REVITALIZING COLLEGIALITY

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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REVITALIZING COLLEGIALITY: RESTORING FACULTY AUTHORITY IN UNIVERSITIES

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FOREWORD

Research in the Sociology of Organizations (*RSO*) publishes cutting-edge empirical research and theoretical papers that seek to enhance our understanding of organizations and organizing as pervasive and fundamental aspects of society and economy. We seek provocative papers that push the frontiers of current conversations, that help to revive old ones, or that incubate and develop new perspectives. Given its successes in this regard, *RSO* has become an impactful and indispensable fount of knowledge for scholars interested in organizational phenomena and theories. *RSO* is indexed and ranks highly in Scopus/SCImago as well as in the Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business schools.

As one of the most vibrant areas in the social sciences, the sociology of organizations engages a plurality of empirical and theoretical approaches to enhance our understanding of the varied imperatives and challenges that these organizations and their organizers face. Of course, there is a diversity of formal and informal organizations – from for-profit entities to non-profits, state and public agencies, social enterprises, communal forms of organizing, non-governmental associations, trade associations, publicly traded, family owned and managed, private firms – the list goes on! Organizations, moreover, can vary dramatically in size from small entrepreneurial ventures to large multi-national conglomerates to international governing bodies such as the United Nations.

Empirical topics addressed by *RSO* include the formation, survival, and growth or organizations; collaboration and competition between organizations; the accumulation and management of resources and legitimacy; and how organizations or organizing efforts cope with a multitude of internal and external challenges and pressures. Particular interest is growing in the complexities of contemporary organizations as they cope with changing social expectations and as they seek to address societal problems related to corporate social responsibility, inequality, corruption and wrongdoing, and the challenge of new technologies. As a result, levels of analysis reach from the individual to the organization, industry, community and field, and even the nation-state or world society. Much research is multi-level and embraces both qualitative and quantitative forms of data.

Diverse theory is employed or constructed to enhance our understanding of these topics. While anchored in the discipline of sociology and the field of management, *RSO* also welcomes theoretical engagement that draws on other disciplinary conversations – such as those in political science or economics, as well as work from diverse philosophical traditions. *RSO* scholarship has helped push forward a plethora of theoretical conversations on institutions and institutional change, networks, practice, culture, power, inequality, social movements,

categories, routines, organization design and change, configurational dynamics, and many other topics.

Each volume of *RSO* tends to be thematically focused on a particular empirical phenomenon (e.g., creative industries, multinational corporations, and entrepreneurship) or theoretical conversation (e.g., institutional logics, actors and agency, and microfoundations). The series publishes papers by junior as well as leading international scholars, and embraces diversity in all dimensions. If you are a scholar interested in organizations or organizing, I hope you find *RSO* to be an invaluable resource as you develop your work.

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INTRODUCTION: REVITALIZING COLLEGIALITY: RESTORING FACULTY AUTHORITY IN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Collegiality is often discussed and analyzed as a challenged form of governance, a form of working that used to function well in universities prior to the emergence of contemporary and modern forms of governance. This seems to suggest that collegiality used to dominate, while other forms of governance are now taking over. The papers in volume 86 of this special issue support the notion of challenged collegiality, but also show that for the most part, nostalgic notions of "the good old days" are neither true nor helpful if we are to revitalize academic collegiality. After examining whether a golden age of collegiality ever existed, we discuss why collegiality matters. Exploring what are often described as limitations or "dark sides" of collegiality, we address four such "dark sides" related to slow decision-making, conflicts, parochialism, and diversity. This is followed by a discussion of how these limitations may be handled and what measures must be taken to maintain and develop collegiality. With a brief summary of the

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remaining papers under two headings, "Maintaining collegiality" and "Revitalizing collegiality," we preview the rest of this volume.

Keywords: Dark sides of collegiality; diversity; parochialism; revitalizing collegiality; slow decision-making; maintaining collegiality

CAN CHALLENGED COLLEGIALITY BE RESTORED?

Collegiality as a mode of governance in universities has been challenged and partly replaced by more enterprise-like and bureaucratic forms of governance. Papers in this special issue point to some of these forces and report on a turn toward viewing universities as enterprises (Denis et al., 2023, Vol. 87; Hwang, 2023, Vol. 86) and to structuring universities as organized actors (Lee & Ramirez, 2023, Vol. 86). University transformations have followed similar trends as organizations in other societal sectors, with leadership structures inspired by and sometimes directly patterned after private businesses (Crace et al., 2023, Vol. 87), global organizational expansion with diffused prototypes for what proper organizations should look like (Lee & Ramirez, 2023, Vol. 86), emerging hybrid forms of governance (Denis et al., 2023, Vol. 87), and new tasks and expectations applied to universities, university leaders (Mizrahi-Shtelman & Drori, 2023, Vol. 87) and recruited faculty (Gerhardt et al., 2023, Vol. 86). Collegiality is also challenged by a changing political landscape (Crace et al., 2023, Vol. 87; van Schalkwyk & Cloete, 2023, Vol. 86; Wen & Marginson, 2023, Vol. 86), new forms of competition (Kosmützky & Krücken, 2023, Vol. 86) with a high focus on excellence funding programs (Harroche & Musselin, 2023, Vol. 86) and a high proportion of temporal research staff with loose connections to collegial processes and communities (Pineda, 2023, Vol. 86).

Additional challenges to collegiality stem from the condition that it remains quite unspecified as a mode of governance (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 86). Data from several of the studies reported in this special issue show that interpretations of the content and function of collegiality often remain taken for granted, unclear (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 86), and diverse among practitioners in higher education and research (Denis et al., 2023, Vol. 87; van Schalkwyk & Cloete, 2023, Vol. 86).

We have argued that a maintenance and revitalization of collegiality require specifying and clarifying what collegiality is and how it can be practiced. As a starting point, research can reveal consequences of transformed modes of governance for collegiality. Interestingly, research reported in these volumes also shows that a taken for granted and dormant collegiality may be mobilized by reforms that challenge it (Denis et al., 2023, Vol. 87; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 87) or by reality breakdowns (Crace et al., 2023, Vol. 87).

In this introductory paper to Vol. 87 we elaborate on two additional ways to facilitate restoration and revitalization of collegiality. First, we need to open up taken-for-grantedness and discuss why collegiality matters. What are the motives

for maintaining or even strengthening collegiality? Collegiality is essential for upholding independent research and teaching – for protecting academic freedom. Second, we address limitations and weaknesses of collegiality. Exploring "dark sides" of collegiality, we review commonly discussed limitations and explore how they may be handled. Specifically, we address four "dark sides" related to slow forms of decision-making, conflicts, parochialism and diversity. Finally, we preview the remaining papers in this volume by summarizing them under two headings: "Maintaining collegiality" and "Revitalizing collegiality."

WHY COLLEGIALITY MATTERS

When collegiality is discussed in academic meetings and at seminars and conferences, it is not uncommon to hear reactions such as, "So what? Why should we care? Isn't collegiality all about friendly relationships among the more or less privileged, yet lamenting faculty?" A very short reply to such comments would be that the task of faculty members is to develop knowledge as a public good, to preserve academic freedom, and to lay the foundation for students' and others' scientific knowledge formation and their ability to receive, critically scrutinize, and use such knowledge. Such tasks are conditioned by the way in which research and education are governed. For faculty to have control over these operations there needs to be a system of self-governance in place, a system that then demands the commitment and engagement of faculty members.

Academic freedom is in decline. As we were working on this introduction, *University World News* (Greenfield, 2023) reported that over the past decade, academic freedom has declined in more than 22 countries representing more than half of the world's population. The news item is based on the *Academic Freedom Index: Update 2023 (AFI)*, published by the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.[1] The *AFI* is a study of 179 countries based on a survey completed by 2,197 experts in higher education. The Academic Freedom Index primarily focuses on political pressures. Throughout Vols. 86 and 87 of this special issue, it becomes clear that academic freedom may also, for an individual scholar or different groups of scholars, be restricted by the governance and management practices of universities and systems of higher education and research.

Waters (1989, p. 958) emphasized that collegiality is a means for self-control and independence.

> Collegiate organizations are self-controlling and self-policing; that is, they are not subject to direction from any external source once they have been constituted. Formal autonomy has two aspects. The first is freedom of action in relation to the pursuit of professional goals. Groups of colleagues are free to do research, to instruct others, and to communicate findings or other forms of knowledge insofar as these things are relevant to professional standing. Collegiate organizations are ideally facilitative rather than authoritarian systems, in which performance standards are established interpersonally and informally rather than by formal rules. However, these standards apply only within the collegial membership. Even here, there are, nevertheless, minimum standards of performance and certain prescriptions that are implied by the ethical norms discussed above. A second aspect of formal autonomy, then, is that the violation of ethical norms, except where these constitute legal transgressions, are matters for self-regulation within the collegium rather than an arena for bureaucratic, commercial, or state legal interference.

In the introduction to Vol. 86 (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 86), we distinguished between vertical and horizontal collegiality. Both aspects are alluded to in Waters' definition. Along the vertical dimension, the decision-making of universities is organized around faculty authority. Vertical collegiality concerns decision-making structures within a formal organization and rules. This can include the composition of university boards, senates and committees, and the selection of "primus/prima inter pares" as academic leaders (Lazega, 2020, p. 10). Horizontal collegiality encompasses the communities of peers in departments, at universities, among reviewers, at conferences or in scholarly networks. The two aspects are interdependent. Peers provide reviews, scrutiny and advice, and are mobilized to elect those who serve in formal positions in universities, research councils and other bodies related to a university. The vertical collegial structure is also based on legitimacy from the horizontal collegium.

Comparing the corporatization and bureaucratization of universities with the organizing principles of collegiality summarized by Waters (1989), we find that almost all aspects of collegiality are challenged. The six principles are as follows: theoretical knowledge, professional career, formal egalitarianism, scrutiny of product, collective decision-making and formal autonomy (see also Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 86). However, while (vertical) collegiality has been weakened as a mode of university governance, it appears to have remained somewhat more robust outside universities (Denis et al., 2023, Vol. 87; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016), in academic journals, academic associations and research councils that build largely on horizontal collegiality. Denis et al. (2023, Vol. 87) described this development as the dislocation of collegiality. This also maintains the calling for science, or science as vocation (Lee & Walsh, 2022; Weber, 1958), given the considerable time and resources scholars invest in academic citizenship, even if this too is challenged both by the increased bureaucratization of scientific work (Lee & Walsh, 2022), and – as we argue in the introduction to Vol. 86 (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 86) – by individualization more generally in society (see also Kosmützky & Krücken, 2023, Vol. 86). Nevertheless, it can be noted that in some countries, evaluators on research councils are qualified as "experts" rather than as "peers," and such peers are not always chosen through elections (see for instance Harroche & Musselin, 2023, Vol. 86). Moreover, horizontal collegiality is subject to bureaucratization and enterprization.

In the introduction to Vol. 86 we defined collegiality as "an institution of self-governance" (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023, Vol. 87); as such, it shares institutional dimensions of democratic governance drawing upon the logic of appropriateness with regard to not only practices and rules, but also individual identities and intentions (March & Olsen, 1995). While the institution of collegiality affords the raw materials of social interactions and guidelines for their use, people upholding these social interactions provide its energy and meaning as an inhabited institution (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Yet, social interactions can also have negative outcomes. We continue by exploring the nostalgic notion of collegiality as well as its dark sides. Nostalgic claims are discussed in a brief review of an assumed "golden age of collegiality."

Was There Ever a Golden Age of Collegiality?

For some, collegiality can be seen as a mythic (Barnes, 2020) and romantic ideal way to govern universities and knowledge production, a practice allegedly based on consensus decisions made by academic staff. In recent decades, this search for a golden age has been described as "a growing disenchantment about the fundamental satisfactions of a career in higher education" (Bennett, 1998, p. 5), a focus on delivering learning outcomes on behalf of "inspiring love of learning" (Rowland, 2008, p. 353), or alienation as a result of increasing individualism on behalf of collective self-governance (Fleming, 2020, 2021). These descriptions seem to suggest that there once was a period when universities and academic staff enjoyed a golden age of collegiality, an assumption that quite rapidly dissolves upon reading historical accounts of university development and governance (see Östh Gustafsson, 2023, Vol. 86). Over time, mixed interpretations lead to ambiguities regarding the missions of universities, modes of governance and collegiality.

In an analysis of the unprecedented success of the university as a world institution, Frank and Meyer (2020, p. 6) drew parallels with religious movements and perceptions of a golden age that are central to such convictions:

> A siege mentality is common. Here the Golden Age is not in the future but in an imagined past of intellectual and cultural purity, removed from the vulgar pressures of the present …. This is a misleading conception of the past university – and of the society in which it operated.

Scholars who have researched the development of universities certainly question assumptions about a golden age of collegiality (see, for instance, Clark, 2006; Merton, 1942; Östh Gustafsson, 2023, Vol. 86). Universities were controlled by the Church in medieval times, from Enlightenment onwards universities were largely leveraged by specific state interests to build nation states and national cultures, and then, more recently universities have had the role to uphold the Humboldt tradition of advocating academic freedom (Clark, 2006; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2014), at least as an ideal. Still, under the influence of the Church and state interests, by organizing knowledge development in structures similar to guilds, some qualified scholars were provided space for collegial governance, and thus, for more or less independent knowledge development (Björck, 2013; Clark, 2006; Frängsmyr, 2017; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2014).

Transformations of universities have continued over time. During the first half of the 1900s, the expansion of subdisciplines within universities led to an epistemological fragmentation (Huldt et al., 2013; Macfarlane, 2005), a development that would result in what Macfarlane (2005) called "silo" effects. Conditions for governance fundamentally changed with the massification of higher education from the early 1960s onward, as the number of students and scholars in academic departments grew in line with arguments for improved career mobility (Macfarlane, 2005).

Whereas Frank and Meyer (2020) noted a striking homogenization of universities in a move away from institutional differentiation, others have noted diversification as nations have sought to develop regions by establishing universities there, in contrast to the more traditional model where universities were

established primarily in areas of historical importance (Shattock et al., 2022). In the realignment of these trends, many higher education institutions have become universities, and degrees, programs and areas of study have become increasingly similar. Polytechnics in the UK were transformed into universities in the 1990s (Willmott, 1995). In Sweden, university colleges have become re-regulated and resourced over the last 25 years to become increasingly similarly regulated as universities, and several university colleges have also been transformed into universities. Together, the massification of higher education and shift away from vocational education led to more people being involved in university operations, including students, scholars, professional administrators, and eventually, managers. As Macfarlane (2005) pointed out, this was the introduction of the "disaggregated university" where the former sense of community among scholars who viewed themselves as part of "intellectual corporations" has been replaced with the notion of the university as comprising disengaged individuals who are merely members of a legal entity.

This raises issues about staffing of universities, how this is controlled and by whom. In a study of the introduction of recycling programs across US universities and colleges, Michael Lounsbury (2001) discovered much variation. While some universities and colleges hired full-time professional recycling managers and established special units staffed by environmental activists, other schools built smaller units staffed by current employees where management practices were typically part-time tasks. One main explanation for these variations, Lounsbury (2001) found, followed on activities of field level organizations. Active social movement organizations around those schools that came to build more resourceful professional and activist bodies had lobbied for such bodies to be built. This lobbying was largely channeled by students. A brief look at how universities around the world have handled the pandemic reveals a similar diversity. Whereas in some institutions, faculty members have had authority over the handling of the pandemic, in others pandemic responses have been treated as managerial tasks, and faculty are being controlled by administrative measures (see Jandrić et al., 2023, Vol. 87).

This brief overview of university transformations over time illustrates how the exemplar or model-oriented ideal of "collegiality" rarely can be ascribed to a specific time or place in the history of universities. Rather, the institution of collegiality has always been interwoven with societal conditions, nation building, political ambitions, and visions regarding the objectives of university knowledge and education. In addition, the student cohort has changed over time, from clergy to privileged elites, and since the 1960s, to the masses. More recently, university education has been viewed as a tool to both increase education levels in the population and educate future members of the labor market (Zawadzki et al., 2020). Multiversity development can also be seen in increases in the number of students, scholars and administrators, and in turn, a steady increase in published papers (Pineda, 2023, Vol. 86). Newly arising challenges associated with governing these new dynamics are among the many consequences of the development of multiversities (see Krücken et al., 2007). To understand how the institution of collegiality is undermined or revitalized in universities, it is critically

important to consider broader and long-term societal and cultural movements, constellations of actor groups within universities, associated organized interests and the channels between them.

DARK SIDES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE INSTITUTION OF COLLEGIALITY

When exploring collegiality as an institution and how it gains legitimacy, it is vital to discuss its boundaries, limitations and what we refer to here as its "dark sides." Commonly posed questions concern, for example, whether collegiality is upholding a system of privilege and whether it is characterized by closure rather than openness. Those questions inevitably lead to a need to discuss shortcomings and limitations of collegial governance – that is, dark sides of collegiality (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). When exploring disadvantages and dark sides, it is important to keep in mind that all forms of governance have constraints, both for those managing them and for the governed. One of the most well-known examples is Weber's description of the limits of bureaucracy as an iron cage that both protects employees and constrains them (du Gay, 2008; Styhre, 2007). In an extension of the iron cage, enterprise governance as an ideal type ascribes freedom and autonomy to the business owner who controls employees by owning the results of their work (Bendix, 1945).

Bringing in disadvantages of institutions may also appear to be somewhat external to the more general topics explored within institutional studies. For instance, in some discussions, "institution" represents "good elements," as in the "open institution, inclusive, and sacramental and 'normalizing'," in contrast to authentic charisma that serves as the expression of a sect (Marzano, 2013, p. 312). In a similar vein, a more recent discussion has questioned the potential to include critical perspectives in institutional theory to understand issues of power dimensions and inequality related to social category or hierarchy (Munir, 2019). In a comment, Drori (2019) explained how the institutional theory perspective is inherently critical; for instance, when it came back into vogue in the 1970s, institutional theorists offered alternative explanations to the research results advocated by rationalist-oriented scholars.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies of institutions often advance narratives that include good elements, dark sides, struggles to establish legitimacy, resilience, and transformation. The Church is an example of an old institution that has remained powerful and has maintained legitimacy over the centuries, protecting its values and morals despite accounts of transgressions and repression, but also known for transformation and redefinition despite strong opposition (Meier Sørensen et al., 2012; Quattrone, 2022; Styhre, 2014). As Parker (2009) explained, the institution of the Church is depicted as the long-term balancing of "good" elements with the dark sides; for example, pre-medieval angels could represent both good and evil, and 17th century women were characterized as being tempted by the dark sides while men were characterized as embodying "good" elements such as strength and morality. Just a very brief account of the history of the Church thus tells

of institutional resilience enduring ongoing transformation, adjustments, and opposition, including both legitimate and illegitimate institutional work. Or, in the words of Drori (2019, p. 5), for an analysis of critical perspectives of institutions, the focus must be on the "variety of contextual features" and how they are "imbued with meanings, set into practices and routines, and embodied in structures and material objects."

In general, the dark sides of collegiality within universities can be sorted into four categories. Collegiality may (a) lead to slow decision-making, (b) be a breeding ground for conflicts, (c) foster parochialism, and (d) have a tendency to prioritize some (privileged) groups on behalf of others. In the contemporary debate, the last category has attracted great interest, a development that is also connected to the more general discussion about diversity and inclusion. We report findings from some recent studies in this field after we discuss collegiality's effect on the speed of decision-making and collegiality as a breeding ground for conflicts and parochialism. At present, discussions about collegiality's role in breeding conflicts have attracted significant public attention in light of cancel culture, as well as publicized accounts of academic fraud and unethical research.

Speed in Decision-making

A common critique of collegiality that has prevailed over time concerns slowness. This critique can be found in Weber's writings and is generally seen as an inherent feature of collegiality. While the collegial system enables a process whereby issues can be handled by several people at the same time to facilitate a more thorough examination, processing is inevitably slower (Östh Gustafsson, 2023, Vol. 86; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016).

The 1963 Robbins report – which kickstarted the transformation of English universities from self-managed and collegial organizations to centralized organizations driven by enterprise ideals (including bureaucracy and the notion that higher education is an enterprise) – also inspired new commentary about the collegial model. As universities expanded, the collegial model was claimed to be too slow to handle rapid growth and external changes in financial models (first expanding, then shrinking) (Burnes et al., 2014). The focus on achieving a deliberated consensus by exploring and articulating as many different perspectives as possible and having lengthy academic discussions contributes to the perception that collegial governance prolongs decision-making. By comparison, decision-making in the private sector appears to be a much faster process.

This view of collegiality as a slow form of governance relative to bureaucratic or enterprise forms of governance is also upheld in media reporting. For example, media narratives frequently amplify events such as thousands of employees being laid off without any prior notice, or a CEO suddenly being replaced. These media narratives exclude the methodological work and jurisdictional rules behind such decisions and how they have been deliberated by executives (often over a period of several months), and in some countries, even in formal discussions with trade unions. A reason for this is that such preparations are often seen as trade secrets, not to be publicly exposed until formal decisions have been made. A forewarning