**The 11th International Critical Management Conference**

**Precarious Presents, Open Futures**

**The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, UK**

**27th - 29th June 2019**

**Sub-theme CALL FOR PAPERS**

**Title:** Public services and the end of knowledge?

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**Sub-theme proposal**

The status of knowledge and knowledge production in the design, delivery and evaluation of public services is threatened, and our proposal is to generate debate about the relationship between public policy and knowledge. Notably knowledge and knowers are under attack and subject to control and replacement, particularly through technological forms of ‘openness’.

Public-services reform in western-style democracies has been premised on the control and eradication of professional judgement regarding knowledge production. Health, security, welfare and education professionals have experienced numerous changes regarding the ‘openness’ of who they are, their work and how they relate to the public:

* Data performance: inspection audits through to league tables (crime clear-up rates for the police, death rates for surgeons, and student examination results for teachers);
* Data responses: market relationality from customer recruitment through to professional engagement with feedback data;
* Data status: the inter-relationship of numbers with the standardisation of work and the disciplining of body and mind for effective and efficient service delivery.

Public services are required to be open to the public whom they are meant to serve, but a form of data hegemony is emerging regarding the colonisation by numbers into decision-making, discourse and practice. Professional discretion and judgement regarding knowledge production with and for complex cases are being removed through the:

1. technology of the ‘template’ where problem-solving is procedurally scripted - professional knowledges that are deployed to address complex cases are characterised as dangerous, are marginalised or even eliminated;
2. trade exchanges of ‘billability’ where problem solving is financialised – procedures are costed and so professional knowledges that do not deliver a measurable outcome, on time and/or according to the contractual remit, are deemed wasteful; and
3. individualisation of ‘responsibility’ where problem-solving is personalised – the templated data and cost invoicing are clearly located within a role whose holder is technically accountable, and so shared judgement and discretion located in professional knowledges are rendered irrelevant for the accountability process.

These changes have impacted on professional identities and practices in ways that substitute metrics for knowledge, electronic presentations for knowing, and consultant knowers for professionals. Such trends signify the end of knowledge – no ideas, or debates or strategies exist, only functional delivery and outcome measurement.

Such changes accompany “progressive neoliberalism” which Faser (2017) argues “mixes together truncated ideals of emancipation and lethal forms of financialisation” (p44) whereby social justice for ‘new’ professionals as data producers, managers and advocates has been equated with corporate upskilling. Privatisation concerns the ‘private’ or how one must be responsible for one’s own data production and measurement. Additionally, the private can also discount uncomfortable and inconvenient knowledge as ‘fake’ where populist deal-making is replacing professional evidence-based decision-making. What Geiselberger (2017) identifies as “the great regression” is evident in diverse privatised services where new forms of “possessive individualism” (Macpherson 2011) speaks to three inter-related trends: first, restoring eugenics as the normalised means of promoting and recognising capability; second, recognising the body as the site of both limitations and potential, whereby neuroscience underpins new forms of prediction about a person’s contribution; and third, artificial intelligence regarding the replacement of human judgement with the known and measured. These new trends in the end of knowledge means there is only targeted and hierarchised delivery by and to the meritorious.

We expect the paper proposals and debate to engage with these questions:

1. What approaches to knowledge production are dominant within and for public services?
2. What knowledges, ways of knowing and knowers are evident in the construction and promotion of these approaches?
3. What accounts can be produced which describe and articulate the realities of professional practice?
4. Is there an end-of-knowledge trajectory, and what does such a question suggest about social-science research?
5. What evidence is there of a radically altered understanding of what constitutes data?
6. What evidence is there of challenges to the promotion of data over knowledge, particularly through socially-just alternative practices?

We see the papers contributing to how knowledge production is charted, understood and explained, and revealing a range of evidence and theorisation from the public services. We would also encourage countervailing papers that reveal alternative approaches to knowledge production.

Please submit a 500 word abstract and contact information (excluding references, one page, Word document NOT PDF, single spaced, no header, footers or track changes) to Helen Gunter (helen.gunter@manchester.ac.uk). The deadline for the submission of abstracts is January 31st 2019, and we will notify you of our decision by the end of February. A publication is planned and we will confirm details at the conference.

**References**

Fraser, N. (2017) Progressive neoliberalism versus reactionary populism: a Hobson’s choice. Geiselberger, H. (ed) *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity. P40-48.

Geiselberger, H. (ed) (2017) *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity.

Macpherson, C.B. (2011) *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.