**Panel Symposium**

**Designing Organizations to ‘Win’ in Pluralistic Settings**

**Organizers**: Niall COOGAN (Manchester Business School), Nuno GIL (Manchester Business School)

**Participants**: Ann LANGLEY (HEC Montreal); John JOSEPH (UC Irvine), Ilze KIVLENIECE (INSEAD); Jochem HUMMEL (VU University Amsterdam).

**List of potential division and/or interest group sponsors:** Organization and Management theory, Public and Non Profit, Strategizing Activities and Practices, Business Policy and Strategy

# OVERVIEW

Orchestrating solutions for the grand challenges that are facing today’s society such as poverty relief, drug resistance and healthcare, climate change, and population growth requires pooling interdependent resources which are controlled by legally independent actors (Vakili and McGahan, 2016[[1]](#footnote-1), George et al., 2016[[2]](#footnote-2)). These actors include governments, public agencies, businesses, nonprofit and user communities. In theoretical terms, addressing these grand challenges requires setting up large organizational networks of autonomous, resource-rich actors unified under an identifiable system-level goal, what Gulati, Puranam, and Tushman (2012[[3]](#footnote-3)) term ‘meta-organizations’. Central to our conceptual understanding of these organizational networks is to recognize that the power to make strategic choice is diffused across multiple resource-rich actors with knowledge-based work processes and conflicting goals. As such, these organizational networks cannot rely on traditional sources of authority vested in ownership stakes, regulation, and employer-employee relations to get things done. Rather the designated leaders of these organizational networks are interdependent with multiple environmental actors which are powerful because they control critical resources that are not easily substitutable (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978[[4]](#footnote-4)). In other words, these organizational networks are ‘pluralistic’, and the pluralistic organizational networks themselves emerge in pluralistic contexts.

In management literature, the study of pluralistic organizational settings has long been germane to the institutional logics tradition (for a review, see Ferraro, Etzion, and Gehman 2015[[5]](#footnote-5)) and interorganizational collaboration literature (e.g., Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013[[6]](#footnote-6), Beck and Plowman 2014[[7]](#footnote-7) ). Another research stream that has pioneered investigation into pluralistic settings has been the strategy-as-practice literature (Pettigrew 1973[[8]](#footnote-8), Langley 1995[[9]](#footnote-9), Denis et al. 2011[[10]](#footnote-10), Jarzabkowski et al. 2006[[11]](#footnote-11)). These vast bodies of literature have significantly contributed to our understanding of how social networks function – or fail to function - under pluralism. From two decades of multiple insights that cannot be summarized here, we highlight how this literature tells us that under pluralism, dominant coalitions are unlikely to be powerful enough to enforce their preferences on other actors. Under these circumstances, in order to achieve a unifying goal, the participants need to overcome epistemic gaps (a coordination problem), and find ways to develop mutual trust, compromise, and reciprocate in their negotiations (a cooperation problem). Overcoming the coordination and cooperation problems is necessary to figure out ways to reconcile, or ‘quasi-reconcile’ (Cyert and March 1963[[12]](#footnote-12)) differences in beliefs, interests, priorities, and even ideologies.

Whilst we recognize the importance of work on the social structures embedded in pluralistic settings, we argue that it is equally important to look at pluralistic settings from other cognitive lens, and notably from an organizational design perspective. This cognitive lens aims to help us understand the organizational structures that enable and constrain collective action (Thompson 1967[[13]](#footnote-13), March and Simon [[14]](#footnote-14), Galbraith 1973[[15]](#footnote-15)) . In other words, organization design is about the structures, processes, reward systems, and policies which undergird effective and efficient organizations. Surprisingly, however, we still know little about how to, first, design pluralistic organizations; and second, design organizations that interface with pluralistic contexts. In this sense, management literature on pluralism has evolved in a direction that is almost diametrically opposed to the way our conceptual knowledge of the firm has evolved. In management studies of the firm, we had a long tradition of studies on organizational structure that preceded studies on the informal networks within the firm in the last two decades (McEvily, Soda, Tortoriello 2014[[16]](#footnote-16)). Indeed, the seminal works of Thompson, Simon, Galbraith, and Cyert and March in the sixties and seventies created solid foundations for the ensuing studies on informal networks, institutional logics, and more recently, for studies linking formal and informal structures. But seminal organizational design studies assume the presence of either i) a hierarchical authority legitimized by government regulation or property rights; or ii) a dominant coalition which uses authoritarianism to dictate the terms of collaboration; or iii) legal contracts to simulate authority.

In this symposium, we propose to start a complementary debate on the value of extending organizational design literature to pluralistic organizational settings. Closer to our interests is Elinor Ostrom’s (1990[[17]](#footnote-17)) work on designing structures to govern common-pool resources, a research stream rooted in political science and thus overlooked in management literature. Common-pool resources are shared resources that conflate two properties: 1) they are available to many claimants, this is claimants have low excludability; and second, the resources are subtractable, and thus one’s use of the resource deprives others from similar benefits. By studying how to govern common-pool resources such as fisheries and pastures self-governed by communities, Ostrom extended ideas of designing organizations to organizational settings where decision-making power is diffused. However, Ostrom’s work is empirically informed by settings where the participants are more homogeneous than those settings endemic to grand societal challenges. Hence, the disputes endemic to settings formed to govern common-pool resources are rooted in self-interest (temptation to maximize utility) and not in disagreements over the goal (participants agree that the sustainability of the shared resource is a good thing). In addition, in commons theory, the existence of a shared resource precedes the problem of structuring the organization to govern the resource. In contrast, in pluralistic settings, the problem of creating a shared resource (by pooling individually-owned resources) and the problem of structuring the organization to encourage the actors to contribute private resources are intertwined. This suggests a dimension of complexity in organizing pluralistic settings that is not present in the problem of governing common-pool resources. And third, the interdependences between participants in pluralistic settings go beyond the pooled interdependences endemic to common-pool resources into complex forms of sequential and reciprocal interdependence. Ostrom’s vast body of commons theory gets closer to our focal concerns when the theory recognizes that polycentricity is a principle to design large arenas of consensus-oriented collective action. Polycentric organizational structures seek to attenuate the management complexity endemic to diffused power by decomposing the organization structure into multiple, nested centers of decision-making and power. The basic idea is to encourage bottom-up creation of rules to structure the local interactions and locally reward or sanction behavior. However, Ostrom lacked the time to explore in-depth the management implications of polycentric organizational structures.

We turn now to present the structure of the symposium, and the contributions of each participant. In so doing, we make clear how our focus on extending an organization design perspective to pluralistic settings makes our symposium clearly relevant to:

1. Organization and Management theory: organization design literature is a foundational body of literature of this division. It has yielded important insights about the structure of organizations. It builds upon the seminal works of Thompson, Simon, March, and Galbraith. This vast body of literature is, however, solidly grounded in the hierarchical organizations and settings where contracts are sued to simulate authority as in strategic alliances. Clearly it is desirable to explore ways to extend organization design studies into interorganizational pluralistic settings particularly in light of our limited knowledge of the role of structure in these complicated, consensus-oriented settings vis-à-vis our advanced knowledge of the role of informal social networks
2. *Public and Non Profit*: pluralistic settings are endemic to organizing in public and non-profit sectors, and in this sense our focal phenomenon is germane to public and non-profit work
3. *Strategizing Activities and Practices:* designing organizations can very much be interpreted as a management practice. Indeed Jay Galbraith’s seminal contributions on organization design became so important in the world of practice that he chose at some point to give up academia to become a consultant. He explained that he left academia when his ideas began “turning out to be too useful to publish.” Worth noting, Jay’s Star Model identified five key “levers” by which managers can shape employee behavior toward a desired outcome remains one of the most influential ideas of all time in the world of practical organisation design and change.
4. *Business Policy and Strategy.* One of our core interests is to look into the design of organizations that interface with pluralistic settings. If we accept that organisations are collections of individuals that must process information, individually and collectively to achieve the organisation’s goals, we can appreciate the connection between structure, process, and strategy. Thompson argued that structure is the outcome of strategy, and structure enblaes and constrains the organization to implement its strategy. In this symposium we will look into structures that enable strategizing under pluralism.

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

To host this symposium, we have assembled a group of eminent theorists and empiricists either knowledgeable in pluralistic settings, or interested in extending organization design literature to these settings. By sharing their insights on how to extend organization design to pluralistic settings, and the value of so doing, we hope to uncover ways to further the debate. The structure of the symposium revolves around an initial presentation of three empirically grounded arguments about the design of pluralistic organizations, followed by a 30 minute discussion led by two scholars, one knowledgeable about organization design literature in general (John Joseph), and the other knowledgeable about strategizing in pluralistic settings (Ann Langley)

# Introduction (10 min) Niall COOGAN, Manchester Business School

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1. Three Presentations (15 minutes each)

# Jochem HUMMEL, VU University Amsterdam (15 minutes)

Jochem will present his findings on how highly heterogeneous actors collaborating in a meta-organization organize the development of common resources. Jochem will share insights from a case study on Helix Nebula; a meta-organization with more than 50 highly heterogeneous member organizations. The members of Helix Nebula include the three largest scientific research organizations in Europe (CERN, EMBL, and ESA) and the largest European commercial cloud providers (e.g., Atos, CloudSigma, and T-Systems). Access to abundant data sources has allowed for Jochem to trace the inception and analyze the development of common resources with a high level of granularity. His findings show that the development of common resources is a process where differences and dependencies are continuously emerging. Specifically, multiple configuration or re-configuration patterns of development options, including merging and forking, is what ultimately leads to crystallizing of common resources*.* Jochem’s analysis shows that, given the lack of hierarchy, interdependent actors resort to the creation of micro-alliances that cluster around the different development options for common resources in Helix Nebula. These micro-alliances consist of two types of actors influencing the development of common resources: decision-making actors and legitimating actors.

# Nuno GIL, Rehema MSULWA (MBS) (15 minutes)

This presentation will be based on a working paper “Integrating Effort in Emerging Pluralistic Organizations. The Case of Planning Britain’s High-speed Two Railway System

Nuno will share some key insights from a study that investigates how organizations that emerge in pluralistic settings can integrate effort to achieve a collective end. In the talk, the theoretical insights will be grounded in the planning of a new national, capital-intensive and controversial railway network in the UK, the High-Speed 2 project. Using an organization design lens, the authors will argue that two mechanisms are essential to integrate effort after a designated leader (a government’s agent) manipulates the organizational structure of direct participation in the decision-making process. Resolving the coordination problem is up to technical working groups through voluntary information provision and processing. Their work uses rationalistic criteria to whittle the solution space down to a short list of options. As trade-offs emerge, the organizational leaders must cooperate to build a negotiated consensus within the coordinated solution space.

 This study swill argue that integration of effort in an emergent pluralistic organizational setting hinges on, first, allocating the tasks of resolving the interorganizational coordination problem and resolving the interorganizational cooperation problem to different groups of individuals of the participating organizations; and second, cycling between the two cooperation and coordination until the effort is fully integrated across and within the organizational boundaries. In so doing, the participating organizations can assign the coordination and cooperation tasks to employees who are incentivized to carry them on efficiently, rewarded if they are effective in their task, and penalised otherwise. Specifically, we will show how officials are tasked to process and provide information. And how elected leaders are tasked to negotiate and bargain within the soordinated solution space agreed by the officials. In addition, the talk will illuminate variance in the patterns of interplay between the coordination and cooperation efforts. We argue that the speed of reaching consensus is contingent on multiple factors notably the degree of goal congruence, the urgency to build consensus, organizational slack, and environmental scrutiny. We will conclude by discussing logic linking pluralistic organizing structure to organizational performance.

# Ilze KIVLENIECE (INSEAD) (15 minutes)

Ilze will present her work on public-private collaboration set in the context of the provision of water and sanitation services to communities, particularly in the developing world. Adopting organizational design lens, she will illustrate how in such common-pool resource based and pluralistic settings (with decision-making embedded in multiple institutional levels, and shared among multiple formal and informal actors), diverse forms of collaboration design may permit to differently affect collaboration outcomes (such as the duration or price for services). From a theoretical perspective, her work will draw attention to the hybridization in underlying organizational design as a way for organizational actors to address contingencies stemming from external social or political collective action, and enable value creation in underlying organizational structures. More broadly, her talk will highlight the potential of linking hybrid organizational design, collective action and social value streams of literature to understand how organizations may succeed in pluralistic settings.

# Panel Discussion (30 min)

Our two discussants -- Professor Ann Langley and Professor John Joseph – will kick off the period of discussion. They will have been given an opportunity to read the three arguments (working papers) presented in the first part of the session. Their task is to help us make sense of what we are trying to do, and see how we can contribute to contemporaneous debates in mainstream management literature. They have also been asked to reflect about complementarities and tricky overlaps between different research strands, and ways to address them in order to produce convincing arguments and refutable theory.The aim of the discussion is thus not to cohere the different arguments, but rather explore opportunities to fold them in major theoretical contributions. Hence, the goal that unifies the panel, and motivates the members to contribute voluntarily their time, effort, and knowledge, as well as to seek consensus, is to advance our understanding of the value of extending organization design studies to pluralistic settings. During the discussion, the audience will be invited to participate and share common themes, insights, and emerging questions. The discussants will facilitate audience participation and, along with presenters, will field questions during the Q&A session.

Our commitment to extend organization design literature to pluralistic settings triggers new research questions that are wholly consistent with the theme of the 2017 Academy of Management conference on interfaces. We summarize these questions under two objectives. First, we are interested in examining how new organizational networks can emerge in a pluralistic setting in order to achieve a system-level goal. We know that these organizational networks need to be internally pluralistic, and thus need to manage multiple interfaces between the resource-rich members of the organizational networks. However, we are unsure how we can design these organizational networks so they can carry along multiple actors with heterogeneous and eventually conflicting goals. We are also interested in exploring the structure of participation of emergent pluralistic organizational networks. Assuming pluralistic organizational networks have a designated leader capable to manipulate the structure of participation, we are intrigued about the criteria to decide which environmental actors should join the organization, and which ones are excluded from membership. We are also interested in exploring organizational structures that can make pluralistic organizations sustainable, resolve disputes, prevent defections, and ultimately enable the organizations to achieve their system-level goals over time. We conjecture that in many cases individual goals may be incompatible, and that issues may need to be addressed without necessarily attempting to reconcile goals and underlying meanings.

Our second objective is to further our understanding from an organizational design perspective as to how firms, which operate under well-defined command and control structures, can cope with the pluralistic environments around them. Admittedly, this problem has a flavor of the nonmarket strategy literature – and as a particular subset of this, the stakeholder management literature. Dealing with contentious external stakeholders is part of maintaining a “licence to operate” (Fombrun et al., 2000[[18]](#footnote-18)) and this issue is becoming more salient on matters of competitive advantage (Hillman and Keim 2001[[19]](#footnote-19), Jones, 1995[[20]](#footnote-20)). Recent socio-technical advances that lower coordination costs such as the advent of social media increasingly potentiate the influence of nonmarket actors who are value creation exclusive, but value distribution inclusive (Kivleniece and Quelin 2012[[21]](#footnote-21)). Examples of these influential actors include local communities, environmental agencies, social movement organizations, and activists with ideologies, values and beliefs incongruous with the goals of the firm (Davis et al., 2005[[22]](#footnote-22), Henisz et al., 2005[[23]](#footnote-23)). From this literature, we also know that amicable relationships with independent actors create more predictable stable returns (Graves and Waddock 1994[[24]](#footnote-24)), open further value creation opportunities (Post et al., 2002[[25]](#footnote-25)), and can increase shareholder value (Hillman and Keim 200112). Even if firms may not be obliged to serve the needs of external stakeholders, leaving them unsatisfied can trigger resistance to value creation (Eesley and Lenox 2006[[26]](#footnote-26)).

We approach our focal phenomenon from an organization design lens. We consider this is an important perspective as pluralistic environments are information-rich, replete with consequential stakeholder’s opinions and requests, which must be integrated into new knowledge across organisational and functional boundaries. As the sources of information become more varied and diverse, the task of creating new knowledge becomes more difficult and costly (Maskell, 2001[[27]](#footnote-27)). Additionally, antagonistic stakeholders with diverging goals cannot be pacified just with market transactions and formal contracts to encourage cooperation (Williamson, 1975[[28]](#footnote-28)). Cooperation is also little incentivised by the common ownership of assets (Hart, 1995[[29]](#footnote-29)); the prospect of future interactions (Heide et al., 1992[[30]](#footnote-30)); nor is this interaction amenable to monitoring or sanctions from the firm (Williamson, 1981[[31]](#footnote-31)). Simon (1991[[32]](#footnote-32): 41) summarised the managerial challenge at these complicated interfaces, *“Coordination between organizations depends almost wholly on economic motivations and rewards, and becomes seriously imperfect wherever major externalities are present that cannot be removed by enforceable contract arrangements*”.

Under these circumstances, the organizations find themselves attempting to balance the pull of techno-economic rationality in the value chain with protracted searches for consensus with environmental actors (King and Soule, 2010[[33]](#footnote-33)). Whereas the firm needs to attribute resources to this interface to facilitate value creation, the firm must also ensure inducements do not compromise economic activity. We can also expect environmental actors will vary significantly ranging from opponents, through conditional supporters, ambivalent actors, to unconditional supporters (Sharma and Henriques 2005[[34]](#footnote-34)). Managing the multiple interfaces with these different actors can be expected to require different structural mechanisms. In this context, we ask: how can firms design themselves strategically in order to balance market demands and environmental demands? Complicating matters, we expect cases where the firm fails to resolve contestation and disputation at the interface between the firm and the pluralistic environment. Hence we also want to discuss structures that the context makes available to resolve disputes, and thus avoid the risk of impasse and inaction.

In conclusion, the purpose of this symposium is to bring together a group of scholars committed to discuss *how to design organizations to ‘win’ in pluralistic settings*. In articulating our motivation in terms of designing organizations to win, we borrow from language used by strategy scholars such as Kathleen Eisenhardt who define strategy as the study of ‘how firms win’. In firms, winning is typically associated with measurable performance metrics such as market share, market capitalization, and profitability. Here, we are also interested in building structure-performance relationships to understand how (pluralistic) organizations can win in pluralistic settings. But what we want to do is broader than the firm. Of course, firms that operate in regulated sectors are perforce organizations that operate with a pluralistic interface and we are interested in debating how we can design these organizations to ‘win’. This is the case for example of wind energy producers or miners forced to negotiate ideas with regulators and the environment in order to overcome bottlenecks. Furthermore, we are also interested in discussing how organizations that emerge in pluralistic settings can be designed to achieve their system goal. This is the case for example of a publicly- and privately-financed organizations formed to develop capital-intensive, long-lived systems. It is unlikely that the designated leader of the organization owns all the resources necessary to achieve the goal, and thus perforce the leader needs to set up a pluralistic organization. But what does ‘winning’ means in this context? Is winning achieving the system goal irrespectively of the concessions that are made along the way to neutralize opposition, persuade opponents to support the enterprise, and preempt defections?

# Short bios of the Participants (in alphabetical order)

**Niall COOGAN, Manchester Business School.** Niall Coogan is a PhD student at Manchester Business School residing in the Innovation, Management and Policy research unit. His research focus is on advancing our knowledge in the fields of organizational design and strategic management with regards to firms who are interfaced with nonmarket, pluralistic environments. Theories being developed during his PhD integrate concepts from pluralism, stakeholder management and organizational design as to better understand the performance differentials of firms who are interfaced between pluralistic and market scenarios.

**Professor Nuno GIL, Manchester Business School (Symposium Organizer).** Nuno is a Professor of New Infrastructure Development at MBS. His research focuses on how societies develop complex socio-technical systems such as long-lived, capital-intensive infrastructure, and how the development processes are shaped by the surrounding environment notably the legal and political institutions. With Professor Jeff Pinto (Penn State Erie) Nuno is currently working on a book *Designing under Pluralism* (MIT Press) in which design choices are conceptualized as ‘common-pool’ resources that conflate low excludability (from participation in the decision-making process) with high rivalry (in preferred design choices). Building on this conceptualization, Nuno and Jeff develop a theory of capital-intensive developments in pluralistic settings that established logic between organizational structures and organization performance.

**Jochem HUMMEL, VU University Amsterdam.** Jochem Hummel is a PhD Candidate at the KIN research group, VU University Amsterdam. He obtained a master’s degree in Business Administration (cum laude) from the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) Erasmus University in 2014, with a specialization in Strategic Management. His major research interests concern the topic of interorganizational collaboration, with a profound interest in new ways of organizing. Jochem conducts research at CERN studying organizing processes at the interface of science and business where actors collaborate across organizational and disciplinary boundaries in order to solve challenging technological and scientific problems.

**Professor John JOSPEH (Univesity of California, Irvine).**  John is on the faculty of the Strategy department at the Paul Merage School of Business at UC Irvine. John received his Ph.D. from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. He also holds an M.B.A. from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. John has taught in the full-time, part-time and executive education programs at Kellogg, has taught in the core curriculum for Duke’s full-time MBA program, and now teaches core strategy at UC Irvine. He is a decorated instructor who has received several teaching awards. John’s research lies at the intersection of strategy and organization theory. His research examines organizational designs for better technology development, strategic planning, and growth.    John’s research has been published or is forthcoming in the Strategic Management Journal, Organization Science, Academy of Management Journal, Long Range Planning, Advances in Strategic Management, Academy of Management Proceedings and other peer-reviewed publications, and has also developed a number of case studies on strategic decision making. John is a member of the Academy of Management and a member of the Research Committee of the BPS Division. He is an associate editor for the Journal of Organizational Design, and serves as an editorial board member of the management field’s top two journals: Administrative Science Quarterly and Strategic Management Journal.

**Professor Ilze KIVLENIECE (INSEAD)**. Ilze Kivleniece is an Assistant Professor of Strategy at INSEAD. She holds a PhD in Strategic Management from HEC Paris (France) and, prior to joining INSEAD, was a faculty member at Imperial College Business School (UK), were she taught on a number of programmes (including specialized Masters and MBA). Ilze’s research is focussed on an emerging, prominent area of studies that connects Strategic Management with broader issues related to the interaction between firms and public, political or social environment. In her research, she draws upon organizational boundaries, nonmarket strategy and value-based perspectives, to study the emergence and performance of novel, innovative organizational forms as important mechanisms of value creation and capture. Among Ilze’s principal research areas are 1) the emergence and design of novel hybrid organizational forms, with particular emphasis on public-private (or cross-sector) collaboration, and 2) the impact of political and social interests, and nonmarket pressures on firm strategy, boundary choices and performance.

**Professor Ann LANGLEY.** Anne is Chair in Strategic Management in Pluralistic Settings, Professor of Management at HEC Montréal and Co-director of the Strategy as Practice Study Group at HEC Montréal. She is the author or editor of six books and over 50 articles. Her research deals with strategic management processes and practices, with special emphasis on organizational change, decision making, leadership and innovation in pluralistic settings. She has a particular interest in qualitative research methods. Ann Langley is Co-editor of the journal Strategic Organization.She is also Co-editor with Haridimos Tsoukas of the book series Perspectives on Process Organization Studiespublished by Oxford University Press. She is adjunct Professor at NHH, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, at the Université de Montréal, and at the University of Gothenburg.

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