Special Issue Call for Papers
Open Organizing in an Open Society?
Conditions, Consequences and Contradictions of Openness
as an Organizing Principle

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Openness has become a powerful norm within contemporary societies (Tkacz, 2012): communities and citizens want both to know "what is going on" and to "have a say" in what affects their daily lives. Organizations are responding by adopting more open practices, for example by introducing greater transparency of information, enhancing upwards and downwards accountability and increasing inclusion by dissolving internal and external boundaries. The call for more openness has a range of implications for organization design, decision-making, control systems and culture. As an organizing principle, openness fundamentally changes what organizations are, how they function and how they interact with their environments. But openness also seems to stand in contrast with existing understandings of organizational confidentiality, competitive advantage, and classical notions of authority. Across these aspects of organizational openness, this special issue aims to theorize the conditions, consequences and contradictions of organizational openness.

Our understanding of openness as an organizing principle is informed by diverse and somewhat fragmented streams of research that investigate how organizations (try to) escape the dysfunctions of bureaucracy, cultural intimacy, tight boundaries and analogue procedures. As such, they address different aspects of open organizing in the light of changing currents in society at large. One stream of research examines the effects of increasing societal demands for transparency, accountability, and participation on organizational processes. Within this stream several studies point to the consequences of openness in terms of its potential for enhanced organizational effectiveness and widened democratic practice as it produces flattened hierarchies, and access to valid and trustworthy knowledge (e.g., Birchall, 2014; Holzner & Holzner, 2006; Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003). However, recent studies highlight the contradictions and ambivalence of openness, especially with regard to transparency. For example, Christensen and Cheney (2014: 81) argue that even though transparency is supposed to create accountability and to stimulate widespread participation, power and authority remain "inherent dimensions of the dialectics between openness and closure in organizational transparency practices" (see also Dobusch et al., 2017; Thorén, Ågerfalk, & Rolandsson, 2017; Costas & Grey, 2014; Birchall, 2011; Garsten & Lindh de Montaya, 2008).

While these studies relate openness to societal ideals or demands, other studies investigate open organizing in terms of open, post-bureaucratic organizational forms. Here, openness refers to changes to the order within and between organizations, which has consequences for organizational layers and boundaries, spans of control and flexibility, and the empowering of employees (Palmer et al., 2014; Puranam et al.,

2014; Whittington et al., 1999). This has led studies to describe open organizational forms, such as business ecosystems (Baldwin, 2012) or meta organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Gulati et al., 2012), as fluid or liquid (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010), latent (Starkey et al. 2000) or boundaryless (Ashkenas et al., 2002). Based on the characteristics of open organizational forms, studies have pointed to new challenges with regard for openness in organizational designs (e.g. Berkowitz & Bor, 2017) and the conflicts of openness with organizational control (Grey & Garsten, 2001; Clegg & Courpasson, 2004) or the reproduction of hierarchical structures (Oberg & Walgenbach, 2008). Thus, open organizational forms are exposed to the "ambiguous dialectics of democracy and bureaucracy" (Josserand et al., 2006) even though they include the reduction of formal hierarchy, an emphasis on flexibility rather than rule following, and the creation of more permeable boundaries inside and outside the organization.

By examining the social dynamics of open organizing other work shift the focus from openness as an organizational form to processes of open organizing (e.g, Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, Dobusch & Schoenborn, 2015). As Faraj et al. (2016: 672) argue, open organizing in social collectives, such as online communities, conditions sociality despite "membership fluidity" to enhance organizational processes, such as sharing and transferring knowledge (von Hippel & von Krogh, 2003; Felin et al., 2014). However, fluidity poses new challenges of organizing, especially with regard to collective actorhood and identity (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015; Hemetsberger & Reinhardt, 2009). Moreover, post-bureaucratic trends that affect processes of open organizing go along with an anti-liberal tendency in managers' decision-making based on closure, which "may hence inherently foster the tenets of the closed society" (Armbrüster & Gebert, 2002: 184). Consequently, we observe an increasing acknowledgment of co-emerging dilemmas or paradoxes in processes of open organizing, which include freedom and control, transparency and opacity, flexibility and stability, individualism and collectivism (Raviola, 2017).

Finally, such dilemmas and paradoxes in open organizing are also increasingly discussed in studies that focus on openness in various organizational domains. These domains such as open strategy (Whittington, Cailluet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011), open innovation (Chesbrough, 2006), open government (Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012) or open science (Nosek et al., 2015) consider openness in terms of increased transparency and inclusion, widened participation and fluid boundaries. For example, in the domain of open innovation traditionally secret activities are increasingly opened up to external constituents, such as users, customers, and other stakeholders (Mol & Birkinshaw, 2014), while open source software development adopts openness as an organizing principle in terms of increased participation and hence fluid boundaries (Feller & Fitzgerald, 2002). Related to these dimensions of openness, scholars found contradictions of openness, such as new closures and opacity for protecting valuable information assets (Ringel, 2018; West & Gallagher, 2006), or for securing speed and flexibility in decision making (Hautz et al., 2017). Similar to other streams of literatures mentioned above, studies on open government also emphasize that open access to data may not necessarily lead to more democratic practices (Janssen et al., 2012; Kornberger et al., 2017).

Submissions to this special issue
Across these streams of literature, the central objective of the special issue is to explore how societal demands for various dimensions of openness are realized in contemporary organizing. In so doing this special issue seeks to lay foundations for theorizing openness as a general organizing principle. Such theorization may not only have

profound implications for conventional theories of organizations, but also enable us to understand and examine potentially paradoxical repercussions of applying openness as an organizing principle for both organizations and society at large. We welcome empirical and conceptual papers that cut across existing literatures, thereby extending previous literatures in three main ways: 1) Papers that systematically compare conditions of openness across specific domains or across open organizational forms. In particular, papers might explore demands for organizational openness at the societal level and compare them across literatures on organizational openness. 2) Papers that examine the consequences of openness as an organizing principle in specific domains on the various notions of organizational openness (fluidity, transparency, etc.) or on the process of open organizing. 3) Papers that assess contradictory trends and paradoxes associated with openness across literatures. In particular, papers could explore how the trend towards more organizational openness and/or openness in specific domains give rise to new closures and exclusionary dynamics. We also invite papers that address how organizational openness is connected or even contributes to the decline of certain democratic principles in contemporary societies. In short, papers could examine how openness as an organizing principle opposes or contributes to new types of closure and exclusion.

Papers might take a range of perspectives, for example adopting a historical, institutional or evolutionary approach, or foregrounding processes and practices. We also encourage theorizing organizational openness on different levels, focusing on cross-cutting themes of organizational openness related to the individual or collective level. The special issue therefore invites papers that make integrative and innovative contributions to a range of topics and themes, including but not restricted to the following:

- <u>Conditions and evolution of organizational openness</u>: What are the conditions of the emergence of new organizational forms compared to the causes for the rise of openness in specific domains? Is the adoption of openness typically evolutionary or revolutionary? How are demands for openness imposed across organizational forms and across domains? What institutional pressures may enable openness as an organizing principle? (How) do new organizational forms and openness in specific domains co-evolve? How are efforts to establish and sustain openness as an organizing principle coordinated, over time?

- <u>Consequences of organizational openness</u>: What are the consequences of openness as an organizing principle for (new) organizational forms and trends towards fluidity, partiality etc. in general? Are transparent, inclusive and boundaryless organizations more inclined to take on openness as an organizing principle, and in which domains? How does openness as a new organizational form and/or as an organizing principle affect society at large, and what are the policy implications of these effects?

- <u>Contradictions and limitations of organizational openness</u>: What are the dilemmas of openness, across literatures and with regard to organizational processes and decision-making? Is organizational openness a counter-movement position against the decline of democratic principles or does it even contribute to this decline? How are demands for openness resisted, e.g. by sub-cultures or by hierarchical positions? What institutional pressures may threaten open organizing? What are the unintended consequences, or even negative effects of organizational openness identified across research streams?

- Theorizing organizational openness: How can organizational openness be captured theoretically across literatures? What are the theoretical opportunities and limitations for building more connected and comprehensive theorizing on openness as a general organizing principle, e.g. with regard to different disciplinary traditions or levels of analysis?

Submitting your paper

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