

***Philosophical Interventions in Organisation and Management: Insights from
Existential-Phenomenology***

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Abstract

Existential-Phenomenology has provided extensive, if not always explicit, resources for research in organisation studies, management, and even business-related ethics and social responsibility. Butler, Zizek, Derrida, Lacan, Levinas, Marion, Nancy, Foucault, Natanson, Bauman, even Deleuze, among others crucially share ontological and epistemological models and concerns – often in the sense of rejection, alteration, and variation. Whereas conceptual genealogies, theoretical heritage, and the ‘right’ perspective will continue to be debated, investigating some potent, fertile, and productive notions that rest upon existential-phenomenology’s foundations may reveal concatenations and dislocations that inspire inquiry and suggest applications for research.

An interaction understood for example metaphorically, psychically, or physically between a self and an other – broadly and variously conceived – is often invoked at the core of subject formation theories. In other words, a basic underlying notion of the self, or subject’s, reliance on the other lies at the foundation of influential, long standing, and still debated articulations within existential phenomenology. Phenomenology, as the study of the movement of consciousness through time – including the way things appear to us – becomes existential with an emphasis upon understanding human being and human experience in the world. Moreover, the body and embodiment become a focus for engagement and intersubjective recognition, raising questions about the role bodily senses – sometimes mobilised metaphorically – such as sight or touch, play in various moments and environments. Moreover, formulations around models of recognition, greeting, address, and witnessing have been engaged in philosophical theory as potentially lending insight to sociality, self-other relationships and intersubjective power relations in the world. That there remains a tension between abstract articulations of subject formation and experience in lived human relationships with others emphasises the complexity of philosophical investigations that emerge with the existential turn.

Although I look forward to discussing a number of such issues with relevance to organisation studies, I am currently working on the notion of irreplaceability. As human beings we carry with us conditions for our own possible experience; and with this scenario comes a responsibility to recognise moments when these conditions function in ways that deny humanity in ourselves and in others (Borgerson 2007). Moreover, human existence demonstrates unpredictability, contingency, and irrepressibility of human being in relation to traditional ontology’s pre-defined essence, expressing alternative modes of action in the face of attempts to circumscribe uncertainty and accident (Marquard 1991). Living access to understandings of embodied experience develops attempts to contest epistemically closed perceptions, in multiple situations. Human being becomes what Lewis Gordon calls a critique of ontology, in that lived experience stands apart from pre-defined essences (Gordon, 1995: 17). Moreover, Gordon emphasises that “the concreteness of the individual is unsubstitutable, the encounter is unrepeatable, the person and the moment are absolute” (Natanson, quoted in Gordon, 1995: 50), in other words, irreplaceable.

Work referenced:

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Speaker bio

Janet Borgerson (PhD, Philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Madison) is a Reader in Philosophy and Management at the University of Exeter. Her research articulates intersections of materiality, agency and incompleteness. Publications include articles in *Sociological Review*, *Radical Philosophy Review*, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, *Culture and Organization*, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Gender Work & Organization*, *Feminist Theory*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Advances in Consumer Research*, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *International Marketing Review*, and numerous book chapters. She is a founding member of the Information Society Network, and is currently working on an MA in Persian and Islamic Studies and co-editing a book on Heretical Nietzsche Studies.