Organization Studies and Habits

Michael Pedersen and Sara Louise Muhr, Copenhagen Business School
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Abstract

In this paper we explore habit as a dynamic order. In doing this, we rest on a recent tendency in philosophical debates which see habit not only as a mechanical repetition designed to suffocate thoughts and dull our senses but also as the very disposition for new ways of being. Habits, these debates suggest, help create a sense of direction and tendency in a world subject to change. Not only do they organize change, they also enable it to take place. Understood in this way habits constitute a form of order in our everyday world that informs and shapes our individuality, our organizations and broader social relations. The talk explores habit as such a dynamic order along three trajectories

1) At a practical level, habit is a dynamic order because in its very repetition it creates a disposition to act, think and feel, which makes us both closed off from and open to novelty.
2) At an ontological level, habit is a dynamic order in so far as it constitutes our subjectivity, binding together individuals and their social-material environment.
3) At an epistemological level, habits provide their own forms of knowledge, a kind of bodily thinking cultivated at the level of feelings, impressions and unconscious thoughts.

This tripartite distinction will in turn allow us to discuss how habit requires new questions and methodologies of fundamental importance to the study of organizational phenomena such as organizational change, cultural management and identity management.

Biography

Michael Pedersen is Associate Professor in Management Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School, Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy. His research focus on contemporary work-life issues such as the relationship between self-management, stress, habits and strategic human resource management with inspiration from philosophers such as Deleuze, Zizek, Ravaisson and Malabou. Michael’s work has materialized in published books and has appeared in journals such as Culture, & Organization, Ephemera and Journal of Organisational Change Management. He is coauthor of the Danish bestseller ‘Strategic self-management: management between freedom and business’ (Gyldendal Business).

Sara Louise Muhr is Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School, Department of Organization. She is also affiliated to Lund University as Docent and Stockholm School of Economics as research fellow. Her research focuses on critical perspectives on managerial identity and HRM, especially in relation to issues around coping with diversity and expectations in modern, flexible ways of working. Following this broader aim she has worked with various empirical settings such as management consultancy, prisons, the military, pole dance studios and executive networks where she has engaged with issues such as emotional labor, gender, ethnicity, habit, leadership and work-life balance. Sara’s work has materialized in several published books and has appeared in journals such as Organization Studies, Organization, Gender, Work and Organization, Journal of Business Ethics, Culture & Organization and Scandinavian Journal of Management.