Exploring interventions for relational knowing and caring in management and organization studies

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Abstract

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Abstract
The dissertation engages with feminist theory, art, and materiality to approach knowing from a relational perspective. It is comprised of a summary and four essays that together answer the research question of 'How can a relational approach to knowing foster possibilities for organizing through empathy and care?'. The first essay delves into the realm of arts-based methods in management education, specifically examining how an artistic intervention can cultivate empathy as a form of relational knowing. Focused on addressing work-related uncertainty among doctoral students during the COVID-19 pandemic, the essay highlights the limitations of normative approaches and the significance of cultivating sensitivity towards ambiguity. The second essay explores collaborative collage writing as a methodological contribution to writing differently in management and organization studies. Engaging in poetic exchanges, this collaborative writing practice disrupts self-judgment and encourages vulnerable relations. The essay positions collage writing as an empathic practice fostering embodied reflexivity and self-compassion. The third essay challenges conventional perceptions of artistic interventions by embracing the concept of 'tinkering.' Framing tinkering as an artistic intervention, the essay promotes the idea that anyone can initiate and explore artistic expressions, contributing to feminist resistance within the business school. Tinkering is presented as a means of fostering vulnerable embodied reflections and attuning to both human and non-human elements. The fourth essay centres on the organizing potential of care for orienting agencies and relations in ways that nurture interdependencies. It departs from a post-human perspective on practice theory to direct attention to how caring orientations emerged through dialogical engagements between humans and non-humans. This essay identifies competing caring orientations and sheds light on the dominance of human-centric organization and theorizing. The dissertation offers three contributions to the feminist knowledge production in management and organization studies. First, it theorizes artistic interventions as activities capable of disrupting the dominant logico-rational approach and facilitating empathic knowing to address work-related uncertainty. Second, it extends the method of collaborative collage, presenting it as an experimental writing practice that fosters empathic and embodied reflexivity. Third, it elaborates on how care can be approached as a form of organizing based on an ongoing 'call-and-response' sensitivity to the relation with the other, where needs and interests emerge rather than being predefined. Overall, this work proposes a speculative approach to researching and theorizing organizations, challenging the hegemonic knowledge production practices within the business school, and advocating for space that embraces ambiguity, difference, and multiplicity.

Keywords artistic intervention, feminisms, materialities, empathy, care, writing differently


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*Kaikki on mahdollista*

Helsinki, 11 April 2024
Ana Paula Lafaire
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List of Publications

This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and of the following publications which are referred to in the text by their numerals:


Author’s Contribution

**Essay 1:** Interspace for empathy: engaging with work-related uncertainty through artistic intervention in management education.

Lead author and co-initiator of the group, providing the empirical context and materials. She oversaw the development of the research idea from beginning to end, and she was responsible for the actualization of the theoretical framework and literature review. Additionally, she was leading the analysis and co-authored the discussion.

**Essay 2:** In lockdown with my inner saboteur: A collaborative collage on self-compassion. Co-authored article

Lead author, the research idea was developed by her, and she was responsible for the actualization of the theoretical framework and literature review. She was the co-initiator of the group that provided with the empirical context and materials. She oversaw the analysis process and wrote the discussion.

**Essay 3:** Tinkering in the business school as artistic intervention.

Sole author.

**Essay 4:** Entangled with a communal sauna: Caring as material-discursive response to vibrant matter.

As second author she co-initiated the research idea, and actively participated in gathering empirical materials, with a sustained longitudinal engagement with the field. This gave her an embodied understanding that was key for analyzing the data. She contributed to the development of the focus and aim of the study throughout the research process. She took the lead in the initial coding of the empirical materials and wrote the outline of the ethnographic vignettes in both the first version of the manuscript and the subsequent version.
In the animated movie Alice in Wonderland (1951) there is a scene where the flowers welcome Alice to sing in harmony with them.

“You can learn a lot of things from the flowers [...] There’s a wealth of happiness and romance”

They assume she is one of them until they realize she does not come from a garden. As they attempt to identify what kind of flower she is, their attitude shifts.

“Do you suppose she is a wildflower?”
“I’m Alice... I am not a flower!”

To settle their confusion, one of the flowers classifies her as what they deem an inferior type of plant.

“She’s nothing but a common mobile vulgaris [...] To put it bluntly, a weed.”
“I am not a weed!”
“We don’t want weeds in our bed..!”

The flowers turn hostile towards Alice, and she is pushed out of the garden abruptly.

The scene has lingered in my memory since my youth, perhaps because it captures a situation that, even without language to make sense of it, felt deeply familiar and disturbing. Alice’s difference matters, resulting in her being denied respect, and acceptance by the flowers. Only one, a little rosebud, expresses dissent in support of Alice. In the Spanish version, it murmurs ‘pues a mí me gusta’ (‘Well, I like her’), but it is quickly silenced with a sharp ‘Tú cállate Rosita’ (‘Quiet bud’). The flowers wield their power, creating a division between those deemed worthy to learn from, and those whose capacity for knowing is dismissed. While the flowers are portrayed as knowledgeable beings with agency and opinions, it also illustrates a community where acceptance is conditional upon sameness and conforming to norms. As a girl, that resonated with my upbringing in México. I did not have the words to name sexist, classist, racist, and homophobic oppression, nor did I could process my entangled experience, yet I perceived them (Ahmed 2015; Lorde 1984). I felt that my ability to advocate on my and others’ behalf in the face of injustice was hindered. Quiet bud! Weed!
Mundane, sedimented in the flesh, ever-burning gut, knot in the throat. It was feminism that enabled me to gather painful ‘scattered experiences’ to grasp them differently so they could ‘be spoken of’ and resisted (Ahmed 2015, 8).

A memory slipped from the past
girls, weeds, and flowers
took the first paragraph
knowing and belonging
guided my doctoral path
Rosita no se calla, she laughs

My work is positioned in the field of feminist management and organization studies concerned with challenging hegemonic knowledge production (see Calás and Smircich 2006, 2009, 2023; Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor and Tienari 2019, 2020; Katila and Meriläinen 1999, 2002; Madalaki et al., 2022) in the context of the business school. Feminist scholarship is focused on the politics and practices of knowledge production, since knowing enacts manifestations of power, shaping the fabric of reality with tangible consequences across time and space (Law 2004; Mol 1999). Feminism, inside and outside academia, critically examines the power in gendered, racial, ethnic, class, and sexual relations, to mobilize social change striving for ethical and just organizations (Bell et al., 2019, 2020; Benschop and Verloo 2016; Calás and Smircich 2006, 2023; Contu 2018; Fotaki and Pullen 2023).

While feminism has played a crucial role in recognizing women and other marginalized groups as knowing subjects—and grant them access to higher education— societal organization and knowledge production still rely on modern dualistic assumptions of separation (mind/body, male/female, thinking/feeling, human/nature) (Anzaldúa 1987; Harding 1991; hooks 1991; Katila, Meriläinen, Bell 2023). These assumptions uphold the notion of ‘legitimate’ knowers as neutral, independent, rational subjects, but usually having the characteristic of being male, white, heterosexual, and privileged. This contributes to the perpetuation of the concept of ‘objective knowledge’ created from a detached position from the world (see Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Calás and Smircich 2006, 2023). Dualistic assumptions of separation have material consequences in society, rendering certain bodies and worlds superior and desirable, submitting others to oppression and exploitation (Calás and Smircich 2023; Fotaki and Pullen 2023). The status quo of contemporary capitalism is sustained through epistemic exclusions (see Code 1991; Dotson 2012, 2014; Fricker 2007; Pohlhaus 2012) which entails perpetuating harm and injustice (Calás and Smircich 2006; Kociatkiewicz, Kostera and Zueva 2021). However, management and organization studies continue to privilege masculinist rationality— and experi-

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1 Hélène Cixous urges to ‘write!’ to unmute the feminine, the body, and the suppressed speech with (hysterical) laughter and thrill in our becoming (Cixous et al., 1976, 899; also Vachani 2019; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki 2023)
ences of middle-class men— in knowledge production through research and education in business school (Bell et al., 2019, 2020; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Cunliffe 2022; Katila et al., 2023).

The dissertation is situated in the context of the business school to explore interventions for relational knowing in management and organization studies. The business school has been criticized for being organized based on rationality, competitive individuality, and linear growth, taking capitalism for granted and normalizing the ongoing social and ecological crises it takes part in (Parker 2014, 2018; Hoofd, 2010; Taylor, 2017; Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021; Fleming et al., 2022; Rhodes and Pullen 2023). Management education, for instance, is dominated by traditional practices of disembodied logico-rational knowing and linear thinking (Dey and Steyaert 2007; Steyaert, Beyes, Parker 2016) even if such approaches are not suitable to navigate ambiguity, uncertainty, and ill-defined problems (Moisander and Stenfors 2009; Kostera and Strauß 2022) which are unfolding in multiple directions (Calás and Smircich 2023). Furthermore, a rationalist approach to knowing prevents accounting for the affective, embodied, material, messy, queer, and vulnerable dimensions of knowledge production and organizing (e.g., Gilmore and Kenny 2015; Hunter and Kivinen, 2022; Mandalaki and Pérezts 2020; Thanem and Knights 2019; Huopalainen and Sattama 2019). The normative ideals of what counts as ‘legitimate’ knowledge disregard care, and instrumentalize passion, leading to repercussions not only in the kind of knowledge generated (Kiriakos and Tienari 2018; Lund and Tienari 2019; Katila et al., 2020; Cunliffe 2022; Pérezts 2022; Steyaert 2022) but also intensifying loneliness, precarity, fear, anxiety, perpetuating individualization and undermining community care and wellbeing (Prasad, 2013; Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Gill, 2016; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Smith and Ulus, 2020; Mandalaki 2023). Hence, the dissertation responds to the call to embody doing knowledge differently by enacting resistance in subtle, ambiguous, and bottom-up interventions (Ashcraft 2017; Katila, Laamanen et al., 2020; Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem 2017; Lund and Tienari, 2019). The aim is to engage with embodied experience of becoming academics (Meriläinen et al., 2021) and spark alternative relational potentials that might support flourishing individuals and communities beyond the masculinist knowing and organizing practices of the business school (Harré et al., 2017; Fleming et al., 2022).

To re-think knowledge production in management and organization studies, the dissertation emerges as an open-ended dialogue with feminist theory, art, and materiality to explore knowing from a relational perspective (Mandalaki et al., 2022; Meriläinen et al., 2022; Fotaki and Pullen 2023; Calás and Smircich 2023; Katila et al., 2023). In contrast, with a dualistic separation, a relational approach to knowing is a co-productive enactment with others (humans, machines, viruses, books, places, coffee, living beings, stories, seasons, memories…), where the ‘knower’ and the ‘object’ of knowing do not pre-exist as distinct entities, but emerge in the embodied, affective act of knowing (Gherardi 2017, 2019a; Bell and Vachhani 2020; Huopalainen 2022; Calás and Smircich 2023; Katila et al., 2023). The dissertation is guided by the research question
‘How can a relational approach to knowing foster possibilities for organizing through empathy and care?’

The dissertation consists of four essays where I, with my co-authors, explore how empathy and care call us to cultivate capacity for vulnerable, other-oriented relations in spaces that disrupt normative approaches to knowing and organizing in the business school. We empirically illustrate the potential of artistic interventions in the context of doctoral education to foster vulnerable knowledge of work-related uncertainty (Lafaire, Kuismin, Moisander, and Grünbaum 2022). Additionally, we explore how to unsettle academic norms through writing embodied affective texts to voice struggles (Lafaire, Soini, Grünbaum 2022). Guided by a research sensitivity towards the relation with the other, we offer a theorization of caring that departs from the interdependencies between humans and non-humans (see Baxter, 2021; Bell and Vachhani, 2020; Calás and Smircich, 2023; Gherardi, 2017, 2019a; Pors, 2019, 2022; Valtonen and Pullen, 2021). This illustrates how relational knowing can foster world-making imaginaries and offer alternative knowledge production practices beyond the normative rational human-centric approaches of the business school. The different analytical and theoretical lenses enable us to investigate what relational knowing ‘does’ as an interpersonal, interdependent, and interconnected process.

Overview of the study and research questions

The dissertation could be approached as a bundle of four essays gathered in a basket through the wonderings and wanderings of more than four years. Since they do not share the same empirical context, nor the same theoretical framework, they offer a variety of experiences and perspectives that together explore relational knowing in its multiplicity. The process of crafting this dissertation was affected by, for instance, the Nordic seasons of light and darkness (e.g., Katila, Kuismin and Valtonen 2023), a global pandemic, inspired collaborations with co-authors and mentors, artistic interventions, poems, sauna sessions, zoom meetings... The process moved in messy turns, some struggling with impatience and inadequacy, while others flowing intuitively in creative acts of doing and writing (Jääskeläinen and Helin 2021).

The first three essays explore the potential of artistic interventions, as a co-creative process to momentarily suspend the organizational norms for other-oriented ways of knowing. Essays 1 and 2 explore empathy, as a social epistemic practice, fostered through collective storytelling (essay 1) and collage writing (essay 2) that enabled doctoral students to unpack affective experiences of work-related uncertainty and shame. Essay 3 mobilizes the concept of tinkering as a bottom-up form of artistic intervention in the context of neoliberal Nordic business school to unsettle the norms of knowledge production in management

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2 Ursula K. Le Guin (1986) offers the metaphor of the carrier bag to reconsider how we read and write stories, to see them as a narrative structure about gathering and sharing instead of linear heroic quests.
education. Essay 4 empirically explores a context outside the business school, as it follows the unfolding of a communal public sauna through the Nordic seasons of the year. The essay traces how the open site is sustained by ongoing call-and-response to matter (e.g., change, decrease, or shifts of wood, bodies, temperature, light...). We show how attending to different needs, not only coming from humans, is an emergent relational dialogue premised on care.

The essays together illustrate other-oriented possibilities for attuning and relational knowing, where the ‘doing’ is part of the ‘ends’ rather than the means to achieve a predefined outcome, for example, communicating through storytelling (essay 1), poetic exchanges (essays 2 and 3), or enjoying sauna (essay 4). The dissertation does not aim to provide any definitive, generalizable, universal truth. Instead, the essays present a context-specific and partial understanding of a dynamic reality (Bell et al., 2020). Drawing inspiration and homed in special issues in management and organization journals, these essays explore open-ended knowing that resist ‘straightforward solutions’ (Kostera and Strauß 2022, 3). This dialogue has been carried out with a focus on feminist theory, art, and care (Mandalaki et al., 2022) for imaginaries and world-making grounded in relationality. The essays contribute to the dissertation by answering different research questions:

**Essay 1:** ‘Interspace for empathy: engaging with work-related uncertainty through artistic intervention in management education.’

*How can artistic intervention facilitate empathic engagement with work-related uncertainty in postgraduate management education?*

**Essay 2:** ‘In lockdown with my inner saboteur: A collaborative collage on self-compassion.’

*How can collaborative writing foster vulnerable relational ways for doctoral researchers to process struggles and pressures in the context of social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

**Essay 3:** ‘Tinkering in the business school as artistic intervention.’

*How does tinkering as a form of artistic intervention foster possibilities for knowing ‘differently’ in the business school?*

**Essay 4:** ‘Entangled with a communal sauna: Caring as material-discursive response to vibrant matter.’

*How do caring relations that unfold outside confined spaces for care organize worlds and imaginaries in ways that nurture interdependencies?*
2. Theoretical concepts

The dissertation adopts a relational approach to knowledge, asserting that ontology (reality) and epistemology (how we know) are intertwined and co-constitutive in the concept of onto-epistemology (Barad 2003, 829; Gherardi 2019a; Katila et al., 2023). The knower doesn’t approach pre-existing objects of knowledge; rather, they emerge in the intra-action of encounters among materialities (Barad 2003; Gherardi 2017, 2019; Bell and Vachhani 2020). These encounters are not about ‘of being specifically situated in the world [as an I, specific and distinct from others], but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity’ (Barad, 2007, p. 337). This means that the practice of knowing is inherent to the practice of being, and it takes site in the body (Barad 2003, 829; Gherardi 2019a). The body is how we affectively experience everyday life, is the site where materials and ‘bodily doings’ are entangled and cannot be treated separately (Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem 2017; Dale and Latham 2015; Gherardi 2019a; Calás and Smircich, 2023). Jane Bennett vividly illustrates this by asking us to pause the reading and take a breath, feel the swarm of non-humans that come together in the making of us—imagine the oxygen, minerals in the bones, millions of bacteria, and your last breakfast—then exhale (Bennett 2010 in Pors 2022).

In the relational encounter with materiality (e.g., bodies, objects, ideas...), we not only ‘acquire’ knowledge but actively co-produce the world (Ashcraft 2017; Bell and Vachhani 2020; Calás and Smircich, 2023; Fotaki et al., 2017; Gherardi 2019a, 2019b). Reality is ‘done’ and ‘enacted’ through the entanglement of discourse and materiality, not predetermined in advance (Law 2004; Mol 1999; Orlikowski and Scott 2008). Materialities ‘intra-act’ to (re)configure the world (Barad 2007) in an ongoing becoming-with (Gherardi 2017, 2019a). The human is displaced from the center of intentional action and control over the world (Orlikowski and Scott 2008). This leads us to the aspect of agency, understood as a distributed capacity across materialities (living and non-living) and discourse to enact the world, regardless of intentionality (Bennett 2010; Gherardi 2019a). Theorizing the relations with materiality and the co-emergence of reality is not to dismiss the human (Gherardi 2019a, 239) but to rethink how humans become able to respond in a ‘complex world of things beyond-our-control’ and to open to the multiplicity of ‘doing knowledge’ (Calás and Smircich 2023, 3). Since humans and non-humans are not separated, and reality is not fixed, we can experiment by enacting alternative becomings (Pors 2022; Calás and Smircich 2023; Meriläinen, Tienari, and Greedharry 2023).
The dissertation delves into understanding relational knowing and caring by exploring how ordinary materialities unfold in multiple, unpredictable relations and their potential for organizing (Bennett 2010; Baxter 2021). Feminist new materialisms conceptualize matter ‘not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it does: what associations it makes, what capacities it has to affect its relations or to be affected by them, what consequences derive from these interactions’ (Fox and Alldred, 2017, p. 24; Bell and Vachhani 2020; Gherardi 2019a). Jane Bennett’s concept of Vibrant Matter prompts us to consider objects as lively instead of passive and predictable, since they can fascinate, push back, and disrupt (Bennett 2010; Bell and Vachhani 2020; Valtonen and Pullen 2021; Pors 2022). Bennett’s work serves to ‘amplify the complexity and uncertainty’ by infusing a sense of ‘wonder into the things, relations and forms of organizing’, allowing us to experience how we are profoundly connected with the world around us (Pors 2022, 72; see essay 4).

The dissertation engages with the literature on interventions, conceptualized as creative and performative acts aimed at temporarily reshaping relational configurations for knowledge production. These interventions possess the potential to create spaces for reflecting on our affective experiences and exploring alternative ways of organizing within the business school (Beyes and Michels 2014; Michels and Beyes 2016). Through artistic interventions, the dissertation delves into how relational knowing can emerge by disrupting and destabilizing material relations (Beyes and Steyaert 2011; Beyes and Michels 2011), suspending cultural norms and prompting questions about what may otherwise seem unchangeable (Berthoin Antal 2013; Berthoin Antal and Strauss 2016). The following section provides a detailed elaboration on how these theoretical foundations have influenced and shaped the research methodology.
3. Methodological reflection

The dissertation is grounded in qualitative inquiry, drawing from an embodied interpretative approach to researching organization (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012; Thanem and Knights, 2019; Katila, Meriläinen and Bell 2023). The dissertation is positioned in line with a relational onto-epistemology and feminist methodologies (Gherardi 2019a; Katila et al., 2023). Crafting qualitative research is a ‘production of knowledge in action’ (Gherardi 2019a, 752) through a process that is exploratory ‘generative, creative (inventive) and open-ended’ (Calás and Smircich 2023, 25). I approach research as an embodied practice because it is through the body that we, my co-authors and I, became affectively attuned to the multiplicity of our research contexts (Thanem and Knights, 2019; Gherardi 2019a; Bell and Vachhani 2020; Katila et al., 2023). This kind of research seeks resonance, aiming for interpretative insights that may provoke others to reflect on an issue (Cunliffe 2022). Theorizing about and from our lived experiences is a fluid process that offers different understandings, and resists fixing and stabilizing the ever-changing nature of social reality in abstract generalizations (Cunliffe 2022; Calás and Smircich 2023). We are called to be sensitive to what is unfolding around us, since immersion in the research context may follow non-linear and serendipitous turns while building close relationships with people and organizations (Cunliffe, 2011).

Each paper of the dissertation builds on various combinations of interview materials, ethnographic and participatory engagement, field notes, transcripts, documents for planning and facilitating workshops with arts-based methods, participants’ accounts, poems, photos, audio and video recordings, and media documents. A qualitative approach proves valuable for capturing experiences, highlighting the interconnectedness and the dynamic, transitional state of in-betweenness within organizations (Gherardi 2019a; Katila et al., 2023; Calás and Smircich 2023). The research was guided by a sensitivity towards the entanglement between materialities, language, agencies, affects, and bodies that come together co-constituting the research (Gherardi 2017, 2019b). We became immersed in the field with attention to the ordinary (Stewart 2007) and materialities (Bennett 2010; Bell and Vachhani 2021; Baxter 2021; Katila et al., 2023) taking into consideration the salient instances that seemed affectively charged and relevant (Helin et al., 2023; Pallesen 2022) to study social reality as collective becoming (Gaggiotti, Kostera, and Krzyworzeka 2017; Harding and Kostera 2021). The essays are written in dialogue with my co-authors (Helin et al., 2014) and ‘with all-that-we-are-part-of’ (Calás and Smircich 2023, 23) while
pursuing a doctoral degree, experiencing a global pandemic and facilitating artistic interventions in Nordic business school. Essays 1, 2, and 3 draw from scholarship on arts-based methods, in the context of organization and management research and education. They are grounded in the notion that art, as an unsettling force, can convey affective experiences with transformative potential for knowing (Kostera and Wozniak 2020; Berthoin Antal, Taylor and Ladkin 2014; Leavy 2020; Ward and Shortt 2020; Boncori 2023; Biehl-Missal 2015). The arts resist being mere tools for data collection, or for enhancing creativity at the service of ‘corporate ends’ (Sköldberg, Woodilla and Antal 2015, 9). The engagement of arts and research has been deemed as ‘unstable’ and ‘uncomfortable’ because the experimental practice has ‘capacity to destabilize and disturb’ (Beyes and Steyaert 2011, 101) and can open possibilities for emancipatory experiences (Kostera and Wozniak 2020; Steyaert, Beyes and Parker 2016). Ilaria Boncori (2023) views arts-based methods as potent feminist tools that hold relational and political significance. These methods draw on sensory and affective experiences, possessing the capacity to connect the individual to the collective (Boncori 2023, 105). They provoke opportunities for experiencing, thinking, and knowing differently (Leavy 2020; Ward and Shortt 2020; Boncori 2023).

Engaging with the arts allows for doing research beyond logico-rational process of sense-making (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Leavy 2020; Ward and Shortt 2020). This approach focuses on the affective, embodied, and sensible dimensions of how organizations are experienced (Boncori 2022) and enables self-other knowledge through emotional, sensory, kinaesthetic, and imaginative ways of knowing (Ward and Shortt 2020). Whether pursued individually or collaboratively, this approach does not demand ‘excellence of mastery in the arts’ (Boncori 2022, 104) but rather an exploratory openness to vulnerability and creative uncertainty (McNiff, 2017). Storytelling, metaphors, and poems, for instance, provide a means to evoke and express complex issues (Taylor and Ladkin 2009), enabling symbolic and aesthetic understandings of embodied experience (Ward and Shortt 2020; Eisner 2008; Leavy 2020). In particular, the dissertation explores the potential of arts-based methods as interventions that foster ‘temporary social space’ for grasping new perspectives on ‘what seemed immutable’ (Berthoin Antal 2013; Berthoin Antal and Strauss 2016, 39).

The essays of the dissertation also respond to the movement of writing differently as a way of producing knowledge differently (Katila et al., 2023). The practice of writing is aimed towards resonance and provoking change (e.g., Höpfl, 2000; Phillips, Pullen, and Rhodes, 2014; Vachhani, 2019; Katila 2019; Pullen, Helin and Harding, 2020; Mandalaki and Daou, 2021). Writing differently disrupts normative academic texts by crafting narratives that resist linear, impersonal representations (Gilmore et al., 2019) in the context of neoliberal demands of fast-paced individualism, excellence, and perfectionism (Mandalaki 2023, p. 14). Crafting texts differently follows a feminist move to write what has been abject and censored (Cixous et al., 1976; Vachhiani 2018) as relational political activist practice (Höpfl 2000; Kostera 2022; Pullen 2018; Mandalaki
allows embodied text to unfold through different temporalities (Helin 2020; Helin et al., 2023). The text becomes attentive to our embodied experience and the ways we are touched (Huopalainen 2022; Pérezts and Mandalaki 2020) where vulnerability is the basis for ethico-political transformations (Meriläinen et al., 2020; Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2023; Katila 2019).

The dissertation became an exploratory ground to experiment with poetry (Kostera 1997; van Amsterdam and van Eck 2019), collaborative writing (e.g. Valtonen and Pullen, 2021; Jääskeläinen and Helin 2021) and collage (Meldgaard-Kjaer and van Amsterdam 2020) as a provocation to us, as writers, and you as our reader, and (possible) fellow collaborator, to reflect and question the (im)possibilities for expressing our ideas and our research (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2023, 3). Hence, the practice of writing differently exceeds the final product of this printed text spilling, in perhaps clumsy ways to do academia differently—writing, reviewing, gathering data, learning, meeting, knowing... (Kostera 2022; Brocori 2022; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2023; Jääskeläinen and Helin 2021; van Eck et al., 2023).
4. Summary and discussion

In this section, I first summarize the four essays and present their key findings, their central theoretical approaches, and their contributions to existing literature (Table 1). Then I discuss how they allow us to examine ‘How can a relational approach to knowing foster possibilities for organizing through empathy and care?’ in the context of management and organization studies.

**Essay 1:** Interspace for empathy: engaging with work-related uncertainty through artistic intervention in management education. Co-authored article (with Ari Kuismin, Johanna Moisander, and Leni Grünbaum) published in *Culture and Organization*, special issue on ‘Teaching what is not there’.

This article explores the potential of engaging the arts in fostering empathy and navigating work-related uncertainty in the context of doctoral education. Drawing from feminist epistemologies, we introduce empathy as a social epistemic practice, rather than cognitive-emotional skill. By analyzing the ethnographic materials of a nine-month artistic intervention called ‘Becoming in Academia’, we offer insights into how an interspace was created in the context of a Nordic business school. The interspace enabled to momentarily suspend the dominant logico-rational norms of knowing. We empirically illustrate how an empathic engagement emerged through three activities: aligning oneself to the other, narrating a collective validation, and acknowledging the agency of the other. By communicating through metaphors and storytelling participants become attuned in an other-oriented way, without the pressure of achieving a predefined outcome. Thus, they were enabled to voice and relate to embodied experiences of uncertainty that perhaps would not have been disclosed otherwise in the workplace. The paper contributes to the arts-based management education literature by highlighting the possibility of enacting empathy as a form of knowing, and how space can be opened among peers for unpacking work-related uncertainty. We direct attention to the potential of arts-based methods for engaging with affective experiences of performing in academia by making them strange or collectively graspable through playful and open-ended approaches.
**Essay 2:** In lockdown with my inner saboteur: A collaborative collage on self-compassion. Co-authored article (with Aleksi Soini and Leni Grünbaum) published in *Gender, Work and Organization*, special issue on ‘Caring about the unequal effects of the pandemic: What feminist theory, art, and activism can teach us’.

This article is a performative text that explores collaborative writing as a collage. The dialogic process of crafting it together through poetic exchanges enabled an embodied reflection during the first year of pandemic lockdowns while pursuing a doctoral degree. Writing the text in the form of a collage serves as a provocation to resist linear representations of our experience, it shows the messy and vulnerable process of articulating ourselves. We depart from our experience of participating and organizing the intervention ‘Becoming in Academia’ with fellow doctoral researchers and the ways we were moved by such exchanges in the context of sudden social isolation. The paper shows how vulnerable relationality among early career scholars allowed to unfold ordinary affects of shame and self-compassion by engaging with difficult experiences. Collective writing can, for example, voice issues regarding unproductivity and self-judgment. We join scholars who invite us to nurture academic community and creativity by engaging with vulnerability. We bring attention to collaborative collage, not only as a way of writing differently but as an empathic practice in itself for co-reflexive explorations of tensions and struggles of working in a neoliberal business school.

**Essay 3:** Tinkering in the business school as artistic intervention. Solo authored article, currently under review in a journal.

This article examines the concept of ‘tinkering’, as the performative act of intervening in a fluid and adaptative way, to reimagine the possibilities for knowing ‘differently’ in the business school through bottom-up artistic interventions. Drawing from the literature on artistic interventions that account for the affective potential to disrupt normative ways of organizing, I mobilize the concept of tinkering to question who and how can initiate such interventions. I craft three narratives based on a self-initiated artistic intervention called ‘Open to Wonder’, to illustrate how the act of tinkering enabled to hold things (e.g., a rock) and ideas about academic work (e.g., writing, ethics) differently. By attuning attention to the senses, the paper shows how curiosity and creativity honed space to engage with others in an open, emerging, and relational way. The paper shows how tinkering as artistic intervention has the potential to unsettle masculine notions of knowledge production in the context of business school by engaging with the senses and vulnerable aspects of our experience. The paper extends our understanding of artistic bottom-up interventions in the business school that account for embodied and affective dimensions of knowledge production. Tinkering offers an invitation to reconfigure the possibilities for knowing with others in emergent ways.
Essay 4: Entangled with a communal sauna: Caring as material-discursive response to vibrant matter. Co-authored article (with Alice Wickström, Laura Kangas-Müller, and Aleksi Soini) currently under review.

This article centres on the organizing potential of care for orienting agencies and relations in ways that nurture interdependencies. We take a post-human perspective on practice theory to direct attention to how caring orientations emerged through dialogical engagements between humans and non-humans. Instead of departing from a human-centred approach focused on care-receiver needs or spaces designed for care, we investigate how care unfolds outside such spaces and how it may organize worlds, relations, and imaginaries. Our ethnographic engagement with a public communally upheld sauna in Helsinki, through the span of the four Nordic seasons, allows us to analyze the material-discursive calls (e.g., shifts in the weather, scarcity of wood supplies, a decrease of natural light) that gave rise to responses. We show how prioritizing certain interest and needs over others give birth to different caring orientations, even if all are concerned with sustaining the site premised on cohabitation, recognition, and respect. Our research aims to provide insight into how other-oriented organizing unfolds when cultivating attentiveness to care across differences and the many troubles that emerge. We show how the site is sustained care and organizes relations premised on continuous inventions in dialogue between bodies, environment, affects, and discourses..., rather than scripted engagements by regulations. Our ethnographic research points towards cultivating a sensitivity of world-making not solely premised on human recognition of interests and needs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>How can artistic intervention facilitate empathic engagement with work-related uncertainty in postgraduate management education?</td>
<td>How can collaborative writing foster vulnerable relational ways for doctoral researchers to process struggles and pressures in the context of social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic?</td>
<td>How does tinkering as a form of artistic intervention foster possibilities for knowing ‘differently’ in the business school?</td>
<td>How do caring relations that unfold outside confined spaces for care organize worlds and imaginaries in ways that nurture interdependencies?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Empathy is a relational epistemic practice that relies on an interdependent and interpersonal process of knowing together with others</td>
<td>Collaborative collage writing is a way to engage with the embodied experience of shame and self-compassion.</td>
<td>Tinkering is a creative act of world-making consisting of socio-spatial emergent practices aimed to transform established parameters and boundaries of knowing</td>
<td>Caring as dialogical organizing premised on ongoing ‘call-and-response’ for co-habitation, recognition, and respect</td>
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<td>Contributions</td>
<td>Broadens understanding of artistic intervention as activities that can facilitate empathic knowing by (1) creating interspaces that disrupt the dominant logico-rational ways of knowing, through an open-ended process, and (2) recognizing personal and collective agency amid pressures and uncertainties.</td>
<td>Draws attention to dialogic writing as an empathic practice that (1) opened a discursive space in which doctoral students could articulate difficult experiences and tensions intensified by social isolation, and (2) conceptualizes the method of collaborative collage, as a way of engaging in reflexivity, identity work, that can disrupt self-judgment and shame. The process may enable to nurturing academic community.</td>
<td>The concept of tinkering serves two purposes: (1) it destabilizes the notion of who is considered a legitimate ‘artist’ within artistic interventions, and (2) it exemplifies how disruptions can occur in everyday, situated ways, fostering creative encounters that embrace sensory and embodied knowledge to challenge traditional masculine notions of knowledge production.</td>
<td>Directs attention to (1) how caring emerged from a dialogical engagement of call-and-responses among humans and non-humans premised on continuous invention, and (2) this may materialize in ambivalent and asymmetrical ways depending on what interests are recognized and how they are addressed to cultivate life-sustaining webs.</td>
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Table 1. Comparative overview of the essays and their contribution.
Contributions

In this section, I discuss the contributions of the essays and their implications for feminist relational knowledge in management and organization studies. The essays of the dissertation offer insights about artistic provocations that can open an interspace for relational knowing in the context of the business school through artistic interventions and writing. The dissertation further unfolds by speculating on how to theorize caring communities within the context of more-than-human world-making. Collectively, the essays broaden our understanding of the potential of artistic interventions, collage writing, and attending to the vibrancy of matter to explore alternative approaches to knowledge production in the business school. In the following, I discuss how each essay offers insights for relational knowing.

The first essay contributes to the field of arts-based methods in management education by elucidating how empathy, as a particular form of relational knowing, can emerge through the activities of an artistic intervention. The essay shows how it enabled to address work-related uncertainty among doctoral students in the context of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Normative ways of knowing tend to approach the world through logic and rationality, assuming reality as stable and predictable, making them ill-suited to navigate the unstable and unknowable (Weick 2007). Cultivating sensitivity and curiosity towards ambiguity, not-knowing, and paradoxes (see Dey and Steyaert 2007; Gherardi 1999) may facilitate a deeper understanding of the complexity of contemporary society (Kostera and Wozniak 2020), in which uncertainty is inherent. The dissertation provides a means of engaging with work-related uncertainty, not to ‘fix it’ but to validate and acknowledge the affective and emotional dimensions. Approaching uncertainty through empathic knowing, not as management wellness techniques, allowed to release the pressure on the participants to perform in professional academic ways.

The artistic intervention created an interspace for open-ended knowing with multiple others, where the ‘doing’ was part of the ‘end’ of attuning to others and exploring different ways of listening attentively to each other. This empathic knowing provided doctoral students with a sense of agency amid the pressures they faced, and a collective acknowledgment of uncertainty. The pandemic exacerbated the blurred distinctions between work and personal life, highlighting how uncertainties can(not) be expressed and validated within the context of business school. The artistic intervention provided a space to amplify the voices of the doctoral students, distinct from those in management. It was not a well-being tool aimed at boosting productivity but rather a means to articulate embodied experiences of work-related uncertainty, disrupting individual isolation. The phrase ‘It’s good to know I’m not alone’ resonated among the participants, prompting them to open up and share experiences such as self-doubt, shame, fear, and guilt. Through this collective care and empathy, these experiences became acknowledged, contrasting with the alternatives of rejection, silencing, and increased isolation.
The second essay delves into the experience of the artistic intervention and explores collaborative writing aimed at nurturing an academic community rooted in caring relations (cf., Jääskeläinen and Helin 2021; van Amsterdam et al., 2023). The essay makes a methodological contribution to the movement of writing differently in management and organization studies through the practice of collaborative collage writing (Meldgaard-Kjær and van Amsterdam, 2020). We demonstrate that engaging in poetic exchanges through collaborative writing can disrupt self-judgment and enable us to confront our experiences of vulnerability (Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2023). Collage writing focuses on writing for and with each other, where creating a linear representation of an argument is not the primary goal. Through this practice, we were able to articulate affective experiences of shame around unproductivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. We extend the understanding of collage writing and theorize it as an empathic practice of knowing that can foster opportunities for embodied reflexivity, identity work, and self-compassion. Collective collage fosters relational knowledge by creating a space for exploration through writing, allowing for touching and being touched in vulnerable ways (Mandalaki, 2021).

The third essay offers a new perspective on artistic interventions in business school by embracing the concept of ‘tinkering’— the act of intervening in a fluid and adaptative way in everyday life (Mol 2010). The essay aims to challenge the conventional perception of the ‘artist’ as an outsider, encouraging a broader range of individuals to initiate and explore artistic expressions. By framing tinkering as an artistic intervention, the essay contributes to the feminist literature promoting subtle modes of resisting within the business school. It highlights how tinkering can orient us to attend to materiality and foster vulnerable embodied reflections regarding academic work. The essay suggests that tinkering, as a means of facilitating artistic interventions for vulnerable relational knowing (Meriläinen, Salmela and Valtonen 2022), constitutes an act of feminist resistance in the business school, intending to spark a sense of wonder with the world around us (Bennett 2010). The essay contributes to re-thinking knowing in the business school, moving beyond notions of success and efficiency. It highlights the relational practice that involves attuning to both humans and non-humans.

Knowing requires cultivating a sensitivity toward the relation with the other, and the fourth essay focuses on the interdependencies between humans and non-humans (Bell and Vachhani, 2020; Calás and Smircich 2023; Gherardi 2019; Huopalainen 2022). We empirically explore how a community is sustained by a caring orientation (Care Collective, 2020) in the face of ambiguous and open spatial boundaries, rules, and regulations. While this essay is not positioned within the empirical context of the business school, it offers a novel theorization of care from a relational perspective that aims to contribute to the studies of sustainable and ethical organizing. Taking a material-discursive perspective, we conceptualize care as organizing relations rather than emerging between individuals already tied together in a space designated for care (cf., Johansson and Wickström, 2022; Phillips and Willatt 2020).
Our analytical lenses allow us to trace the relations on how caring orientations emerge between humans and non-humans. We identify two competing caring orientations: one premised on cyclicity and attunement to the community, and one premised on linearity and attunement to those outside of the community. While both orientations were dependent on continuous invention and ongoing attunement to sustain the site physically, culturally, and communally, our research shows that attending to needs and interests materialized in asymmetrical and ambivalent ways. We draw inspiration from María Puig de la Bellacasa’s work (2017) as we engage in speculation about caring as dialogic organizing, emphasizing that it is not solely centered on human needs. This essay sheds a sensitivity on how knowledge in management and organization studies is often dominated by human-centric world-making, which dictates what interests and needs are recognized and addressed. This opens up questions about the temporality of the caring orientation and the human-centric perspective that might value long-term survival over impermanence.

In summary, this dissertation contributes to the feminist knowledge production in management and organization studies in three key ways. First, it theorizes artistic interventions as activities capable of disrupting the dominant logico-rational approach and facilitating empathic knowing to address work-related uncertainty. Second, it extends the method of collaborative collage, presenting it as an experimental writing practice that fosters empathic and embodied reflexivity. Third, it elaborates on how care can be approached as a form of organizing based on an ongoing ‘call-and-response’ sensitivity to the relation with the other, where needs and interests emerge rather than being predefined. Overall, this work proposes a speculative approach to researching and theorizing organizations, challenging the masculinist rational human-centric perspective that often dominates knowledge production in management and organization studies.

The dissertation holds significant implications for disrupting hegemonic knowledge production within the business school. Even subtle and ambiguous disruptions can defamiliarize normative knowledge production practices, enabling individuals to perceive, critique, and resist what was once considered numbed or immutable (Katila et al., 2020; Pérezts, 2022). Acts of resistance, grounded in the ordinary (Stewart, 2007), become the battleground and playground for reorienting academic practices by engaging with the embodied, affective, and material dimensions of knowledge production (Ashcraft, 2017, p. 51). Adventurous and imaginative work, inspired by activism, and a dedication to social change, becomes the means through which collective resistance is enacted within the business school (Rhodes and Pullen 2023).

The dissertation shows knowledge production practices grounded on relational knowing that diverge from seeking a final correct answer. These practices require space for holding not-knowing, ambivalence, difference, and multiplicity (Kostera and Strauß 2022; Calás and Smircich 2023; Katila et al., 2023). Responding differently involves attention to the emergent process, which is not linear and surprising, shaped by various agencies in an ongoing dialogue. Empathic knowing, for instance, can enable novel ways of relating to personal and
collective experiences amid uncertainty. Embodied reflections allow the emergence of aspects that might remain unarticulated otherwise (Helin 2019), impacting self-knowledge, well-being, and creativity. Moreover, relational knowing directs attention to how we experiment with ‘everyday happenings,’ as we are all ‘becoming part of new events’ that are often beyond our control (Calás and Smircich 2023, 9). This is particularly evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused major disruptions globally from 2020 to 2021. The dissertation illuminates the (im)possibilities, imaginaries, and practices for world-making rooted in 'cohabitation, sharing, recognition, and respect' (Fotaki, 2023).

I wish to underscore the inherent partiality of knowledge (Bell et al., 2020; Katila et al., 2023) in a general sense, as well as the limitations of this dissertation. It is crucial to acknowledge that empathy, on its own, is not intrinsically ‘good’ and has been problematized for perpetuating perspectives of those already privileged, thereby reinforcing inequalities rather than dismantling them (Ahmed, 2004; Pedwell, 2012). Nevertheless, there is potential for empathy to serve as a catalyst for feminist resistance, transitioning from individualized experiences toward collective solidarity (Vachhani and Pullen 2019, 23). Exploring the potential of empathy as an intersubjective and interpersonal epistemic process in future research could deepen our understanding of how experiences may catalyze resistance. This exploration is especially pertinent when considering the mobilization of experimental and destabilizing artistic interventions.

The dissertation acknowledges expressions that are not merely ‘unproductive but differently productive’ (Ulmer 2017, 201), stemming from wonder (Bennett 2010; Pors 2022). It seeks to actualize the stories we tell ourselves, recognizing they matter and can affectively orient us toward potential futures (Ahmed 2006). These narratives extend to shaping notions of what constitutes ‘legitimate’ knowledge production (Bell et al., 2020). How might we enact alternative stories? Not with the aim of conquering, but rather to support the well-being of individuals and nurturing caring communities (Care Collective 2020) in the business school and beyond. Drawing inspiration from Sara Ahmed and Audre Lorde, we are reminded of the iterative nature of feminist collective movement, ‘built from many moments of beginning again’ (Ahmed 2017, 6), where ‘there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like)’ (Lorde 1985, 220). So, we might as well tinker, collage, write a poem, and marvel at all we are becoming with.


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