

Special Issue of *Organization Studies*

Inequality, Institutions, and Organizations

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Organization Studies, the official journal of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS), invites submissions for a Special Issue on “Inequality, Institutions, and Organizations”.

Deadline for paper submissions: March 30, 2015

This Special Issue focuses on the relationships between inequality, institutions and organizations. Although the relevance of organizational research to societal problems has spawned debate for at least a decade, and has generated a proliferation of polemics and prescriptions (e.g., Dover & Lawrence, 2010; George, McGahan & Prahbu, 2012; Gulati, 2007; Hinings & Greenwood, 2002; Lorsch, 2009; Starkey & Madan, 2001; Von Glinow, 2005.), there has been insufficient theoretical and empirical engagement among organization scholars on questions that primarily relate to the relationships between social inequality and institutional development. The ways in which organizations and institutions contribute to or mitigate inequality is of particular concern. As such, the potential for management scholars to inform understanding of the mechanisms that exacerbate or reduce inequality is significant; similarly, the study of inequality poses fundamental questions for management theory.

Inequality is profound in both developed and developing contemporary society. Despite Friedman's (1971) and Vermeulen's (2005) claim that improving business profitability is itself a major contribution to society (because social welfare increases when businesses make more money), a growing body of research ranging from Jencks et al (1979) to Stiglitz (2012) suggests that improvements in aggregate wealth may be associated with increases in inequality. Increases in wealth are not always associated with prosperity. For example, rich societies do not always perform better on social and health indicators than moderately wealthy societies, while more equal ones often do. For example, Greece, despite its fiscal crisis, has a higher life expectancy with \$20,000 per capita income than the USA, which boasts twice the per capita income of Greece (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Income inequality is also growing in its prevalence and impact (Jencks et al 1979). The share of wealth owned by the richest 1% Americans has grown from 19.9% in 1976 to 34.6% in 2007, with liquid wealth (equal to the value of all assets except housing) even more concentrated as the richest 1% owned 42.7% in 2007 (Wolff, 2010). In 1960, the ratio of annual pay of CEOs of large- and medium-sized American companies to that of workers was 42:1; by 2007 it had increased to 344:1 (Lansley, 2011). A symptom of the mechanisms behind these changes is evident in the distribution of income among the rich: in 2004, the combined income of the top 25 hedge fund managers was greater than the combined income of all CEOs of S&P 500 firms (Kaplan & Rauh, 2010). Despite widespread reporting of these facts, relatively little research has developed in the field of management on the causes of such disparities (e.g., Norton & Ariely, 2011).

The growing problem of inequality in developed countries appears connected to the prevalence of large corporations. Barley (2007), for instance, argues that large corporations wield inordinate influence over policy-making, hamper the performance of institutions created to protect the public from corporate excesses and, together with various multilateral institutions, push for increased privatization of public services. In a similar vein, Davis (2009) proposes that the financialization of the economy has been a powerful catalyst for inequality. Shareholder value creation has become, in many cases, the sole driver of corporate strategies with imperatives such as employment conditions, economic mobility, and health benefits increasingly ignored (Stout, 2012).

Social inequality effects a broader range of outcomes than just inequality in income or wealth. It includes inequality of access to health care, education, housing, food, economic resources, power structures, and areas of recreation; degradation of living conditions, the environment, social structures, and relationships; and direct or indirect exploitation of groups on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, disability, or sexuality. All of these are driven in part by the distribution of wealth, but they also each have their own specific dynamics and challenges. Consequently, rather than solely rely on numerical measures, we also need to consider qualitative understandings of (in)justice and perceived fairness. While perhaps more difficult to capture, the unveiling of causes and effects in these areas are at least as important as considerations of financial disparities. Thus, for this Special Issue, we are interested in the broadest sense of the term inequality.

A critical way in which institutional and organizational scholars can contribute to a better understanding of inequality is through an examination of the roles they play in producing, reproducing, and diminishing social disparities. An institutional perspective on these issues could highlight the ways in which social rules, beliefs, norms, values and practices are mediated through formal organizations to create and reinforce structures of social inequality such that they often become taken-for-granted. In many cases, such work would illuminate the ways in which corporate and social elites (re)create organizational and institutional structures to their own advantage. Such research might further illuminate the institutional work of individual and organizational actors in the formation, ongoing operation, and potential transformation of institutions that include certain groups, while excluding others; reinforce unequal access to power and decision-making mechanisms; and, provide freedom and wealth to some parts of society, while impoverishing and constraining others. Crucially, such analyses could also expose ways in which such institutions can be disrupted, destroyed, and/or replaced with those that are more equitable. Finally, an institutional lens applied to issues of inequality could explore acts of resistance, ranging from the occasional and highly symbolic (Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a Birmingham, Alabama, bus) to the everyday tactics employed by the weak (silent non-compliance, gossip, petty sabotage, small theft and pilferage, etc.).

Macro- and micro-organizational scholars might productively explore those organizations, and individuals most clearly tied to issues of social inequality, including those elites with formal decision-making power, such as politicians, corporate managers, senior civil servants, educators, and leaders of non-profit organizations. It could also examine those who act to contour organizational and societal cultures, such as film and television producers, media writers, designers, architects, professors, and enablers of mass forms of communication, who play a pronounced role in determining acceptable norms, values and beliefs.

In addition to the general moral and theoretical need to explore these issues, there is growing evidence that the urgency for such research has been exacerbated by recent changes to the economic, political and social structures that shape our everyday existence. The recent financial crisis is clearly germane, but it is also apparent that the sources of societal inequalities are more deeply rooted, and that we know relatively little about them or the organizations and institutions that originate and perpetuate them. For example, the “working poor,” while “seemingly indispensable to the value creation model for firms in developed economies” (Leana et al., 2012: 901) are simultaneously constrained by these same systems with little chance of advancing beyond their current circumstances (see also Mair et al., 2012). Virtual workers, an increasing proportion of the workforce in many organizations, have reported feeling less respected and more disconnected to the organizations that employ them than more traditional workers (Bartel et al., 2012). Further, despite decades of awareness, women remain discriminated against in many organizations, leading to a perpetuation of unequal pay and severe under-representation in senior management positions (Belliveau, 2012; Elvira & Graham, 2002; Hoobler et al., 2009; Huffman et al., 2010; Phillips, 2005; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Racial disparities (Carton & Rosette, 2011; Cortina, 2008; Hekman et al., 2010), sexual harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Raver & Gelfand, 2005), discrimination against stigmatized and marginalized individuals and groups (Martí & Fernández, 2013; Paetzold, et al., 2008; Soule, 2012) and even exploitation that leads to “body breakdowns” (Michel, 2011) have also been reported as outcomes of pernicious organization-related and often institutionalized actions that lead to deep, and often widely-held, feelings of injustice. Finally, the degradation caused to the natural environment as an outcome of political action, power dynamics, and investment decisions is also in need of more study. As Adler (2012: 246) has recently stated, as well as being an enabling tool for required cooperative functioning, bureaucracies also remain a “coercive weapon for exploitation”.

Earle et al. (2010), not surprisingly, found that the more frequent deviant behavior takes place within a community, the more likely it is that other organizations will also engage in it, and the less likely it is that injured parties will oppose it. Consequently there are important questions raised by the existence of such inequities and problematic behaviors that have become seemingly entrenched in many of our societal structures. Despite this, and the tremendous growth in research over the past decades, the intersection of social inequality, organizations and institutions remains significantly under-examined. As such, we feel that scholars interested in institutions and organizations, from those who study the behavior of individuals to those who are interested in how societies are shaped and governed – and all levels in between – can and should contribute to our understanding of inequality.

Our aim for this Special Issue is to begin to address this inconsistency. Thus, we invite papers that explore a range of themes, including the following:

- The institutional foundations of inequality;
- The impact of specific institutions on social inequality, and how those impacts are mediated by organizations and individual actors;
- The creation and persistence of particular organizations (e.g., multilateral agencies, associations or clubs) and their impact on specific forms and instances of inequality;
- The development or employment of technology in the persistence and creation of inequality;
- The role of social and corporate elites in creating and/or reproducing self-serving structures of inequality;

- The institutional work of specific individual organizational actors to increase or decrease social inequality;
- The unintended consequences on social inequality of organizational actors and actions;
- The use and exposure of devices that disguise inequality;
- The collective mobilization against (or in support of) inequality;
- The legitimization of particular domains of activity that lead to greater or lesser inequality;
- Silences and absence of theorization with respect to inequality in institutional analyses;
- The roles of power and political structures in determining how structures of inequality are created and maintained;
- Strategies that disrupt institutionalized structures of inequality;
- The implications of inequality considerations for theories of management, including theories of agency, capability development, and organization design;
- The identification of theoretical and/or empirical criteria for measuring inequality;
- The implications of inequality for foundational relationships in theories of organization studies.

This list is, of course, meant to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive. Our goal is to broaden and deepen the exploration of how, why, when and where social inequality, organizations and institutions interact. In particular, we anticipate that this Special Issue will be of interest to those organization and institutional scholars who align with various theoretical and empirical approaches, including, but not limited to, practices and/or routines, feminism, critical theory, critical race theory, actor network theory, sensemaking, semiotics, network analyses, discourse analyses, institutional work, institutional logics, and participatory action research approaches. We are similarly encouraging of case studies, comparative research projects, ethnographies, survey-based work, large statistical analyses, and conceptual pieces. Finally, we would like to see work that is focused on inequality in different geographical regions, including developed and developing countries. In so doing, and with all due respect to the few researchers who have drawn attention to social problems, we hope to begin to address Von Glinow's (2005: 983) recent criticism that management scholars have been "far too silent on things that matter."

Potential Contributors

We are very confident that we will receive a strong response to a call for papers for this Special Issue. We have organized two events connected with this topic that have been very successful. In 2012, Lawrence, Amis and Munir organized a sub-theme at the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) annual congress that attracted 33 submissions from 15 different countries. Following the success of this sub-theme, the same group organized a follow-up conference in Vancouver in June 2013 with the same title as this proposal. This conference attracted 44 papers from scholars in 8 countries. The quality of the papers for both events was, on the whole, impressive and included papers from a number of very well established scholars and others who, while more junior, are clearly going to have a significant impact on the field. Included in the submissions were authors who have published in *Organization Studies*, and other leading journals such as *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and *Organization Science*. Given the conversations that we have had with those who attended these conferences, and other highly regarded scholars who are working in this field, we have no doubt that we will be able to produce a high quality Special Issue.

Submissions

Please submit papers through the journal's online submission system, SAGE track. To do so, please visit <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies>, create your user account (if you have not done so already), and for "Manuscript Type" choose the corresponding Special Issue. All papers that enter the reviewing process will be double-blind reviewed following the journal's normal review process and criteria. You will be able to submit your paper for this Special Issue through SAGE Track between **March 1 and 30, 2015**.

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An international organization is a union of actors in the international arena, formed to perform specified functions and/or solve identified problems for the members and/or non members. The concept of an international organization can also be seen on the one hand as a logical progression in the evolution of political entities from the basic family or tribal grouping of pre- and early historic times to the feudal arrangements of early Europe which emerged following Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (Imber 1984). An informed study would be quick to point out the limitations of a typical international organization. This study focuses on the identifiable limitations of the United Nations.

3. The problem of inequality- The reality of inequality in the world system is very much visible in the UN. Inclusive organizations are those that all interested parties can join, whereas exclusive organizations are those designed specifically to exclude some countries. The regimes literature studies the effects of IOs on other actors in international relations, particularly states. It looks at IOs as if they were black boxes, and examines the inputs into and outputs from these boxes. Chapter 6 looks at issues of peace and security, focusing on the concept of collective security and on the organizations involved in the collective security system. These include the Security Council and Secretariat of the UN, and regional collective security organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

Introduction to Groups and Organizations. The punk band NOFX is playing outside in Los Angeles. The music is loud, the crowd pumped up and excited. The critical perspective is another macroanalytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth of inequality. A critical theorist studying the Occupy movement might look at how business interests have manipulated the system to reduce financial regulations and corporate taxes over the last 30 years. In particular, they would be interested in how these led to the financial crisis of 2008 and the increasing inequality we see today. The slogan, "We are the 99%," emblematic of the Occupy movement, refers to the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class.