

**LUCK OF THE DRAW?  
SERENDIPITY, ACCIDENT, CHANCE AND MISFORTUNE  
IN ORGANIZATION AND DESIGN**

A special issue to be published in *Culture and Organization*

Special Issue Editors

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*But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy!  
(Robert Burns, To a Mouse)*

Designer culture has become an important feature in contemporary organizations and one that carries significant claims for design as an *aesthetic* innovation (Brown 2008, 2009; Dunne and Martin 2006; Ewenstein and Whyte 2009; Lunberg and Pitsis 2010; Martin 2009). “Designer-made” suggests a superior type of good, one that commands a premium price in the market-place, where mass-produced products are replaced by carefully personalized and branded goods and services (Lipovetsky and Charles 2005). Exponents of the McDonaldization thesis have argued that brands are now the targets of the same rationalizing and planning forces that physical objects once were (Ritzer 1998), while others have argued that brands acquire lives of their own by dint of a myriad accidental factors that put them beyond the control of their designers (Arvidsson 2006; Kornberger 2010).

Organizations themselves, their architectures and cultures, can be viewed as products of design where practices, meanings and relations are carefully devised and controlled by managers and armies of advisers, consultants and gurus who work for them (Casey 1996; Sarasvathy et al. 2008; Dunbar and Starbuck 2006; Yoo, Boland, and Lyytinen 2006). Conversely, they can be approached as outcomes of innumerable local initiatives, conflicts, compromises and accidents, chance discoveries and unlucky lapses, where large parts of organizational life remain unmanaged and unmanageable (Bowles 1997; Thomas 1993; Gabriel 1995; Kornberger and Clegg 2003). Meanings are, according to the former conceptualization, carefully produced and monitored by regimes of rationality and control, whereas the latter allows space for meanings to emerge spontaneously and mutate through fantasy, emotion and pleasure (e.g. O'Doherty 2004).

Intelligent design or random mutation? A purposeful, meaningful cosmos created with the methodical fastidiousness of a Swiss watch-maker versus an inchoate, emergent universe full of surprises, accidents and coincidences, good and bad – this is the core question that we seek to explore in this Special Issue.

The axis of mechanical design versus organic emergence is one that underscores many of the debates in organizational and management studies. Conceptions of organizations emphasizing their mechanical, planned and controlled qualities approach them as human artefacts, the products of design, calculation and creative imagination. Those of them stressing their organic, unpredictable and complex qualities approach them as outcomes of social, political and other processes that are not directly managed or controlled by anyone.

Conceptualizations of management and leadership also diverge widely, depending on the emphasis placed on design. Planning and controlling were determining features of classical

conceptions of the manager, conceptions that cast him (and only by the occasional exception her) in the role of someone who has, if not eliminated, at least tamed the whims of fortune and leaves little to chance (e.g. Jaques 1976). It is as if organization, its theorists and practitioners, had finally exorcised Fortuna, the bitch-goddess of unpredictability, to whom the Romans dedicated more temples than any other (Machiavelli 1513/1961; MacIntyre 1981) by closing down all these temples for good and all. More recent conceptualizations, however, have tended to emphasize the manager's ability to improvise, think laterally ("out of the box"!) and creatively when confronted by an unpredictable and changing world (Mintzberg 1983; Weick 1993). Excessive reliance on plans, designs and scenarios has been seen as curtailing an organization's or group's ability to respond flexibly and creatively to uncommon situations. Concepts such as 'communities of practice' and 'emergent networks' have tended to highlight the evolving, accidental, spontaneous and unmanaged qualities of certain social groupings – to the point where it has been argued that "business authors often 'miraculate' their object of study" (Spoelstra 2010, 87). This call for flexibility and creativity, however, has not deterred enthusiasts of strategy and design from seeking to 'create' such communities and networks, guide them and even target them towards specific tasks and ends. And is there a space in between – do we need to prepare ourselves to make the most of the unpredictable event, to improvise fruitfully, or to "make our own luck?" (de Rond and Morley 2009; Merton and Barber 2006).

We are interested in exploring the scope and limits of design when applied to any organizing activity, but specifically so through the ways in which *serendipity*, *luck*, *chance* and *misfortune* as entities must be seriously entertained when theorizing any such activity (Roberts 1989; Fine and Deegan 1996; Kubinyi 1999). In particular, we would encourage submissions that address (but are not limited to) some of the following areas:

- The cross-roads where organizing meets serendipity and design
- Misfortune and organizational design
- Branding: Marketing accident or designed responses?
- The importance of luck, accident and serendipity in the creative process
- Learning to be lucky and learning from luck
- The aesthetics and rhetoric of design – the fantasy of designer omnipotence and its ramifications
- The politics of design and in particular the attempts to "design out" expressions and actions of dissent and contestation
- The poetics of chance and design – the usefulness of design and fortune as sense-making devices
- The 'management' of unpredictability and chance events and the spectre of undersigned and unmanaged organizations
- Accidental organizations and organizations designed to deal with accidents
- Narratives of luck, misfortune and design in organizational life.

### **Submission and informal enquiries**

Please ensure that all submissions to the special issue are made via the ScholarOne *Culture and Organization* site at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gsc>. You will have to sign up for an account before you are able to submit a manuscript. Please ensure when you do submit that you select the relevant special issue (volume 20, issue 5) to direct your submission appropriately. If you experience any problems please contact the editors of this issue.

The deadline for manuscript submission is 5th of September 2013.

Style and other instructions on manuscript preparation can be found at the journal's website: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1475-9551&linktype=44>.

Manuscript length should not exceed 8000 words, including appendices and supporting materials. Please also be aware that any images used in your submission must be your own, or where they are not you must already have permission to reproduce them in an academic journal. You should make this explicit in the submitted manuscript.

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