11th International Critical Management Studies 2019 conference

Precarious Presents, Open Futures Theme

Open University, Milton Keynes

**Disabling presents, enabling futures? Ableism and the idea of ‘normality’ in the context of organizational and technological transformations**

Convenors:

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There is growing attention across different disciplines regarding the concept of ableism, defined as ‘a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human’ (Campbell, 2001: 44). The lens of ableism was originally developed within the field of Critical Disability Studies to offer new productive ways of thinking about questions of embodiment, identity and agency (e.g. Campbell, 2001; 2009; Goodley, 2014; Shildrick, 2009). Ableism helps reflect on the assumptions of what it means to be a ‘species-typical human’, and the implications this has for those living with impairments whose inferiority is deeply ingrained into our collective subjectivity (Campbell, 2009). Ableism can also be used to explore issues of gender, race and age (e.g. Wolbring, 2012), or more broadly for understanding the oppression of those deemed ‘different’ from the corporeal standard and the way ‘normality’ is socially constructed.

Recently, analyses of the ableist nature of organizations and management have provided insights regarding the disabling present of workplaces (e.g. Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017; Bend & Priola, 2018; Foster & Wass, 2013; Jammaers, et al., 2016; Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014; Mik-Meyer, 2016; Williams & Mavin, 2012). These studies have complemented research exposing the way notions of ‘normality’ in organizations are infused with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age (e.g. Acker, 1990; 2006; Riach et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014; Van Laer, 2018; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). The notions of ‘normality’ and ‘difference’ are, however, becoming further complexified by organizational and technological transformations that can dis/able the lived experience of employees with diverse backgrounds. On the one hand, recent organizational and technological transformations could improve the productivity and well-being of employees and stretch the number of individuals active in the labour market (e.g. Roulstone, 2016). These transformations include teleworking, the use of flex offices, or assistive technologies, enabling more employees to control the location and organization of their job. Similarly, technological evolutions, like the emergence of the platform economy, can open new ways for individuals to flexibly and independently organize their work and develop a career outside traditional paths. On the other hand, these evolutions also pose risks and can have disabling consequences. For instance, technological changes such as automation can lead to the loss of unskilled jobs, putting employees with diverse backgrounds at risk (Rotman, 2013). Similarly, novel forms of organizing involving regular re-organisation of teams, widening of job descriptions, and the growing role of soft-skills can also pose challenges (Sang et al., 2016; Foster & Wass, 2013), whilst technological innovations risk isolating workers with impairments from their peers (Bricout et al., 2010). Furthermore, technological enhancements of the body reflect society’s expectancy to be ‘perfect’ and ‘hyperproductive’ (Eilers et al., 2014; Goodley, 2014). Moreover, many of these recent transformations reflect the neoliberal idea that workers are themselves responsible for unlocking their potential and constantly improving their selves (Cederström & Spicer, 2015; Goodley, 2014).

Building on these viewpoints, this stream has two main goals. First, we hope to further discussions on ableism within critical studies on management, organizations and employment relations. We are especially interested in exploring how the concept of ableism can help us understand the impact of new organizational and technological transformations on those deemed ‘different’. Second, we would like to open a debate on whether (and how) organizations and organizing can be reimagined despite or in spite of these evolutions, so that they empower people deemed ‘different’ and challenge ableist assumptions in the workplace. We are welcoming not only of studies on disability, but rather of all studies that deal with ideas of ‘normality’ and otherness in organization studies. We also welcome reflective pieces about our own role as researchers and educators as we may shape ableist discourses.

Potential topics related to all those deemed ‘different’ that could critically be addressed by submissions, theoretically or empirically, include (but are not limited to):

* The infusion of ableism and ideas on ‘normality’ in organizational practices, cultures, spaces, technologies, …
* The connection between ableism, ideas on ‘normality’ and neoliberalism.
* The connection between ableism, ideas on ‘normality’ and organizational and technological evolutions such as:
  + transhumanism, morphological freedom and cyborgs in organizations
  + health, well-being, happiness and resilience discourse
  + new types of workspaces (e.g. hot-desking, shared offices, teleworking)
  + alternative workplaces
  + platformization of the economy
  + automation and digitalization processes.

**Submission Guidelines**

Please submit a 500 word abstract (excluding references, one page, Word document NOT PDF, single spaced, no header, footers or track changes) together with your contact information to [cms19.ableism.stream@gmail.com](mailto:cms19.ableism.stream@gmail.com). The deadline for submission of abstracts is January 31st 2019. We will notify you of our decision by the end of February.

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