



**Call for Papers on a Special Issue in *Organization Studies* on**

## **Collective Action in Crisis?**

**Guest Editors: Martin Kornberger, Renate Meyer, Corinna Frey-Heger,  
Marian Gatzweiler, Ignasi Martí**

**Submission deadline: October 15<sup>th</sup> 2021**

### **The challenge**

With the turn of the millennium, crisis seems to have entered the *theatrum mundi* for good: the terror attacks of 9/11, the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/08, the ensuing economic crises, the 2015 refugee crises and displacement more general, then various political crises (from protest movements, to national political movements, Brexit etc.), geopolitical conflicts and wars (Syria, Ukraine), the accelerating climate crisis and most recently, COVID 19. Given the original meaning of the Greek word ‘crisis’ (which derives from *krinein*, meaning to decide) we understand crises not only as low-probability, high-impact events such as disasters, fires, or earthquakes; rather we also include empirical contexts addressing organizing under high uncertainty, in extreme contexts, creeping crises or wicked problems. What we want to explore in this SI is how we organize our capacity, and organize for capacity, to act as collective in the midst of crisis. To be sure, much foundational and inspiring work has been done to address collective action in crisis, including literature on sense-making in crisis (Dwyer, Hardy, Maguire, 2020; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1993, 2010), practices of high-reliability teams (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011; Busby, 2006; Danner-Schröder and Geiger, 2016), studies in crisis management

(Ansell and Boin, 2019; Perrow, 1984; Rerup, 2009), decision making in crisis (Janis, 1989; Kornberger, Leixnering and Meyer, 2019), forms of robust action (Furnari, 2014; Leifer, 1983; Padgett and Ansell, 1993), work under extreme contexts (Bacharach and Barmberger, 2007; Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018; Shepherd and Willians, 2014) and, more generally, theory on tackling grand challenges (Ferraro, Etzion and Gehman, 2015).

Whilst building on these literatures, we suggest dealing with crisis goes beyond proposed forms of organizing collective action such as markets, hierarchies, networks, and institutions: in fact, during crisis neither prices, nor managerial fiat, nor norms or logics, nor social networks alone seem sufficient to coordinate action and orchestrate decision-making. Thus, in this SI we seek to consolidate our community's knowledge about organizing collective action in the midst of and following crises, broadly defined, and seek to extend our understanding of crises, their emergence, development, and possible strategies for their mitigation.

This empirical question also implies a theoretical puzzle: "Collective Action in Crisis?" may be read as questioning our theories of collective action and of organizing in times of crisis: Are our theories of organizing collective action in crisis sufficient to capture crisis' dynamics? Or does crisis (here revealing its shared roots with critique) expose the limitations of our theories of collective action? Do we need to think of alternative vocabularies – beyond markets, firms, networks, and institutions – to capture how collective action is organized in situations of crises? Are there different, perhaps, unexplored, traditions and scholarly conversations that may help in re-framing, re-positioning, or broadening, our theorizing?

Indeed, with "Collective Action in Crisis?" we propose a theoretical ambition *and* an empirical agenda, for the pressures of crisis accentuate some of Organization Studies' foundational concerns: how do highly specialized organizations organize crisis response? How do networks of actors from public, private and third sectors as well as emerging collectives orchestrate collaboration outside and beyond formal organization? How do these collectives mobilize resource, improvise solutions, and strategize under extreme uncertainty?

## **The call**

This special issue invites contributions to explore this dual agenda: how is collective action accomplished during crisis; and what do we learn about the governance and organization of collective action from crisis?

With this call we encourage submissions that relate to, but are not restricted by, the following concerns:

- **Organization of collective action:** We invite work that explores collective action as form of collaboration and coordination in crises beyond the well-worn modes of the state, market and hierarchy. In crisis we witness new forms of organizing collective action that rapidly switch between central and decentral, formal and informal, organic and mechanic organization. The question is through which governance mechanisms and practices such collectives are organized: how do they balance centrifugal and centripetal forces to arrive at robust action? How does a collective develop a sense of purpose and identity, a shared strategic direction, and sustains coherence in action? What are the organizational forms that emerge in response to crisis? We seek to explore the institutional, organizational and strategic forces that enable and/or constrain effective collective action and its governance. Alternative forms of organization, including temporary organizations, movements, peer networks, social entrepreneurship, sharing and others might be part and parcel of thinking through this issue.
- **Organizational practices, experimentations, innovation:** What are the routines, practices, technologies through which crisis situations are managed? When does management become part of the problem as it denies more fluid forms of organizing and more entrepreneurial approaches? Are there, despite uncertainty, institutionalized scripts and templates, logics of practice etc. that guide collective action? How are they translated into action? How detrimental can they be to local specificities and adaptation to local requirements? But crisis also triggers improvisation, creative organizational responses and different forms of distributed experimentation. How are radical forms of practice variation organized? How do well-worn scripts and newly improvised practices interact in extreme contexts? Which innovative forms of organizing collective action may allow for sustained flexibility and control at the same time? What theories of “humanness” do organizations that engage into experimentation embrace and what moral questions does this bring to the fore? What values come to the fore throughout crisis, and how do they question established orders of worth?
- **Communication, technology and social media:** Distributed crisis response often relies on modern communication technology to orchestrate collective action. Social media can galvanize a global audience and frame crises in specific ways. At the same time, crisis response and organizing is also about face-to-face networks, social histories and the messiness of offline social ties and politics. This begs the question how online platforms and social media combine with offline sites? How is required closeness and proximity paired with the global reach permitted by online platforms and social media? How does

new media shape messages and dynamics of framing and resource mobilization? What role does shared imagery, visualizations and the aesthetics of crisis play in crisis management?

- **Sensemaking, decision-making and leading:** In crisis, sensemaking and decision-making often oscillate between centralized approaches and more distributed forms of agency. How is agency (and cognition) distributed across actors and how is it brought together? How does decision-making within a plurality of actors sustain collective action during situations of crises? How are strategies of action developed? How is leading possible under conditions of polycentricity? And what does leadership mean in such situations?
- **Power and performance:** How is performance evaluated, given that different actors might have different evaluative practices and principles? How are conflicts (between actors, organizations, institutions) resolved? What is the role of expert knowledge during crises? Is knowledge translated into power or are experts complaisant accomplices of existing power structures? These questions ultimately point towards studying the interface between science and power where politics of valuation meet claims of evidence-based governance. During crisis, when facts are hard to establish let alone tested, and communication is mediatized, politics of representation and framing play a crucial role.
- **Civil society, infrastructures and politics:** During crises we see relations between state, organizations and civil society being negotiated anew. We witness a comeback of the state as sovereign actor in control of its population. At the same time, we see commons, peer networks and social infrastructures that mitigate against the crisis. New forms of commons, often enacted by civil society and grassroots movements, emerge side by side to heavy-handed state intervention. The question is how these new configurations result in new fault lines and new power relations between state, civil society and the individual? What are the respective roles of various sectors? How does (traditional as well as social) media influence and shape the relationship between actors? Due to the boundary spanning nature of these challenges, singular organizational and institutional actors are not equipped to deal with the scale of such issues in a sustained manner. The scale of these crises complicates the attribution of who is responsible, which often hinders the initiation and maintenance of collective action efforts that cut across institutional domains. The question is what new forms of collective organizing enable actors to deal with the increasing scale of crises? What mechanisms sustain and increase such engagement?
- **Temporality and sustained crisis:** While traditionally crises are studied as situations with relatively confined temporal horizons, many contemporary crises follow different

temporal dynamics: they are sustained or ‘creeping’ crises. This is not only evident in the accelerating climate crisis, but also in narrower crisis like the housing crisis or many humanitarian and displacement crises around the world that last for years, if not decades. Such shifting temporal dynamics present profound challenges for collective action: How do emergent collectives of actors make sense of and deal with such sustained crises?

What institutional arrangements foster or hinder collective action in response to sustained crises? How should we conceptualize the ontology of crisis, given its strange temporality?

- **Exit and transitions from crisis:** While managing at the onset of a crisis already seems rather complex, we experience that exiting any established ‘crisis mode’ with inherent practices of collective action is an even more difficult undertaking. We currently experience this in the light of the current COVID 19 crisis, where entering a crisis mode seemed much easier than exiting or transitioning to a ‘new state of normal’ following the crisis, especially once certain forms of collective action are accepted and followed. Similar dynamics seem to be at play in long-term and sustained displacement crises where people are contained in camps for decades without any clear end or transition in sight. Once certain response structures are arranged and established, they seem almost impossible to reverse. Is there a way to prepare for a ‘transition’ or ‘exit’ from the onset of a crisis, while recognizing the need for an initial buy-in from a range of actors to collectively respond to the crisis at first? Is the idea of a post-crisis ‘back to normal’ a viable exit strategy, or do we remain in constant interim and beta-mode?

These topics are meant to be generative rather than exhaustive. We encourage authors to think broadly about this topic and contact a member of the editorial team if they wish to explore the fit of their research to the special issue theme. We are open to theoretical and empirical papers, using a variety of methodologies.

## **Submitting your paper**

Please submit your manuscript through the journal’s online submission system

(<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies>). You will need to create a user account if you do not already have one, and you must select the appropriate Special Issue at the “Manuscript Type” option. The Special Issue Editors handle all manuscripts in accordance with the journal’s policies and procedures; they expect authors to follow the journal’s submission guidelines

(<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/oss>). You can submit your manuscript for this Special Issue

between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2021. Informal enquiries to Martin Kornberger (martin.kornberger@ed.ac.uk).

For administrative support and general queries, you may contact Sophia Tzagaraki, Managing Editor of Organization Studies, at osofficer@gmail.com.

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## Guest Editors

**Martin Kornberger** received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of Vienna in 2002. Prior to joining the University of Edinburgh as Chair in Strategy he worked at the University of Technology Sydney as associate professor in design and management, and as research director of the Australian Creative Industry Innovation Centre; at Copenhagen Business School as professor for strategy and organization; and at EM Lyon, France. Since 2011 he is also a research fellow at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. With a background in the Humanities and an eclectic bookshelf behind him, his research focuses on strategies for and organization of new forms of distributed collective action.

**Renate Meyer** is Chair in Organization Studies at WU Vienna University of Economics and Business and part-time Professor of Institutional Theory at Copenhagen Business School. Renate

is also a Visiting Fellow at UNSW Sydney, and Visiting Professorial Fellow in the Alberta School of Business. She focuses on meaning structures and has recently studied structural forms of institutional pluralism, institutions as multimodal accomplishments, novel forms of organization, collaborative governance and collective action mostly in urban contexts.

**Marian Gatzweiler** is a Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh Business School. Marian's research mainly focuses on the intersection between management and information systems in high-performance settings. His field work includes research on management practices in large-scale humanitarian crises and Europe's largest megaproject. Interdisciplinary in nature, Marian's research draws from organization theory, science and technology studies and political philosophy and ultimately seeks to develop actionable insights to inform contemporary management and policy challenges.

**Corinna Frey-Heger** is an Assistant Professor at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. With her research, she seeks to understand new forms of organizing in the context of today's grand challenges and global crisis. She conducted ethnographies in different refugee crises settings in Rwanda and Lebanon. Currently, she is particularly interested in how well-intended responses to such crises and challenges may intensify the very problems they are meant to solve. She completed her PhD in 2018 at the Cambridge Judge Business School.

**Ignasi Martí** is a Professor at the Society, Politics and Sustainability Department and the Director of the Social Innovation Institute at ESADE Business School. He is also visiting researcher at emlyon business school. He earned his PhD in Management at IESE Business School and his Habilitation à la Directions des Recherches (HDR) at the Université Paris-Dauphine. His research focuses on social exclusion, resistance, and has recently studied collective action in the face of the housing crisis in Spain and of human trafficking in India and Argentina.