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Administrative Resilience

CALL-FOR-PAPERS

Time for Meeting

Chair:

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This panel raises the question of the contribution of “the meetings”¹ to improving the resilience of public sector organisations.

Resilient organisations are permanently involved in making sense of complex, uncertain and changing environments (Duit 2016). They are organisations capable of “grasping ambiguity” (Weick 2015); that is, dealing with both a profusion of expert knowledge and our ignorance of how to use this abundant knowledge to address the complex problems facing public sector organisations.

Would “the meeting” be the very place where organisations are learning how to “grasp ambiguity”?

We, as researchers, practitioners or policy makers, are spending most of our time in meetings. The time spent by workers – particularly managers (Brinkerhoff 1972) – in meetings has always been significant (Bales 1954; Kriesberg & Guetzkow 1950) and keeps increasing (Rogelberg et al. 2006); social movement activists appear “to spend more time in meetings than in the street” (Haug 2013), and meetings proved to be central to key policy processes as agenda setting, devising and implementing policy change (Tepper 2004).

Despite this prevalence of meetings in organisational life, we continue to focus on actors, ideas and institutions. Among the researches that raised the topic of meeting, only a few considered “the meeting” as a research object in itself. Instead, they relied on an instrumental approach involving that: first, meetings are conceived as “tools for tasks” (such as decision-making); second, they are evaluated as ineffective tools; third, and consequently, one should concentrate on improving their effectiveness (Schwartzman 1989).

¹ Following Schwartzman, we define the meetings as gatherings between three or more individuals accepting to assemble for a purpose related to the functioning of an organisation or a group (Schwartzman, 1989). This panel specifically focuses on “planned meetings” (Haug, 2013): their time, participants, place, frequency and purposes are decided in advance and specific roles are allocated to the participants.

Following Schwartzman's invitation to stop considering meeting as tools for tasks, a "social view" on meetings (Peck et al. 2004) has shifted the focus toward actual meeting practices involved in initiating, conducting and terminating meetings (Jarzabkowski & Seidl 2008; Hendry & Seidl 2003).

This social view has also stimulated a reflection on the various roles played by meetings in organisations, such as a diagnostic (e.g. gaining knowledge of organisational failure) and expressive function (e.g. sharing opinions or circulating policy ideas) (e.g. Hagene 2016; Adams 2004), and drawn attention to their "great importance as a sense-making form for individuals and organisations" (Schwartzman 1989, p.9).

Then, "the meeting" might be the very place where organisational learning is enacted. It might create the ambiguity that makes a self-organising process possible (Hendry & Seidl 2003, p.185) by "bracketing in" (Thunus 2016) constituent elements of the meeting environment (e.g. people holding particular expertise, representing specific interests, and involved in extended networks of relationships), and "bracketing out" [idem] others, in particular the structures, rules of conduct and way of thinking specific to the meeting environment or "outside" (Goffman 1959).

This panel asks under which circumstances we particularly need to meet together (1. Time for meeting). What makes the meeting different from other arenas of the organisational life? And does this difference explain the contribution of meetings to improving organisational resilience (2. The meeting time). By examining the formation of "networks of meetings" (Freeman 2008); it also raises the question of the contribution of meetings to larger change processes (3. From time to Time).

These questions might be addressed by papers presenting empirical, qualitative and possibly ethnographic case studies of meetings as well as organisational or policy (change) processes inducing meetings "where different worlds come together" (Schwartzman 1989), i.e. meeting between different administrative departments, organisations, policy sectors and sub-sectors, professions, and so on.

1. Time for Meeting

Is there a time for meeting and is it, perhaps, time for meeting? Should we meet to address to complex and rapidly changing political and social problems we are facing?

Are the meetings particularly needed to respond to particular types of problems and why?

These questions could be addressed by papers reflecting on policy, social or organisational processes inducing meetings and examining the relationships between specific needs (for example, a new organisation strategy, the implementing a policy plan, the resolution of a political or environmental

crisis...) and the characteristics of the meetings (meeting time, place, regularity, participants, organisations...)

2. Meeting Time

Is the meeting time particular? Could we conceive “the meeting” as a bracket in time and space? How do the participants feel when attending a meeting? Do they have the impression to be in a specific social context where they are liable to experience new roles, relationships, senses of priority, and views of the world...?

In particular, how do the participants experience the meeting duration? Do they evaluate the time spent in meetings in the same way than the time they spend doing (what they think to be) their “real work”?

Is there particular meeting practices (practices involved in starting, conducting and ending meeting, coping with the meeting time/agenda ...) and actions (talking, listening, taking notes...) that influence the participants’ experience of the meeting event? And could we consider that these meeting practices and actions determine the meetings contribution to improving organisational resilience?

Papers addressing these questions might present detailed case studies focusing on meeting practices, actions and experiences (of time). They might examine the relationships between these practices, actions and experience and the impact of the studied meetings on their environment. Examining this relationship could lead, for example, to show how a separation between the meeting and its environment is achieved and to ask if this separation has an impact on the meeting contribution to organisational resilience.

3. From Time to Time

How do meetings relate to one another over a mean to long period of time? How is this relationship accomplished? In this respect, what is the role played by specific kinds of people, moving from one meeting to the next, and documents or other types of artefacts circulating over time and space? Are these relationships between apparently separated meeting events (“intercolloquiality” or “inter-eventuality” (Freeman 2012, p.18; Thunus 2016, p.21) relevant to understand the direction and pace of change processes? And do denser and larger networks of meetings mean more resilient public sector organisations?

Papers examining this issue might reflect on professional roles (for example, meeting convener, network coordinator...) inducing the participation in many meetings and ask if the way these roles are performed impact on the meeting contribution to organisational resilience. They might also question of the function of meeting tools, technologies of information and communication,

and other types of artefacts in connecting different meetings together. Finally, they might attempt to map and describe networks of meetings and reflect on the relationships between the characteristics of these network and organisational resilience.

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13 May 2018	Papers deadline	Date limite pour la soumission des contributions	13 mai 2018