

The performative power of frictions and new possibilities: studying power, performativity and process with Follett's pragmatism

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**The performative power of frictions and new possibilities:
Studying power, performativity and process with Follett’s
pragmatism.**

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| Abstract: | This article seeks to open up new possibilities for process organization studies to reimagine power and performativity by exploring the potential of Mary Parker Follett’s pragmatism as process philosophy. I revisit her body of work to show how she translated her process ontology into theoretical resources and practical insights that allow for new ways of |

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| | <p>understanding power and performativity together and explore them as mutually constituting processes of organizing. In particular, I mobilize Follett’s view of conflicts as emerging differences in the world and frictions as constructive conflicts with the potential to generate something new in order to introduce and conceptualize ‘performative power’, that is, the power emerging from relating and integrating differences in organizational situations that are experienced as frictions by people involved. Drawing on my ethnographic study of an entrepreneurship accelerator – a training programme for innovators and start-up projects – I discuss and illustrate empirically how performative power is generated from frictions that arise in ordinary lived experiences. This conceptualization of performative power is an attempt to develop a processual and performative understanding of power, and a useful lens to conduct process research. Making a connection between performative power and the experience of frictions provides a new way to see, talk and study processually power in contemporary organizations.</p> |
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7 **The performative power of frictions and new possibilities: Studying**
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9 **power, performativity and process with Follett's pragmatism.**
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7 *The greatest need of today is a keen, analytical, objective study of human relations ...*
8 *What is the central problem of social relations? It is a question of power; this is the*
9 *problem of industry, of politics, of international affairs, but our task is not to learn*
10 *where to place power; it is how to develop power.*

11 *(Follett, 1924, pp. ix, xii)*

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15 *So far as my observation has gone, it seems to me that whereas power usually means*
16 *power-over, the power of some person or group over some other person or group, it is*
17 *possible to develop the conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-*
18 *active, not coercive power.*

19 *(Follett, 1925/1941, p. 101)*

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25 In the two quotes above, Mary Parker Follett is asking her readers to put power at the
26 centre of social relations and to learn how to develop jointly co-active power. Based on
27 her extensive experience of organizing in different contexts, from neighbourhood
28 associations to public and industrial organizations in the US and Europe, she provided in
29 her writings a critical analysis of power, as ‘power-over’, the power of some person or
30 group over some other person or group. She argued that an alternative conception of
31 ‘power-with’, jointly developed not coercive power, was possible and that it could be
32 created through organizing. Her power-with perspective was grounded in her pragmatist
33 philosophy, and theoretical and practical understanding of people’s experiences and the
34 world she inhabited.

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48 Power has always been a core issue in organization studies, and how power is theorized
49 and with what consequences remains highly debated (Ailon, 2006; Clegg, Courpasson &
50 Phillips, 2006; Hardy & Clegg, 1999; Pfeffer, 2013). How we understand power is
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7 connected to how we see the social world, and can make a difference to how we think
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9 and act (Lukes, 2005; Reed, 2013). Although conventionally power is conceived as the
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11 capacity to do something or a resource for doing something, the nature and the experience
12
13 of power in organizational life are changing (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). This opens up
14
15 new questions about performativity as an inherent possibility for power and organizing
16
17 (Raffnsøe, Mennicken & Miller, 2019) and for our theories and practices to create the
18
19 social world we inhabit and bring alternative worlds into being (Bartunek, 2020; Gond,
20
21 Cabantous, Harding & Learmonth, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2008). Hence we need new
22
23 ways of thinking and studying power as a lived phenomenon in contemporary
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25 organizations (Fleming, 2014; Sutherland, Gosling & Jelinek, 2015).
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31 In this article, I adopt a pragmatist approach in order to reimagine power and
32
33 performativity through a processual lens and explore them together as interweaving
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35 dynamics of organizing (Simpson, Harding, Fleming, Sergi & Hussenot, 2018). Process
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37 organization studies engage both with the potentialities of process thinking to understand
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39 organizational phenomena and with the challenges of translating different process
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41 philosophies and modes of process thinking into theoretical perspectives and ways of
42
43 studying organization and organizing (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth & Holt, 2014; Langlely &
44
45 Tsoukas, 2016; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Viewing pragmatism as a process philosophy
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47 opens up new possibilities for process studies and can help address these challenges of
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49 fully embracing a process ontology (Elkjær & Simpson, 2011; Lorino, 2018; Simpson &
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51 den Hond, 2021).
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7 My process view and ontological position are both informed by Follett's pragmatism
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9 (1918, 1919, 1924, 1941). I mobilize her processual understanding of organizing and
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11 power, including her view of conflicts as 'emerging differences in the world', to re-
12
13 conceptualize power and performativity as mutually constituting processes of organizing.
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15 I introduce and conceptualize what I call 'performative power' as power that emerges
16
17 from relating and integrating differences in organizational situations that are experienced
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19 as conflicts by people involved. Performative power can be seen at work by paying
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21 analytical attention to the dynamics of 'frictions' that are constructive conflicts with the
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23 potential to create something new.
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27 Drawing on my ethnographic study of an entrepreneurship accelerator – a training
28
29 programme for innovators and start-up projects – I discuss and illustrate empirically how
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31 performative power emerges from frictions. My analysis shows how performative power
32
33 can be used to study power in organizational settings, such as the accelerator, that are
34
35 characterized by the coordination of differences and the search for novelty. I offer
36
37 performative power as an attempt to develop a processual and performative
38
39 conceptualization of power, and a useful lens to conduct process research. Overall, the
40
41 article seeks to explore how viewing Follett's pragmatism as process philosophy opens
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43 up new possibilities for process organization studies.
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49 The article is organized as follows. First, I briefly introduce current studies of power and
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51 performativity as processes of organizing. Then I discuss Follett's pragmatism, focusing
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53 on her process ontology and understanding of organizing and power in order to elaborate
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7 the concept of performative power. I outline the methodology before presenting the
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9 analysis of the performative power of frictions in the accelerator. I end by discussing the
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11 theoretical implications and the contributions to process studies and pragmatism in
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13 organization studies.
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16 **PROCESS, POWER AND PERFORMATIVITY: COMMUNITY IS [A] PROCESS**
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19 *Community is a creative process. It is creative because it is a process of integrating. ...*
20 *the unifying of differings.*
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22 *(‘Community is a process’, Follett, 1919, pp. 579–588)*
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27 Process studies of power and performativity are becoming a diverse and creative
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29 community of inquiry. Initially separate streams of work have started to intersect and
30
31 change how we can think about power and performativity together as processes of
32
33 organizing. The interweaving of the ‘performativity of power’ and the ‘power of
34
35 performativity’ has generated ongoing conversations about the inner workings of
36
37 performativity and the performative power of our theories, as ‘performativity itself is an
38
39 inherent condition of possibility for organizing and the exercise of power more generally’
40
41 (Raffnsøe et al., 2019, p. 175). A good example is the debate about ‘critical
42
43 performativity’ highlighting how theories can bring into being the socio-material
44
45 production of subjectivities and identities (Cabantous, Gond, Harding & Learmonth,
46
47 2016), the constitution of new organizational models and realities in capitalist contexts
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49 (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016), and the connections to broader social and political dynamics
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51 (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016).
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7 New understandings of power are emerging in traditional workplaces and in alternative
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9 forms of organizing that challenge existing theories of power (Fleming, 2014; Hardy &
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11 Thomas, 2016; Pfeffer, 2013). Work is already underway to answer the need for a new
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13 discourse and vocabulary that overcome dualistic views and assumptions of power
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15 (Ailon, 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2008). Foucault had a major effect on organization
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17 studies' view of power (Clegg, 1989; Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2014;
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19 Raffnsøe et al., 2019) and Foucauldian studies are expanding our understanding of how
20
21 discourse produces power relations in organizations, including the mechanisms by which
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23 willing compliance to relations of power is achieved or resisted (Hardy & Thomas, 2016;
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25 Lukes, 2005; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy, 2011).

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30 Process researchers have developed innovative theoretical perspectives and methods to
31
32 incorporate process thinking more deeply in studies of power and performativity, and
33
34 have examined their dynamic interplay across a range of related phenomena, including
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36 resistance, strategy, activism and leadership (Esper, Cabantous, Barin-Cruz & Gond,
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38 2017; Harding, Ford & Lee, 2017; McCabe, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Simpson,
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40 Buchan & Sillince, 2018). Recent developments in process philosophy and theorizing
41
42 have clarified the distinction between process thinking as an ontological position and
43
44 process thinking as an orientation to study organization and organizing, and they have
45
46 highlighted several modes of process thinking and doing process research (Helin et al.,
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48 2014; Langley & Tsoukas, 2016; Sergi, Crevani & Aubry, 2020). Performativity,
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50 articulated in different ways by various authors, is one of the most significant implications
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7 in adopting process as ontology; that is, all accomplishments are performative (Introna,
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9 2013; Gond et al., 2016; Simpson, 2016; Cabantous & Sergi, 2018). Undertaking
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11 empirical studies of organizing with a process ontology is, however, extremely
12
13 challenging because our spontaneous view of the world – including of processes – is
14
15 entitative, not processual (Selg, 2020). Hence we need new perspectives that enhance our
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17 understanding of process as a way of seeing and living in the world.
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21 A useful starting point to understand process as ontology is offered by Dewey and
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23 Bentley's framework and vocabulary of 'self-action', 'inter-action' and 'trans-action'
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25 (1949) to indicate modes of action and analyse conceptual distinctions between entitative
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27 and processual ontologies (Ansell, 2011; Selg, 2018; Simpson, 2009, 2016).^[1] Selg and
28
29 Ventsel (2020, pp. 19–20) explain these different modes of action as follows. Self-action
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31 refers to 'an action that is taken up by individual and independent entities, but need not
32
33 encounter other such individual and independent entities'. Reified entities (i.e. actors,
34
35 human beings or things) generate their own action. Inter-action refers to 'an action that
36
37 takes place *between/among* entities that themselves are fully constituted prior to action'.
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39 Trans-action refers to 'an action that, in a way, *transcends* the entities, which are
40
41 *constituted within* this action'. A trans-action is a dynamic, unfolding process. Trans-
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43 actors are beings and things that emerge from, or are constituted through, trans-actions as
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45 ongoing accomplishments and provisional effects. Trans-action departs from the other
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47 two modes of action at an ontological level and invokes a processual ontology (Simpson,
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49 2016).
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7 A trans-actional perspective thus comes with a number of ontological implications. First
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9 of all, the world can be seen as a flow of trans-actions, rather than as being composed of
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11 entities. Second, trans-actional relations are processual and trans-actional processes are
12
13 relational (Emirbayer, 1997; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Selg & Ventsel, 2020). Third,
14
15 a trans-actional view is committed to emergence, understood as the unanticipated
16
17 generation and development of novelty (Simpson, 2016), where trans-actions have
18
19 constitutive and creative potential (Selg, 2020).^[2] Trans-actional relations knit together –
20
21 constitute and potentially transform – actors and situations in the processual unfolding of
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23 organizing. Therefore, a trans-actional perspective is fundamentally processual and
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25 performative.
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31 Whereas self-actional and inter-actional perspectives see and analyse processes as entities
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33 (e.g. power as resource, property or a relation between actors), trans-actional perspectives
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35 view them as unfolding, ongoing processes that are constitutive of and emergent from the
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37 flows within which they are involved (e.g. power as dynamic process that is constitutive
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39 of and emergent from organizing and vice versa). Trans-actional insights resonate with
40
41 various philosophical and theoretical perspectives that are informing process studies of
42
43 organizing.^[3] As I discuss next, pragmatism offers a trans-actional view of action and
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45 process that translates process as ontology into theoretical perspectives, concepts and
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47 analytical tools to support processual studies of organization and organizing (Elkjær &
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49 Simpson, 2011; Lorino, 2018; Simpson, 2009; Simpson & den Hond, 2021).
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FOLLETT'S PRAGMATISM: A RELATION PROCESS ONTOLOGY OF ORGANIZING AND POWER

In this section I introduce Follett's process ontology and discuss her theory of integration and creative view of organizing and experience. I then focus on her perspective of power-with and the key related concepts of differences, constructive conflicts and possibilities. Finally, mobilizing Follett's work, I propose a conceptualization of performative power to reimagine power and performativity together as mutually constituting processes of organizing.

A relational process ontology and a view of organizing

Follett's worldview is aligned with that of other pragmatists, but it also differs significantly. Her pragmatism was based on a relational process ontology where the world is viewed as in constant flux and as a complex whole. She drew on William James (1890/1950, cited in Follett, 1919, 1924) to claim that existence is always unfolding in a process of becoming where change itself – potentiality – is the only thing that is constant and is experienced as a flow of possibilities (Follett, 1919, 1924; Stout & Love, 2015). Follett's conceptualization of the self is similar to George Herbert Mead's view of the individual as self-in-and-through-others (Simpson, 2009), as 'the self is always in flux weaving itself out of its relations' (Follett, 1919, p. 577). Like John Dewey, Follett put solving social and political problems at the centre of her theory of action, whereby to act is to live collectively with a focus on how problems can be addressed and solved, framed

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7 by a democratic ethos and strongly focused on societal progress and growth (Ansell,
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9 2009; Frega, 2019).

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12 Follett's pragmatism has three distinctive features. Her thinking was based on her
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14 interdisciplinary education and familiarity with intellectual developments of her time, as
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16 well as on her own experience of working, studying and consulting for public and private
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18 organizations, including community centres and neighbourhood organizations, the US
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20 House of Representatives, and industrial firms (Tonn, 2003). This research approach,
21
22 unusual for her time, resonates with the participatory research endeavours of scholars
23
24 today (Stout & Love, 2015). Moreover, Follett's writings – developing insights from
25
26 listening to conversations and observing organizational experiences – set her apart in the
27
28 effective use of language and ordinary examples. Her attention to words is well illustrated
29
30 by the discussion of the preposition 'with' and its use, central in her thinking. 'With is a
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32 pretty good preposition, not because it connotes democracy, but because it connotes
33
34 functional unity, a much more profound conception than that of democracy as usually
35
36 held.' In a note she explained that 'with' 'is understood as indicating an interweaving, not
37
38 mere addition (M.P.F.)' (Follett, 1925/1941, p. 62). Finally, Follett's way of theorizing
39
40 was iterative and based on 'sensitizing' concepts. She developed a distinctive vocabulary,
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42 building across disciplinary areas and empirical situations, with some foundational
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44 concepts – like 'integration', the 'law of the situation', 'creative experience' and 'power-
45
46 with' – that are closely related and based on a common set of principles. Their meanings
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48 need to be understood through their interdependence, however, and as results of Follett's
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7 relational process thinking, starting from a theoretical framework of creative integration
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9 and experience.

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11 ***The theory of creative integration.*** The core elements of her theoretical framework are
12 integration, the situation and the method of integration (Stout & Love, 2015). Integration
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14 needed to be understood as a process; she insisted that ‘there is no result of process but
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16 only a moment in process’, and often referred to ‘integrating’. Integration – sometimes
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18 ‘circular response’ and ‘reciprocal relating’ – is relational and ‘reality is in the relating,
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20 in the activity-between’. We as human beings are not something separate in ourselves but
21
22 something in relation to others, because a ‘circular response’ perspective implies that, ‘by
23
24 the very process of meeting, we both become something different’ (Follett, 1924, p. 63).
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26 Through circular relationships people continuously re-create each other, and there is a
27
28 reciprocal influence between the whole and the parts. Groups are the result of the
29
30 interweaving of individuals because ‘unity is always a process, not a product’ (Follett,
31
32 1941, p. 91). The group process depends on the continual integration of differences where
33
34 the focus is on interdependency and coordination involving a number of individuals and
35
36 groups that discover joint interests in a situation. The interweaving of activities and
37
38 progressive integration of potentially diverse desires and interests lead to joint action and
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40 commitments, and the recognition of interdependence with others.

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42 Follett viewed the situation as a relational and dynamic whole. All those within a situation
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44 – humans and non-humans – are in dynamic relations of mutual influence and responsive
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46 to their environment. Acting within a situation requires being responsive to the evolving
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7 situation, and the overall situation, represented by the reciprocal relating between people,
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9 activities and the environment. This is the dynamic context that includes the physical and
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11 social aspects of the situation, which require specific ways of knowing, understanding
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13 and finding agreement (Stout & Love, 2015). People involved in the situation should
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15 work together to understand and obey the law of the situation, which gives power to the
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17 overall situation, the situation and the group process and not to specific people, positions
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19 or organizations.
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23 As a method, integration is also iterative and constituted by related elements, including a
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25 disposition, a style of relating, a mode of association and an approach to action (Stout &
26
27 Love, 2015). Follett described disposition as an attitude: ‘the will to will the common
28
29 will’ (Follett, 1918, p. 50). The relational disposition generates a style of relating that is
30
31 cooperative and enables participatory interactions as modes of association. Genuine
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33 participation is necessary for the group process to create integration. Integration is neither
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35 easy nor always possible, however. When it happens it generates a new unity, in the sense
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37 of a moment in the process of integration more than its final outcome. It is a movement
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39 forward beyond the possibilities that already exist to create something new (Whipps,
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41 2014). Follett illustrated creative integration with a simple example. ‘In the Harvard
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43 Library one day, in one of the smaller rooms, someone wanted the window open, I wanted
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45 it shut. We opened the window in the next room, where no one was sitting’ (Follett, 1941,
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47 p. 32). Integrating is in fact about jointly unifying and iteratively creating something new
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53 (Whipps, 2014; Stout & Love, 2015).
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7 ***Creative experience and (group) organizing.*** Follett viewed integration as a ‘creative
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9 experience’, also the title of her book (Follett, 1924). Experiencing requires active
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11 participation in events or activities, always in an effort to create something new. It
12
13 becomes creative when differing interests meet and confront one another through a
14
15 process of integration. She explained that we need to investigate actual experience to ‘find
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17 out what may be, the possibilities now open to us. ... We want to know how men can
18
19 interact and coact better: (1) to secure their ends; (2) to understand and so broaden their
20
21 ends’ (Follett, 1924, p. x–xii). Follett proposed ‘creative experiencing’, and variations
22
23 such as ‘experience as creating’, as an alternative to rational problem-solving, which she
24
25 viewed as too simplistic, too linear and too detached from social relations. Further,
26
27 organizing is a relational and emergent social process that depends on the integration of
28
29 all participants’ experiences and an emergent purpose (Rylander Eklund & Simpson,
30
31 2020). So she focused on ‘that method of organization that will generate power’ (Follett,
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33 1941, p. 110), which means horizontal organizational arrangements like groups that allow
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35 people to act together and practise and experience power.
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41 **A power-with perspective**

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44 All Follett’s major concepts link back, through a relational way of thinking, to power-
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46 with, which can be viewed as the central concept in her work. She developed power-with
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48 as a concept with a normative orientation, well illustrated by the quotations at the
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50 beginning of the paper. Power-with is jointly developed and non-coercive power. It is a
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7 processual understanding of power, which is both the process that develops power and
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9 what is created by power.

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12 Follett started from a provisional definition of power as ‘simply the ability to make things
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14 happen, to be a causal agent, to initiate change’ (Follett, 1925/1941, p. 99), and added
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16 that ‘genuine power is capacity’ (Follett, 1925/1941, p. 109). By ‘capacity’ she did not
17
18 mean ‘an inscribed capacity waiting to be deployed’, as in a more conventional view of
19
20 power. ‘Control might be defined as power exercised as means towards a specific end;
21
22 authority, as vested control. And we should remember in this study that power and
23
24 strength are not always synonymous; it is sometimes through our weakness that we get
25
26 control of a situation’ (Follett, 1925/1941, p. 99). She characterized ‘power-over’ as the
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28 ‘logic of the crowd’, embodied by authoritarian systems, and ‘power-with’ as the ‘logic
29
30 of the group’, embodied by democratic systems. ‘Power-over’, a dyadic power typical in
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32 command-and-authority situations, should be replaced by ‘power-with’, which is a jointly
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34 developed power that emerges in situations through the process of integration under the
35
36 law of the situation.

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42 Power-with becomes a generative force created through collaboration, which in turn
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44 serves to unify individuals in groups, ‘while allowing for infinite differing does away
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46 with fighting’ (Follett, 1941, p. 115). Follett’s key insight was the recognition that
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48 diversity is a critical condition for progress and growth (Pratt, 2011). Power-with is
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50 generated through the group process and creative integration. It is the power of the group
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52 to bring together diversity, by conflicting yet integrating differences, and to generate new
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7 values and solutions that create social change and growth. Through integration, diversity
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9 and conflicts generate power-with in a reciprocal and iterative relation.

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11 ***Differences, constructive conflicts and new possibilities.*** These are key concepts in
12 understanding power-with as a perspective. Conflicts are the appearance of emerging
13 differences in the world, not necessarily good or bad. Follett suggested that we should
14 make conflicts – and differences in interests, values, purposes or desires – work for us by
15 using suitable strategies, so they become ‘constructive conflicts’ or ‘frictions’. Integration
16 not only resolves specific conflicts but also transforms conflicts into opportunities to
17 create something new. She noted three main ways to deal with conflicts: domination,
18 compromise and integration. Domination is based on relations of asymmetry, by which
19 one side strives to impose its views upon the other. Compromise, as an instrumental form
20 of reasoning, is the best means of finding solutions where situations are well defined from
21 the start and forms of interaction are based on the mutual renunciation of personal interest.
22 Integration is not either/or, neither compromise nor coercion, but constantly evolving
23 resolutions based on the continual integration of differences. Although Follett
24 emphasized integration, she made an accommodation for disintegration in the creative
25 process as ‘we should always see the relation between disruptive and creative forces;
26 disruption may be a real moment of integration’ (1924, p. 178). Conflicts can be
27 integrated through the techniques of disintegration and revaluation (e.g. putting cards on
28 the table, dialogue, and creative resolution or integration by the creation of new common
29 interests, values or purposes).

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7 The integrative resolution of conflicts is possible through cooperative patterns of
8 interaction where conflicting claims can be clearly identified and the law of the situation
9 discovered. To make conflict constructive requires paying attention to the use of
10 language, transforming ‘fighting’ into ‘conferring’. When conversations and discussions
11 fail to resolve differences, as ‘genuine integration occurs in the sphere of activities, not
12 of ideas or wills’ (Follett, 1924, p. 150), they can be integrated only through actual
13 practice (Tonn, 2003). Integration becomes a cooperative inquiry where conflicts are
14 accepted and transformed into frictions, which may be viewed as renewable sources of
15 creative energies that can be put to work.

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17
18 Finally, the concept of possibilities is key to the conception of power-with. Follett claimed
19 that power-with or ‘a jointly developing power means the possibility of creating new
20 values’ (1925/1941, pp. 113–114). This possibility emerges when we make conflict
21 constructive through creative integration. She repeatedly referred to ‘possibilities’,
22 especially in *Creative Experience*, with practical examples viewing possibilities as means
23 and ends where ‘means and ends truly and literally make each other’ (Follett, 1919, p.
24 579). Possibilities can be viewed as means and ends by which the present is not only
25 shaped but also changed as they provide the force to transform actual situations and open
26 up new possibilities (e.g. new actions, values, purposes and meanings).

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29 In sum, Follett developed a relational process ontology that she translated in a systematic
30 network of conceptualizations where power-with is the central concept. Moreover, she
31 provided practical insights and applications of her theoretical ideas. The impact of her
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7 power-with perspective is generated by its ontological grounding and its theoretical and
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9 empirical potential.

10 11 **A Follettian conceptualization of performative power and a trans-actional lens**

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14 I draw on Follett's relational process ontology and power-with perspective to study power
15 and performativity together as mutually constituting processes of organizing. Here I
16 define 'performative power' as *the continuous relating and integrating of emerging*
17 *differences that may be consequential in the flow of trans-actions of organizational*
18 *becoming*. Trans-actors and situations emerge together as performative accomplishments
19 in this continuous flow of organizational becoming. Trans-actions that mutually
20 constitute these trans-actors and situations have the potential to transform them. This
21 potential to create something new, emergent novelty, offers possibilities that can change
22 the flow of trans-actions, making them consequential. I define 'conflicts' as the evolving
23 situations that arise from continuous relating and integrating emerging differences and
24 consequences, and 'frictions' as the constructive conflicts with the potential to create
25 something new. I employ conflicts and frictions as sensitizing concepts to study
26 performative power empirically.

27 28 29 **METHODOLOGY**

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32 I take a processual approach to study how performative power is generated from the
33 frictions that arise in ordinary lived experience, drawing on my ethnographic study of an
34 entrepreneurship accelerator. Organizational ethnography enables one to study processes
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7 of organizational life as they happen – in vivo and in situ – and ‘from within’ (Shotter,
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9 2006; Elsbach & Kramer, 2016; Van Hulst, Ybema & Yanow, 2016). Ethnographic
10
11 fieldwork provides a situated understanding of ‘people doing things together’ that, in
12
13 combination with abductive analysis, can unveil relational processes of meaning-making
14
15 (Barley, 1990; Fine & Hallett, 2014; Leibel, Hallett & Bechky, 2018; Tavory &
16
17 Timmermans, 2014).
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20 21 **Research context**

22
23 Entrepreneurship accelerators are convenient sites for conducting processual studies of
24
25 organizing because of their ‘bounded becoming’ (Sergi, 2012). They are training
26
27 organizations that ‘accelerate’ people and projects. They support participants to form and
28
29 develop collaborative, innovative start-up projects that solve problems by providing
30
31 concentrated resources in terms of education, mentoring, networking and funding.
32
33 Accelerators are also project-based organizations. They are temporary (the training
34
35 programme normally runs for three to nine months), iterative (the programme is repeated
36
37 over different rounds with some changes) and performative (as evidenced by changes in
38
39 jobs and careers, the creation of successful start-ups, and the transformation of local
40
41 ecosystems). The accelerator organization becomes visible through situations of
42
43 interactions that can be studied, such as meetings, classes, face-to-face and online
44
45 mentoring sessions, and informal gatherings.
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52 I conducted an ethnographic study of an accelerator based in a large European city,
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54 organized by a regional development agency in collaboration with private and public
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7 partners. A small number of staff managed the training programme, the educational
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9 content was delivered by a stable network of collaborators and partners (e.g. consultants
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11 and guest speakers), and mentoring provided by a small pool of successful local and
12
13 international entrepreneurs. The curriculum was based on project-based learning,
14
15 focusing on the use of innovation and entrepreneurship methodologies and tools (e.g.
16
17 design thinking, lean start-up and business model canvas), and was delivered with the
18
19 support of other local and international academic and business partners. New participants
20
21 were recruited in each round of the accelerator programme, with a focus on selecting
22
23 people with a balanced mix of technical and business backgrounds, genders, ages
24
25 (normally between their mid-20s and late 30s) and nationalities (Europe, South America
26
27 and Australia). In each round a small cohort of 10–12 people was organized into three
28
29 teams, each assigned to a sponsor organization, with which they collaborated to find and
30
31 solve a problem relevant to the sponsor and with commercial potential. The programme
32
33 regularly starts in January and ends in November, and I studied its fourth round in 2017.
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39 **Methods**

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42 *Access and position in the field.* My access to the accelerator was negotiated and granted
43
44 based on a project proposal accepted by the director of the programme and explained to
45
46 the other staff and participants. I had considerable autonomy and access, which included
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48 making themselves available for interviews and informal conversations. Access was
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50 denied only once, as I shall explain later.
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7 **Data collection.** Observation was the main method of data collection. The fieldwork
8
9 included direct observation during more than 15% of the accelerator's working days (28
10
11 days). Data were collected through notes that were taken both as events happened or
12
13 immediately afterwards and through pictures, videos and other digital traces to deepen
14
15 my understanding of the organizational life of the accelerator. Observations were mostly
16
17 non-participant and on site. I switched to participant observation, in a few situations, for
18
19 instance, during a creativity workshop where I became involved in activities alongside
20
21 the participants. A few observations also took place online, using videoconferencing
22
23 tools. I sat in on several face-to-face mentoring sessions on different aspects of the
24
25 projects (e.g. product development and prototyping), where the teams were discussing
26
27 different aspects of the projects with mentors and exchanging documents, pictures and
28
29 other digital materials. I also shadowed the accelerator's director when he attended an
30
31 annual event with other managers from similar programmes in Europe and the US. These
32
33 different forms of observations provided a composite view of the accelerator's everyday
34
35 organizational life, enriched by interviews and other data collection methods.
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42 Before entering the site, I collected and assembled archival data, including documents,
43
44 videos, websites and blogs. In addition to the informal conversations that naturally
45
46 occurred during the observations and regular catching-up triggered by participants every
47
48 time I came back to the site, I conducted in-depth and repeated interviews with staff,
49
50 participants and other people involved (e.g. mentors and speakers) during different stages
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52 of the programme (24 interviews in total with 16 different people; 8 recorded interviews).
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7 **Data analysis.** I used an abductive approach to data analysis and interpretation (Tavory
8 & Timmermans, 2014). At the first stage of the analysis, conducted during the fieldwork,
9 the field notes and other material were summarized in memos on key themes in the data
10 and in logs with reflections on the work in the field. The second stage, carried out after
11 leaving the field site, was based on an iterative and comparative development of emerging
12 patterns in the data. ‘The creation and resolution of conflicts’ became a central pattern in
13 the analysis. Many day-to-day activities and different moments were characterized by
14 disagreements, tensions, disputes, struggles and contention. Some disputes and
15 confrontations were down to simple misunderstandings and differences in views, as well
16 as the diversity of participants. In other cases, conflicts led to progress and reframing
17 aspects of the projects, and even significant changes in direction. In other tense situations
18 nothing seemed to happen. The experiences that I captured in the notes in those critical
19 moments seem to suggest that some people involved felt puzzled, perhaps even troubled
20 at times, and others elated and full of energy.

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39 Directing the analytical gaze towards conflicts helped to focus on the ‘productive power
40 of conflicts’. In the last stage of the analysis I iterated between data and theory. Follett’s
41 (1924, 1941) writings on power and conflicts were useful in thinking about constructive
42 conflicts as differences being held in tension and how they could potentially generate
43 something new in some situations through ‘friction’. She wrote, ‘I call this: setting friction
44 to work, making it do something’ (1925/1941, p. 35). Thinking about some conflicts as
45 frictions generated small abductive leaps that overall resulted in a new way to interpret
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7 the data. I came to view the continuous production and resolution of conflicts in the
8
9 organizational life of the accelerator as the unfolding of power in this organization that
10
11 could be seen at work by paying analytical attention to the dynamics of frictions.
12

13
14 *Presenting data and findings: three vignettes.* The data and their interpretation are
15
16 presented in three vignettes that exemplify conflict situations. The focal point of each
17
18 vignette is a detailed account of how conflicts and frictions emerged in the situation, the
19
20 people involved and their relations, how they were resolved, and their consequences
21
22 (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). My position as actor in the situation is embedded in the
23
24 text. The interpretation of each vignette follows immediately after the narrative and
25
26 focuses on analysing performative power using the trans-actional lens described earlier.
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29 30 **THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF FRICTIONS**

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33 I illustrate and analyse how performative power is generated from frictions in three
34
35 situations that are typical of an accelerator: a class (vignette 1), a mentoring session
36
37 (vignette 2), and graduation day and the last day of the programme (vignette 3).
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40 41 **Vignette 1: The class discussion of the ‘1/3 equity rule’**

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44 After welcome and ice-breaking activities on the first day of the programme, next day the
45
46 participants attended a class on intellectual property rights and start-up law delivered by
47
48 two lawyers. The contract that people were required to sign to take part in the programme
49
50 was discussed during the class and the lawyer explained ‘the 1/3, 1/3 and 1/3 equity rule’:
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52 participants would have the right to one-third of the ownership of any results coming out
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7 of their work and projects during the accelerator and beyond; another one-third going to
8
9 the accelerator; and the final one-third to the sponsor organizations. 'Taking an equity
10
11 slice' is a common practice in accelerators. On average the equity taken is between 6%
12
13 and 10%, although some programmes, especially publicly funded ones, are 'equity free',
14
15 and even provide some forms of living expenses for the duration of the programme.

16
17
18 The 1/3 equity rule embedded in the contract triggered a heated discussion between the
19
20 lawyers, the participants and a senior staff member. The latter was sitting at the back of
21
22 the room during the class doing her email, but clearly following the discussion. At one
23
24 point she turned to me and said,
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26

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28 *[Staff] They always react badly to this 'shocking news' that actually is written in*
29
30 *the contracts that we have been emailing them before the start of the programme.*
31
32 *This is why we put this class at the beginning, based on what happened in previous*
33
34 *years during this class. They do not understand that their fees do not cover much.*
35
36 *Moreover, we do a lot of work and so does the sponsor organization. But most*
37
38 *importantly two-thirds of zero is still zero.*
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43 She then stood in front of the room and explained that the contract was a standard
44
45 agreement, often found in academic organizations and similar institutions. The
46
47 accelerator's practice was to have the participants sign a standard agreement at the
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49 beginning of the programme, with the informal understanding that the exploitation of the
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51 rights from the projects, if they were done through a start-up, was open to negotiation at
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53 the end.
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7 [Participant 1] Can you share a case about exploitation of the results?
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9 [Staff] This standard agreement was changed in the two cases that happened and
10 was made more in favour of the fellows.
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14 [Participant 2] I ask for transparency ... after we have done so much work on the
15 project ... that's not fair that the majority of ownership is taken away from us.
16
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18
19 This conversation started by a participant gradually engaged more than half of them and
20 lasted around two hours, taking the entire session and extending into the evening. At the
21 end of the session I approached a couple of the participants who were most involved in
22 the discussion. They both expressed their unhappiness about 'doing all the work and
23 [having] the results taken away', and said that they had to think about whether their
24 ongoing participation was worth it.
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34 The next time that I joined the programme I noticed there were fewer participants than
35 before. The two ones that I had approached were still there but the participant who had
36 started the discussion had gone and a new participant had taken her place. When I asked
37 the staff about it, they told me that 'we had a discussion with her, and we encouraged her
38 to leave. This was a better result for her, the other participants and the programme. ...
39 She was a sort of troublemaker ... we have learnt to spot them from the beginning.'
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48 ***Becoming active participants and understanding part-taking.*** The vignette shows the
49 potential for transformation in the trans-actional relations knitting together actors and
50 their situations. The class becomes a situation where conflicts emerge and become
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7 frictions. As Follett suggested, understanding conflicts does not mean they are avoided,
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9 but it means ‘playing the game differently’, which means relating and integrating all the
10
11 interests to create new possibilities. The class is intentionally positioned at the beginning
12
13 of the programme to bring differences in views, interests and understandings into the open
14
15 so they can be scrutinized and resolved.
16
17

18
19 The vignette illustrates how the actors themselves can be changed at the same time as
20
21 their situations. By engaging in the discussion of the $1/3 + 1/3 + 1/3$ rule, participants
22
23 develop their understanding of what it means to work together and accept the
24
25 underpinning interdependency of the creative experience in the accelerator. It is about
26
27 working not only with other participants but also with the accelerator – which includes
28
29 staff, mentors and relevant others – and sponsor organizations, who are also active
30
31 participants in the programme. All of them are ‘part-takers’ – in the double meaning of
32
33 ‘taking part in the activity’ and as ‘taking a part of the result’ – and the $1/3$ rule becomes
34
35 the law of the situation when viewed in the collaborative context of the programme, which
36
37 aligns the interests of all actors involved. The participative relation that organizes the
38
39 accelerator programme is made clear and tangible by the symbolism of the $1/3 + 1/3 +$
40
41 $1/3$ rule and materialized in the contract that the participants sign at the outset.
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47 Moreover, in the evolving situation, actors create new meanings that open up new
48
49 possibilities and trigger new actions. The contract becomes a temporary agreement that
50
51 can be reopened and renegotiated at the end of the programme. The future possibility of
52
53 reopening the contract transforms the meaning of the contract for many of the
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7 participants. The new understanding of it gives provisional stability for people to start
8
9 working together within the programme and to manage the uncertainty involved in
10
11 creating something new. It distributes the rewards but also, mostly, the risks. Based on
12
13 this expanded understanding of the 1/3 rule and the contract, the participant who does not
14
15 seem to accept them becomes a ‘troublemaker’ who is encouraged to leave. It is an
16
17 unexpected situation of conflict that actors need to resolve through dialogue and through
18
19 opening up the possibility of leaving the programme. This is a consequential change for
20
21 the participant who is leaving and the programme that needs to replace her.
22
23

24
25 In sum, creative experience depends on the integration of the experiences of all actors
26
27 who are working together. They become active participants. The vignette highlights both
28
29 the relating and integrating of differences, with emerging consequences and new
30
31 differences, and the collective and interdependent aspects of performative power, as well
32
33 as the importance of temporal anticipations of possible futures.
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36 37 **Vignette 2: A mentoring session and its follow-up meetings**

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39
40 The teams present their projects and the work undertaken since previous meetings in
41
42 mentoring sessions. Normally, a member of the team presents the project – or pitched, to
43
44 use the business term – and other members attend the session and take questions. The
45
46 mentors ask questions and challenge the assumptions of the projects to help the teams to
47
48 think about different aspects of their work. This vignette illustrates what happened during
49
50 a mentoring session and follow-up meetings during the last couple of months of the
51
52 programme. At this stage, the teams had been working on their projects for more than
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6 five months in collaboration with the sponsor organization. The following excerpt is from
7
8 an exchange during a team presentation.
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10
11 *[Presenter] This is our global market with 173 million dollars around the world.*

12
13 *Our estimation is that we can reach a market of 3.7 millions.*

14
15
16
17 *[Mentor 1] I see some major weaknesses here. ... There are many small markets*
18 *in different countries that combined together just form a small global market ...*
19 *after four years to create a company and 5 million investment, investors will not*
20 *want 100 millions in sales.*

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23
24 *[Mentor 2] What about competitive technologies like ... are they not already in*
25 *the same market that you are targeting? You need to pivot to a different market.*

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31 *[Mentor 3] What about moving from targeting the immunization to the therapeutic*
32 *market? The latter is 95% of the whole injection market.*

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36
37 The presenter, supported by her team, provided convincing answers to the volley of
38 questions from the mentors. The other two team presentations and mentor discussions
39 followed similar dynamics and involved questions about the targeted market, a popular
40 topic. Afterwards all the teams went for some drinks in the local bar, looking satisfied
41 about their presentations and cheerfully chatting on the way out.
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48
49 The next day, each team had a follow-up meeting with some staff to discuss next steps in
50 the projects, including the approaching deadline for submission of consultancy reports to
51 the sponsor organizations. In two meetings the staff praised the performance of the teams
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7 during the session with the mentors, and the progress made. In the third meeting, with the
8
9 team involved in the exchange quoted above, it became clear that the team was falling
10
11 apart, and the project was not going anywhere. Team members voiced their disagreements
12
13 on how to solve the problems identified in the session with the mentors. With just a few
14
15 weeks left before the end of the programme, they had little to show for the final
16
17 presentation. On leaving the room and walking to the programme's offices I asked the
18
19 senior staff what she made of what we had just seen. 'They are what we thought was our
20
21 best team, and to be honest I am surprised', she said. 'They have been fighting for ages
22
23 between them without settling on anything.' She shook her head and seemed as puzzled
24
25 as me.
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31 Later that day I had the chance to discuss these events with the director of the programme.
32
33 He knew what had happened with the last team in the follow-up meeting, but said he was
34
35 not too concerned because 'we will make them have something to present, do not worry.
36
37 ... They can still create something good. If not, we will make them settle on something
38
39 good enough [pause] to be presented. We have seen this before, in other editions of the
40
41 program.' The team presented their project at the final event, as discussed in the third
42
43 vignette.
44
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46

47 ***Becoming team members and a team is an integrative group process.*** Here we can
48
49 understand not only how actors become team members, but also how a 'team' is as much
50
51 a product of relations as it is an integrative group process that continuously emerges from
52
53 the continual and progressive integration of differences. During the mentoring session the
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7 actors become ‘team members’ by presenting and answering questions about their
8
9 projects. Experienced founders become ‘mentors’ by asking challenging questions and
10
11 providing constructive feedback, based on their own experiences, and on anticipation of
12
13 the future in terms of the potential market and other factors. The market invoked by the
14
15 mentors and materialized by talking about numbers, size and money becomes part of the
16
17 law of the situation. The direct ‘giving of orders’ by the mentors – e.g. ‘you need to pivot’
18
19 – is depersonalized by the team members, who are working together to create larger
20
21 market opportunities for their respective projects. All the actors involved in the mentoring
22
23 situation understand and work to enhance their interdependency and coordination.
24
25 Following the law of the situation requires a contingent and situated understanding of the
26
27 evolving situation and the broader context, which includes integrating potentially diverse
28
29 interests, values and understandings of mentors, targeted customers and other actors.
30
31 However, ‘pivoting’ to a new market could be consequential. It requires making changes
32
33 and potentially disrupting a developing project. This can iteratively generate new
34
35 differences and integration.
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41 The second part of the vignette shows that a team is both a continuous integrative group
42
43 process and a performative accomplishment that is provisional and uncertain. There are
44
45 challenges in building meaningful relations across differences that need to be
46
47 continuously re-evaluated and integrated to create something new. In this situation,
48
49 conversations and discussions failed to resolve the conflicts and the actors did not seem
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51 able to create genuine integration through activities and joint experiences. As Follett
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7 suggested, bringing differences into the open, transforming conflicts into frictions and
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9 putting them to work can be a useful way to think about the creative integration process.

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11 It requires an integrative attitude and a joint search for meanings and purposes by the
12
13 people involved, together with regular communication and opportunities for direct
14
15 contact, like mentoring and coaching sessions and meetings. Integrating can be acquired
16
17 as a method through practice and training, and involves ongoing, painstaking work where
18
19 previous accomplishments can be undone. It also takes time and might not work as
20
21 expected.
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24
25 In sum, the two situations – a mentoring session and follow-up meetings – are not
26
27 exceptional, but ordinary working situations in the organizational becoming of the
28
29 accelerator. For this reason, they are useful to highlight how consequential some mundane
30
31 actions may be in opening up and closing down possibilities, and changing the flow of
32
33 organizational becoming. With this vignette we can understand further the impersonal,
34
35 contingent and uncertain aspects of performative power.
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39 40 **Vignette 3: Graduation day and the last meetings**

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42 Graduation day included a public event and a party. The event was structured as a series
43
44 of talks performed in front of a selected public, which included families and friends of
45
46 the participants, guests from other accelerator programmes in Europe, investors, sponsor
47
48 organizations and the media. The director introduced the programme and the new
49
50 initiatives planned by the accelerator. He presented the outcomes of the programme so
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52 far, including some of the results embodied by the next speaker, who was introduced as
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7 the co-founder of ‘the only start-up that has a product on the market among the ones that
8
9 have been generated by this programme and similarly in Europe’. The co-founder
10
11 presented the story of his start-up project, lessons learned in the previous four years, and
12
13 future plans and expectations – combining start-up jargon with humour and a dusting of
14
15 self-irony that amused the audience. He raised expectations for the pitches by the teams,
16
17 who each presented their project, focusing on the innovative idea that they had been
18
19 working on, the problem they were solving, the targeted market and the plans and
20
21 milestones to make it a success. A ‘Q&A’ session followed with all team members and
22
23 experts including two international guests and the start-up co-founder. The questions were
24
25 targeted at evaluating the idea, market opportunities, projects and teams, without being
26
27 too challenging. All the teams performed well, and everybody celebrated at the party.
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32 The key meeting of the last day of the programme was the ‘360-degree’ feedback session
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34 with all team members. When I discussed the purpose of the meeting with the staff, they
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36 said the participants would be encouraged to comment on what worked and what did not
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38 work in the programme. They planned to use the feedback to revise and refine it. I was
39
40 surprised when my invitation to attend was withdrawn at the last minute in a conversation
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42 with the director. The reason he gave was unclear, and our conversation quickly and
43
44 unexpectedly became tense. Later, based on interviews and conversations with some
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46 participants, I discovered that the feedback meeting had been heated, more than the staff
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48 expected. Many participants expressed frustration and told staff they did not intend to
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50 continue their projects or collaborate with the programme.
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7 In the following months, the staff met each team and participant again to discuss the
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9 possibility of continuing to collaborate, whether continuing the ‘start-up’ project with the
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11 same team or on their own, and to negotiate the new equity structure, starting from the
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13 contract that was signed at the beginning of the programme. The eventual results of these
14
15 negotiations and the consequences set in motion were that only two of the 11 participants
16
17 decided to continue the project, each of them without their team members but in
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19 collaboration with the accelerator and the sponsor organizations. Some participants
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21 remained involved with competitions and other activities of the programme and its
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23 international network.
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28 ***Becoming entrepreneurs and projecting possible future(s).*** The first part of the vignette
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30 highlights how temporal interdependency is a constitutive dimension of the knitting-
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32 together of actors and situations. Becoming entrepreneurs is a performative
33
34 accomplishment that emerges from the reciprocal relating and integrating of different
35
36 actors. The team members become ‘entrepreneurs’ in the context of interdependency and
37
38 coordination with each other and also with other actors, in particular the start-up co-
39
40 founder. The participants are ‘projecting possible future(s)’ and opening up new
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42 possibilities. That means they blend the present with the future that is projected and
43
44 anticipated as full of opportunities and possibilities. These projections and anticipations
45
46 are aligned with and embodied by the start-up co-founder, whose actions are seen as
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48 intertwined with the participants’ ones. This dynamic alignment and binding of action
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50 expands the participants’ present activities and creates new possibilities. These new
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7 possibilities can be experienced and interpreted differently by the people involved in these
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9 situations, triggering what can be seen by the actors and others as exciting, surprising,
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11 puzzling and unexpected reactions. The relational and temporal aspects of the flow of
12
13 trans-actions that constitute and transform the actors and the situation are intertwined.
14

15
16 I have included the withdrawal of my invitation to the final feedback meeting and my
17
18 exchange with the director to illustrate how power can be experienced beyond words and
19
20 interactions. In the other two vignettes I attempted to render some emotional aspects of
21
22 the interactions that I captured in the data: surprise, humour, cheerfulness and
23
24 unhappiness. My personal experience of friction in the situation with the director
25
26 triggered new possibilities for thinking differently about how performative power works
27
28 and what it does. I return to this point below, when discussing ideas for future studies, in
29
30 terms of the role of the body, affect and materiality on the study of performative power
31
32 that emerges in situations. Here, it is relevant to point out that although the conversation
33
34 remained mostly polite, it was unexpectedly intense. It also affected my sense of time, as
35
36 I did not immediately realize that our exchange had lasted 75 minutes.
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43 The second part of the vignette shows how conflicts can be transformed into creative
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45 frictions and can develop new opportunities when actors extend the uncertainty and
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47 temporality of the situation. 'Leaving the situation open' instead of 'defining the
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49 situation' results in extending the period of uncertainty before committing or binding to
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51 possible trajectories of action, which can be helpful in creating new possibilities.
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53 Moreover, instead of integration, actors can in some situations choose to 'dis-integrate'
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7 from their existing groups and continue their creative journey with other actors within
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9 their community. The disintegration of some relations can open up the possibility for new
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11 relations and integrations.
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14 To summarize, the analysis of this vignette points out the importance of temporal
15
16 interdependency, projectivity and anticipation of possible and plausible futures, and other
17
18 temporal dynamics of performative power. It also suggests that disruptions of temporality
19
20 and relationality matter.
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23 **PERFORMATIVE POWER AND NEW POSSIBILITIES**

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26 *Brilliant empiricists have poked much pleasant fun at those who tell us of some vague*
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28 *should-be instead of what is. We want something more than either of these; we want to*
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30 *find out what may be, the possibilities now open to us. This we can discover only by*
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32 *experiment.*

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(Follett, 1924, pp. xi–xii)

36 This study offers a processual analysis of how performative power emerges in the
37
38 unfolding of organizational becoming. Paying analytical attention to conflict situations
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40 and frictions in the organizational life of an accelerator reveals performative power in the
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42 trans-actional relations that knit actors and situations together. The three vignettes provide
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44 a composite picture of how actors can themselves be changed at the same time as their
45
46 situations, and the potential in the trans-actional relations to create new actions and new
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48 possibilities for people to act on. New possibilities emerge through the continuous process
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7 of creative integration of differences and conflicts. These possibilities may be
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9 consequential and create novelty.

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11 Drawing on Follett's relational process ontology of organizing and power, I have defined
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13 'performative power' as the continuous relating and integrating of emerging differences
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15 that may be consequential in the flow of trans-actions of organizational becoming. My
16
17 analysis of performative power reveals three main theoretical insights. First of all,
18
19 performative power is a collective and mundane, yet interdependent and impersonal
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21 process. It is collective and mundane in the sense that power emerges from the trans-
22
23 actions of actors doing things together in ordinary situations. From a trans-actional
24
25 perspective, actors and situations are mutually constituted with power. The attention to
26
27 the trans-actional dimension of action emphasizes the interconnectedness and
28
29 interdependency of people who act together. Thus, performative power is interdependent
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31 and impersonal because 'nobody and everybody' is in charge of its emergent becoming
32
33 (Introna, 2013; Selg & Ventsel, 2020). Second, performative power can emerge from
34
35 temporal interdependency and disruption dynamics. Power can be developed through
36
37 connecting and aligning present actions to reinterpretations of the past, and anticipations
38
39 and projections of possible futures (Mische, 2009; Simpson, 2009). Temporal disruptions
40
41 can result from the constant relating and integrating of emerging differences and conflicts.
42
43 These temporal ruptures and interruptions can generate new relational possibilities and
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45 novelty (Carlile, 2004; Tavory, 2018) but they also demand flexibility and adaptation to
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47 a life of constant disruption (Fleming, 2014). Third, performative power highlights that
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7 change can be transient, contingent and provisional, but needs to be consequential for the
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9 ongoing flow of organizing, that is, meaningful for the actors involved so as to shape their
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11 future actions (Carlile & Dionne, 2018; Reed, 2013). Consequences can be seen as
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13 changing directions in the flow of trans-actions (Simpson et al., 2018) and as creating
14
15 provisional stability and facilitating action in situations of intense uncertainty. Thus,
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17 performative power points towards a view of power that is more nuanced and not as
18
19 ‘powerful’ as we expect it to be, but still consequential and potentially creative.
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22 23 **Performing processual possibilities for process organization studies**

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26 In this article, I have explored the potential of Follett’s pragmatism for process
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28 organization studies and for reimagining power and performativity as mutually
29
30 constituting processes of organizing. As several scholars note, pragmatism has
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32 contemporary resonances and rich potential to contribute to contemporary organization
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34 studies (Elkjær & Simpson, 2011; Farjoun, Ansell & Boin, 2015; Lorino, 2018; Simpson
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36 & den Hond, 2021). Yet Follett’s pragmatist perspective remains seriously under-
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38 represented in organizational research (see for exceptions Ansell, 2009; Hafting &
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40 Lindhult, 2013; Lorino & Mourey, 2013; Rylander Eklund & Simpson, 2020).
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42 Conventional readings of Follett’s work in organization studies tend to focus on
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44 individual concepts and insights like ‘power-with’ and ‘conflicts as emerging differences
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46 in the world’, and pay only limited attention to the deep relational thinking and concerns
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48 that anchored those ideas (e.g. Boje & Rosile, 2001; Clegg et al. 2006; Contu, 2019;
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50 Graham, 1995). In contrast, I have started my exploration of Follett’s body of work with
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7 her ontological position and the concerns she sought to address. My first contribution in
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9 this paper comes from revisiting Follett's key writings (1918, 1919, 1924, 1941) and
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11 showing that while aligned with other classical pragmatists – notably James, Dewey and
12
13 Mead – her pragmatism is excitingly different and full of potential that can be tapped by
14
15 process organization studies. This is because she demonstrated how a process ontology
16
17 can be developed and translated into theoretical resources and practical understandings
18
19 that allow for new ways of process thinking and research. Her ways of working open up
20
21 new possibilities for generative process theorizing about power and organizing; it also
22
23 helps to understand the performative power of her concepts themselves. Ontologies of the
24
25 social world and ways of theorizing power are connected (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Lukes,
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27 2005; Pratt, 2011; Reed, 2013).
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32 I have discussed how Follett's theorizing and concept-making were deeply relational,
33
34 recursive, forward-looking and open-ended. She proposed different terms that allowed
35
36 for surprising insights, like 'power-with'. Her theories and concepts highlighted new
37
38 connections – for instance, between power and creative experience. They provide
39
40 directions for research and analysis, with particular attention to 'what may be'. She
41
42 showed how concepts are fluid, open to revision and adaptable, and so useful to build
43
44 'new' concepts. Her theories and concepts are processual and performative tools that
45
46 actively help to make the world by thinking otherwise. Her style of theorizing and
47
48 concept-making could be examined further in relation to current conversations about
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50 process theorizing (Cloutier & Langley, 2020).
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7 My second contribution of this paper is to introduce and conceptualize performative
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9 power as power that emerges and can be experienced through frictions in organizational
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11 life. Embracing Follett's relational process ontology and thinking about organizing and
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13 power. I have mobilized her understanding of differences, conflicts and frictions and
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15 turned them into a conceptualization of power. Thus I argue performative power emerges
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17 through the continuous relating and integrating of emerging differences, and has the
18
19 potential to create something new. Performative power is an attempt to develop a
20
21 processual and performative understanding of power as a constitutive process of
22
23 organizing that is collective, pluralistic, temporal and potentially creative (Pratt, 2011).
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25 Moreover, making a connection between performative power and the ordinary lived
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27 experience of frictions provides a useful lens to conduct processual research that seeks to
28
29 see, talk and study power at work in contemporary organizations. Drawing on my
30
31 ethnographic study of an accelerator, I have demonstrated how it can be used to examine
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33 how power emerges and is experienced in organizational settings that are characterized
34
35 by the coordination of differences and the search for novelty. Performative power can
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37 thus be a helpful starting point to explore power in collective creativity (Hargadon &
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39 Bechky, 2006) and the emergence of novelty in organizations (Carlile, 2004; Garud,
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41 Simpson, Langley & Tsoukas, 2015). It can help to link the lived experience of power,
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43 diversity and creativity in organizational situations, emphasizing the integration of
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45 differences and the creation of novelty as emergent possibility and not as certainty of
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47 'creativity on demand'. Moreover, the complex interdependency and temporal dynamics
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7 of performative power could be explored further by drawing on other pragmatist
8 perspectives like Mead's philosophy of temporality (Reed, 2013; Simpson, 2009).^[5]

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11 Finally, considering how to theorize and study embodiment, affect and materiality in the
12 dynamics of performative power may be a fruitful way to capture more comprehensively
13 the lived experience of power in organizations (Ashcraft, 2020; Sutherland et al., 2015).

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16 Future studies of performative power could explore these theoretical and empirical
17 suggestions.

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23 Lastly, my writing of this article was inspired by seeing the potential of putting process
24 studies in conversation with pragmatism to enhance processual thinking and research in
25 organization studies. Viewing Follett's pragmatism as process philosophy has opened up
26 new possibilities to embrace process as ontology and to develop a processual
27 understanding of power and performativity together as mutually constituting processes of
28 organizing. The conceptualization and the processual study of performative power and
29 frictions are an attempt to provide a useful way to reimagine and to study empirically the
30 dynamic interweaving of power and performativity in the emergent flow of organizing.
31
32 In the end, performing processual possibilities requires us to develop new perspectives
33 that enhance our understanding of process as a way of seeing and living in the world. This
34 article seeks to move us beyond existing understandings and to inspire others to develop
35 together new processual possibilities for organization studies.
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NOTES

[1] My use of hyphenation here follows Dewey and Bentley's (1949: pp.107–108) practice 'as a means of emphasizing the issues involved in their various applications ... It has the particular value that it enables us to stress the inner confusions in the names as currently used'.

[2] Mutual constitution as form of causality has been discussed by Selg (2020), and in relation to power by Reed (2013) and Selg (2018).

[3] There are parallels between the concept of 'trans-action' and Karen Barad's (2003) notion of intra-action, but also with John Shotter's (2006) 'with-ness thinking'.

[4] In social sciences what is meant by 'relational' and 'processual' varies. I follow scholars in relational sociology that use 'processual' to acknowledge the primacy of process and 'relational' to acknowledge the primacy of relations in different approaches, with overlap in the case of 'relational all the way down' approaches (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Selg, 2018, 2020 for further discussion). Follett's ontology is both processual and relational, hence I use 'relational process ontology' to make this ontological distinction.

[5] Reed (2013) proposes an initial conceptualization of performative power based on Mead's philosophy of temporality. What he means by performative power, however, is different although related to mine. He draws a conceptual link between power and social causality and discusses performative power as the performative-pragmatist dimension of

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7 power and social causality together with the relational-realist and discursive-hermeneutic
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9 ones.

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