

Exploring ‘Risk’ Beyond ‘Risk Management’: *Critiquing the Limits and (Un)Intended Consequences of Managerialism*

***Call for Papers for Sub-Theme
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Stream Convenors

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Introduction

In November 2022, *Collins Dictionary* announced that its ‘word of the year’ was ‘permacrisis’. *Collins* explained that they chose this word because it ‘sums up quite succinctly how truly awful 2022 has been for so many people’ (Sherwood, 2022). However, as the dictionary’s definition of the word suggests, permacrisis does not simply refer to the events and experiences of one particularly awful year, but the culmination of ‘an extended period of instability and insecurity’. It therefore describes our own historical moment as a period which can be traced across various crises that have been of international concern in the first two decades of the 21st Century: global financial crises, ecological collapse, political upheavals (of various kinds), the Covid-19 pandemic, the potential of a return to war in Europe and South-East Asia, ever-increasing disparities in wealth and income, social divisions sewn by so-called ‘identity politics’ and ‘culture wars’, as well as various ‘threats’ to national and international peace. The term therefore acknowledges that among the main events of the 21st century have been the proliferation of various risks entering into our daily lives. This is despite the beginning of the 21st Century being marked by the promise that liberal-democratic capitalism (and managerialism) had triumphed over the social, political, and economic conflicts that defined the previous century.

In the context of these unsettling, complex and perpetually uncertain developments, we suggest that the 2023 *International Critical Management Studies Conference* presents a pertinent opportunity to reconsider what we mean by ‘risk’ – a key concept that invariably will be entwined with these phenomena: what ‘risk’ refers to, where it can and can’t be located, who bears the burden of risk, and who speaks of it – how and in what ways? These fundamental questions will allow us to reconsider how businesses, organisations, societies, individuals, and groups may approach managing risk, both inside and outside organisational contexts. Indeed, the word ‘critical’ is etymologically rooted in the ‘judgement’ of ‘the nature of a crisis, in a condition of extreme doubt or danger’ and therefore applies as much to the individual citizens and subjects of the 21st Century, as it does to the institutions that bring individuals together into various forms of organisation.

With the intensified encroachment of risks of various kinds continuing to enter all aspects of modern life, we suggest that now is a crucial moment for critical management and organisation scholars to rethink and challenge the conceptualisation of ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’ as they have emerged and developed as discrete areas of inquiry in MOS as well as in the wider social sciences and humanities. Indeed, a defining aspect of the interdisciplinary field of CMS (and one which sets it apart from MOS more generally) is the potential position to think and practice ‘against management’ but *for* organising (Parker, 2002). We seek to extend this formulation towards problematising the very ‘management’ of risk by opening the concept up to all domains of management practice and thought.

Aim of Stream

The aim of this stream, therefore, is *not* to further develop contributions to the domain of ‘risk management’ as such, but to provide a space in which scholars from a diverse array of backgrounds can consider their focus of interest in relation to ‘risk management’ and the various ‘risks’ that dominate their respective domains of inquiry. Our aim is to provide a platform on which a broad network of scholars can begin critiquing and exploring the limits of risk as an ever-present concept. This is particularly timely as scholarly and practitioner interest in discourses of risk – its ‘assessment’ and ‘management’ – has proliferated to unprecedented levels in recent years. Indeed, there appears to be no organisational field or domain that is left untouched by ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’s’ intrusion.

This pervasive interest is a key reason for the need for risk’s re-appraisal. Additionally, alongside its managerial and organisational manifestations is the recognition that some of the most defining vocabularies for research and thinking in the social sciences have been cast in terms of risk itself. In the past half century we have witnessed key schools of thought and scholarship develop from the very concept of risk, including: Cultural Theory of Risk (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1980; Douglas, 1966); Foucauldian perspectives (Castel, 1991; Foucault, 2000); and relatedly, the institutional and social arrangements leading to the ‘Risk Society’ perspective (Beck, 1992, 1986, 2008; Giddens, 1990). In expanding and extending upon his earlier ‘Audit Society’ thesis (Power, 1997), Power (2004, 2016) has systematically captured how ‘normal’ organisational practices of risk management have proliferated since the mid-1990s into a key constitutive part of ‘good’ governance. Moreover, serious questions have been raised about the central paradox of managing risk, where the active attempt to reduce, avoid and overcome ‘risk’ can actually lead to unintended consequences that may cause more ‘risk’ (Beck, 1992).

Considering the various ‘risks’, ‘dangers’, ‘crises’, ‘conflicts’ and ‘challenges’ named above, this subtheme invites submissions from a diverse range of critical approaches - theoretical, thematic/conceptual, empirical, and methodological. We also encourage contributions from a range of disciplines to address areas of managerial concern that have so far not been considered in terms of risk. Therefore, contributions from any strand of CMS are welcome. These may consider the following questions: What is the future of the risk society? Is it possible to imagine a world beyond risk and its management (how would such a world look like)? What vocabularies and avenues of critique are available for those seeking to move beyond legacy approaches to risk? Is there an alternative to risk management? How might critical scholars engage practitioners, activists, and students around risk?

Rethinking Risk in the Context of the Conference Theme

In line with the general theme for the *2023 International Critical Management Studies Conference* on ‘Being practically critical: Re-imagining possibilities for CMS, challenging the idea of a conference and (re)building our community of communities’, we encourage submissions that may themselves be interpreted as ‘risky’, ambitious in scope and radical in terms of thinking, writing, and presenting on this pervasive topic. We welcome papers that use any of a wide variety of theoretical and disciplinary lenses to reimagine and challenge what we might traditionally understand in terms of ‘risk’ and its management.

Call for Papers

We suggest that the pervasive nature of ‘risk’ calls for the reconsideration and critique of ‘risk management’s’ *limits*. We therefore encourage papers that address and extend critical analyses of

various forms of 'risk'. Our list is inevitably non-exhaustive; however, submissions may include the following topic areas:

- Alternative Approaches to Risk Management
- Neo-Liberalism and the Transformation of Risk
- The Ethics of Risk and Risk Management
- Ecological and Environmental Crises
- The Limits and Consequences of Legislating Against Risks (e.g., United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, COP27 etc.)
- Surveillance and Risk
- Entrepreneurship and the Celebration of Risk
- Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, and Machine Learning (as a means of overcoming and increasing Risks)
- Organizing for War and Peace (Risks associated with military, political and NGO contexts)
- Risk and Everyday Life (Health and Safety, Food Security, Identity Politics, Culture Wars etc.)
- Risk and Exploitation (e.g., Precarious Work, modern-day slavery, Human Rights etc.)
- Trust, Secrecy, Transparency and Risk
- Performance Management, People Analytics, and the Management of Risky Human Resources
- Emotions and Experiences of Risk
- Cultures of Fear and Affect
- The Risk of Positivity and Cultures of Well-being
- The Risks and Consequences of Technology
- The History and Legacy of Risk
- Risk and the Emergence of Resilience

While we encourage papers to be delivered in person, we are happy to receive submissions from those that cannot present in person subject to request. **We therefore ask that you indicate your preference as part of your submitted abstract.**

Please submit abstracts for consideration to cmsbeyonrisk@gmail.com by the **14th April 2023**. Please ensure abstracts are no longer than 500 words (excluding references), so they can be included in the conference book of abstracts. We welcome prospective submissions from academics at all stages of study, and ideas at all stages of development. We also welcome longer papers that are under development (in addition to the 500-word abstract) for the purposes of consideration and feedback.

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