



Call for papers for an *ephemera* conference

Beyond measure

Stockholm University Business School, Sweden
1st – 2nd June 2017

Organizers:

Nick Butler, Helen Delaney, Emilie Hesselbo and Sverre Spoelstra

Measurement is a central task of capitalist organization. From the days of the industrial factory, when labour first came to be measured in hours, through to the time-motion studies under Taylorist regimes, measurement has involved the optimization of surplus value extraction from labour. During the 20th century, these techniques of measurement were complemented by more intrusive forms of quantification such as the use of psychological testing in the human relations school.

The will to quantify continues today with balanced scorecards and activity-based costing (Power, 2004), the discourse of employability (Chertkovskaya, et al., 2013), and the performativity of economics (Callon, 1998). At the same time, others point to the impossibility of measuring affective work and immaterial labour (Dowling, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2000). More generally, ‘trust in numbers’ (Porter, 1995) – based on a longstanding infatuation with the ideal of objectivity (Stengers, 2000) – is becoming characteristic of a totally quantified society in which we keep track of our diet, fitness, sleeping habits, and menstrual cycles via digital tracking technologies (Charitsis, 2016).

Quantification also lies at the heart of knowledge production in the business school (Zyphur et al., 2016). Ever since the early influence of Paul Lazarsfeld (1993) in the post-war years, management science has

been preoccupied with the measurement of ‘objects’, ranging from things that are straightforwardly measurable (e.g. the height of employees in leadership positions) to things that are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify (e.g. charisma, authenticity, ethics). Despite a half-century of criticism directed at the positivist tradition in the social sciences, management science still holds to the McNamara fallacy: ‘If it can’t be measured, it doesn’t exist’. The politics of measurement in management theory and practice – and its link to the logic of capitalist exploitation – therefore deserve sustained critical scrutiny.

For this *ephemera* conference, we invite papers that explore the stakes of measuring organizations and their members – especially in contested zones of quantification. For instance, what happens when employees are measured not just in terms of productivity but also their health and well-being (Cederström and Spicer, 2015)? What happens when leaders are measured not just in terms of bottom-line performance but also their authenticity or spirituality (Ford and Harding, 2011)? Closer to home, what happens when academics are measured not just in terms of the quality of their scholarship but also their citation rate and H-index (Nkomo, 2009)?

But we are also interested in what is beyond measure – that is, the relation between organizing and the immeasurable. Here, religion and spirituality come into view. One may think of themes such as the call for a ‘higher purpose’ in work, the role of faith and spirituality in business, and the presence of organizational figures who defy measurement (idols, spirits, ghosts, monsters, etc.). Deleuze (1995: 181) famously said that the idea that organizations have a soul is ‘the most terrifying news in the world’. For us, this is no longer news but perhaps all the more terrifying for it.

Efforts to quantify aspects of our organizational lives give rise to new and complex ethical questions around work, identity and politics. We therefore invite submissions that may include, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Measuring organizations, management and leadership
- The excessive, the limitless and the infinite
- Big data and algorithmic management
- The quantified self and digital measurement technologies
- The turn to ‘objectivity’ in the social sciences
- Zero and nothingness
- The performativity of measures
- Value theory and the immeasurability of labour

- The reevaluation of values
- Faith and spirituality in business
- Time-motion studies and their contemporary equivalents
- Death and 'the great beyond' in organization
- The use of psychometric instruments in management theory and practice
- Commensuration and incommensurability in organizational theory and practice
- The politics of performance audits
- Measuring the immeasurable

Deadline and further information

The deadline for submitting abstracts is **1st March 2017**. Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be submitted in a Word document to one of the conference organizers: Nick Butler (nick.butler@sbs.su.se), Helen Delaney (h.delaney@auckland.ac.nz), Emilie Hesselbo (emilie.hesselbo@fek.lu.se) and Sverre Spoelstra (sverre.spoelstra@fek.lu.se).

The conference will be held at Stockholm University Business School, Kräftriket, Stockholm. See here for details:
<http://www.su.se/english/about/campus/maps/kr%C3%A4ftriket>.

The conference is free for all participants to attend, but registration via email is required.

Selected papers from the conference will be published in a special issue of *ephemera*.

References

- Butler, N. and S. Spoelstra (2014) 'The regime of excellence and the erosion of ethos in critical management studies', *British Journal of Management*, 25(3): 538-550.
- Callon, M. (1998) 'An essay on framing and overflowing: Economic externalities revisited by sociology', *The Sociological Review*, 46(1): 244-269.

Cederström, C. and A. Spicer (2015) *The wellness syndrome*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity

Charitsis, V. (2016) 'Prosuming (the) self', *ephemera*, 16(3): 37-59.

Chertkovskaya, E., P. Watt, S. Tramer and S. Spoelstra (2013) 'Giving notice to employability', *ephemera*, 13(4): 701-716.

Deleuze, G. (1995) 'Postscript on control societies', in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. M. Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dowling, E. (2007) 'Producing the dining experience: Measure, subjectivity and the affective worker', *ephemera*, 7(1): 117-132.

Ford, J. and N. Harding (2011) 'The impossibility of the "true self" of authentic leadership', *Leadership*, 7(4): 463-479.

Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Lazarsfeld, P.F. (1993) *On social research and its language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nkomo, S.M. (2009) 'The seductive power of academic journal rankings: Challenges of searching for the otherwise', *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 8(1): 106-121.

Porter, T.M. (1995) *Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Power, M. (2004) 'Counting, control and calculation: Reflections on measuring and management', *Human Relations*, 57(6), 765-783.

Stengers, I. (2000) *Invention of modern science*, trans. D.W. Smith. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Zyphur, M.J., D.C. Pierides and J. Roffe (2016) 'Measurement and statistics in "organization science": Philosophical, sociological and historical perspectives', in R. Mir, H. Willmott and M. Greenwood (eds.) *The Routledge companion to philosophy in organization studies*. London and New York: Routledge.