be somewhat out of control. This kind of designing arises in some “well designed” knowledge organi-



zations, such as business to business, multinational professional service consultancies. In and around these organizations, work pressure is intense, work and (other) life may merge; knowledge professionals are embodied in the new professional, fit, yet highly stressed bodies. A form of ‘democratic’ gender egalitarianism may operate at lower organizational levels, alongside very unequal higher organizational levels. These organizations are both very modern, even postmodern, but also very traditional: a different kind of designing as process (*Hearn et al. 2016*).

(New?) Dilemmas

Here, I briefly addressed three dilemmas, possibly new dilemmas, in neoliberal times: the onset of new and/or not so new realities?; the politics and/or the ontology of process itself?; and the local and/or the transnational?

New and/or not so new realities?

First, are organizing, managing, and designing really making *new* realities? There is much talk of these (new) realities, but perhaps they are not really so new. To take the example of government by contract: in 1964 the Governor of California called for bids from system engineers in the aerospace industry to develop plans for transportation, information, waste management, and coping with criminals and the mentally ill (*Hoos 1969*); government by contract arrived, and others followed (*Hearn and Roberts 1976*).

A more recent example is based in research on emerging neoliberal welfare. In 1990 the UK research council, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) introduced a small research programme, “The Management of Personal Welfare”; it ran till 1995. The programme was based, initially, on the stress-coping-social support model, and the assumptions behind it. Through this approach, ambiguities were possible between, on one hand, difference, multiple oppressions, intersectionality, “diversity”, and, on the other, demands of neoliberal trends, such as the resilience of neoliberal individuals and groups who are assumed to be more self-reliant, and above all able to cope with social problems (*Williams et al. 1999*).

A further set of ambiguous (possibly new?) (organizational) realities can be posited from the rapid development of ICTs and associated virtualities, through the combination of: technological control (potential for centralized surveillance, instantaneousness, time/space compression virtual reproducibility, creation of virtual bodies, blurring of “real” and “representational”), conditional communality, globalized connectivity, personalization (*Hearn 2006*). New virtual realities in their flowing undecidability may be suitably analyzed through processual gerunds.



The politics and/or the ontology of process?

Even with the very different meanings of –ings, gerunds and participles, there is still the question: what is missing from these approaches? In using gerunds across this ambiguity, there are most likely some implicit assumptions on the relations of agency and process. But where is and what is the place of structure? Where are social divisions? Intersectional structures? This is not to reify social divisions and social structures, but to suggest the need both to name and to deconstruct social divisions. Without attention to social structure, the uses of –ings easily slips into being a reflection of neoliberal “choices” and “pluralities” themselves.

More fundamentally still, for some there can be the fundamental ontological shift from process seen as sequence, life cycle, evolution, dialectics or teleology (Van de Ven 1992) to the unfathomable emergent processes of perpetual flux: itself a long established idea, from Heraclitus! Or the notion of process may invoke material-discursive (Hearn 2014a), post-constructionist (Lykke 2010) realities, in which there is blurring of the idea of the social as not unique (Karakayli 2015).

The local and/or the transnational

Finally, there are dilemmas and ambiguities in the use of gerunds in relation to space and spatialization – around the focus on the immediate and the local, on one hand, and the more distant and the transnational, on the other. Much of the focus of attention in using gerunds is rather localized, as in doing, acting, and performing; yet meanwhile wider global and the transnational processes seem ever more important in the current historical phase. The transnational both affirms and deconstructs the nation; it suggests several different meanings: *moving across* national boundaries or *between* nations; *metamorphosing*, hybridizing, transgressing, problematizing nations or national boundaries; and *new configurations*, intensified transnational, deterritorialized or virtual entities with two or more nations or actors across national borders, for example, the material/virtual sex trade (Hearn 2004, 2015a; Hearn and Blagojević 2013).

Transnational change problematizes the taken-for-granted local, national, organizational, intersectional gender relations; it is acutely contradictory, multiple forms of difference, presence/absence, for the privileged and the dispossessed, as in the concept of trans(national)patriarchies. So what is the place of gerunds in global, transnational capitalist patriarchal change? What are the forms and limits of agency, individual and collective, and what are the major globalizing, transnationalizing processes that construct and constrain agencies? And how do these macro transnationalizing processes produce new dilemmas for human services?



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