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**Organizing in Times of Crisis:
The Case of Covid19**

= *Open access online course* =

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Course Design

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Course Description

The worldwide spread of the Covid19 virus poses a grand social challenge. Seriously threatening the health of the world's population and accompanied by huge social and economic disruption, it is one of the largest immediate crises for Western societies since World War II and a humanitarian disaster for humankind around the world. Drawing on classic and contemporary organization theory, this course aims to illuminate many pressing questions surrounding the pandemic, such as how supply chains can be organized to ensure adequate supplies of health material, the strengths and difficulties of open science approaches to the development of a vaccine or capabilities of different forms of organization and coordination to quickly and adequately respond in times of crisis.

The course comprises *12 classes*, each dealing with a particular aspect of the Covid19 crisis in relation to different theories of organization and organizing. It is a collaborative effort of organizational scholars from different Austrian and German universities that have expertise in researching grand challenges, different forms of organizing and crisis management. Given the current need for distance learning, the whole course can be completed *online* and *asynchronously*. Each class comprises a short recorded lecture and a set of core and background readings in addition to links to contemporary newspaper articles.

The course is made available open access, which means that all learning materials are openly available for everyone. Lecture slides and the syllabus are shared in editable formats, so that instructors from around the world can use the materials and adjust the course as needed. All course materials can be found here: https://timesofcrisis.org/

Learning Objectives

Students of this course should learn to:
- Analyze the current Covid19 crisis through the lens of organization theory

- Understand the role of different organizational forms such as bureaucracies, high-reliability organizations or inter-organizational networks in coordinating responses to crisis
- Understand alternative and open forms of organizing and their advantages and difficulties
- Understand the role of leadership in crisis situations and reflect on different types of sensemaking with regard to open communication and transparency on the one side and uncertainty and an unknown future on the other side
- Understand the challenges of organizations to communicate in times of crisis, and the role of social media for and in crisis communication.
- Reflect on how organizations can be designed to respond to unexpected events and be responsive and resilient
- Understand how crisis can be a trigger for entrepreneurship, innovation and change
- Understand the ways in which grand challenges relate to inequalities, including gender inequality
- Critically engage with both theoretical concepts and practical contemporary phenomena.
- Reflect on what organization theory and practising managers can contribute to addressing grand societal challenges

Suggested Assignments and Grading - Please Modify these Decentrally

Grading and examination as well as the tools used for handling the assignments may vary from instructor to instructor. Generally, the workload in terms of ECTS depends on how the course is implemented by the instructor (e.g., whether completion of all 12 classes including the following assignments is mandatory):
- *Before listening to lectures*: For each class, students read the relevant core reading(s) and contemporary news article(s) provided in the course outline and post a question that links the core readings to current developments (either in a forum or using email - follow instructor guidance).
- *After listening to lectures*:
  - Students complete the post-lecture assignment for each class either individually or in groups (follow instructor guidance).
  - A randomly assigned group of students sorts the posted questions in a given week and provides answers to three clusters of questions (either in a forum or an open document or a presentation/podcast - follow instructor guidance).
- *After completion of all classes*: Students write a short essay (1.500 words) on a topic of their own choosing or on a topic provided by the instructor following the advice given in the "How to write an Essay" mini lecture.

Classes

1. **Organizational Decision-Making in Crisis**
   Elke Schüßler, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Guiding questions: What does a pandemic have to do with organization theory? How do decision-making processes influence how organizations and societies deal with crisis? When does crisis (fail to) lead to organizational or societal change?

Core readings
Farley, J., Baker, D., Batker, D., Koliba, C., Matteson, R., Mills, R., & Pittman, J. (2007). Opening the policy window for ecological economics: Katrina as a focusing event. *Ecological Economics*, 63(2-3), 344-354. PDF

Kornberger, M., Leixnering, S., & Meyer, R. E. (2019). The logic of tact: How decisions happen in situations of crisis. *Organization Studies*, 40(2), 239-266. PDF

Contemporary news articles
Baker, P. (2020). 'We Can't Go Back to Normal': How Will Coronavirus Change the World? *The Guardian*, March 31.
and
Grey, S. & MacAskill, A. (2020). Special Report: Johnson Listened to his Scientists about Coronavirus - but They Were Slow to Sound the Alarm. *Mobile Reuters*, April 7.

Post-lecture assignment
Write a short (about 250 words each) memo about the following two questions:

1. Which models and logics of organizational decision-making from your readings and the lecture can you recognize in practice in the current Covid19 crisis? Find one example and outline the decision-making dynamic.
2. In this example, discuss the role of actors in using the Covid19 crisis to bring about organizational/industrial/societal change.

Background readings
Cohen, M. D., March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1972). A garbage can model of organizational choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1-25. PDF

Müller-Seitz, G., & Schüßler, E. (2013). From event management to managing events. *Managementforschung*, 23, 193-226. SSRN

Rerup, C. (2009). Attentional triangulation: Learning from unexpected rare crises. *Organization Science*, *20*(5), 876-893. PDF

Background video
Crismanagement is (by Prof. Markus Reihlen, Leuphana University Lüneburg)

2.   Organizing in and for the Unexpected
Daniel Geiger, University of Hamburg

Guiding question: How can organizations be designed to routinely deal with unexpected events?

Core readings
Bechky, B. A., & Okhuysen, G. A. (2011). Expecting the unexpected? How SWAT officers and film crews handle surprises. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54, 239-361. PDF

Bigley, G. A., & Roberts, K. H. 2001. The incident command system: High-reliability organizing for complex and volatile task environments. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6): 1281-1299. PDF

Contemporary news article
Kliff, S. (2020). U.S. Hospitals Prepare for Coronavirus, With the Worst Still to Come. *The New York Times*, March 12, 2020

Post-lecture assignment
Write a short (about 250 words each) memo about the following two questions:
1. What were key reasons why the preparedness plans of the US hospitals did not work for the case of COVID-19?
2. Please discuss how high-reliability organizations such as hospitals can practice flexibility whilst maintaining the core operations. What role do organizational rules play in this regard?

Background readings
Danner-Schröder, A., & Geiger, D. 2016. Unravelling the motor of patterning work: Toward an understanding of the micro-level dynamics of standardization and flexibility. *Organization Science*, 27(3), 633-658. PDF

3.   Crisis Management and Bureaucracy
Leonhard Dobusch, University of Innsbruck

Guiding questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of bureaucratic organization and decision-making in the face of crisis? Why did certain policy makers act so fast/slowly?

Core readings
Meyer, M., & Simsa, R. (2018). Organizing the unexpected: How civil society organizations dealt with the refugee crisis. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(6), 1159-1175. PDF

Stark, A. (2014). Bureaucratic values and resilience: An exploration of crisis management adaptation. *Public Administration*, 92(3), 692-706. PDF

Contemporary news articles
Hadas, E. (2020). Good Bureaucracy is Ultimate Virus Slayer, <u>Reuters</u>, March 04, 2020
and
Monbiot, G. (2020). Prescription for Disaster, <u>The Guardian</u>, March 18, 2020

Post-lecture assignment
Find at least two examples for bureaucratic procedures in your home country during the response to Covid-19 and explain in not more than 400 words (one page) whether these have helped or hindered the country's resilience vis-à-vis the pandemic.

Background readings
Howard-Grenville, J., Nelson, A. J., Earle, A. G., Haack, J. A., & Young, D. M. (2017). "If chemists don't do it, who is going to?" Peer-driven occupational change and the emergence of green chemistry. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 62(3), 524-560. PDF

Du Gay, P. (2005). The values of bureaucracy: An introduction. In: Du Gay (Ed.) *The Values of Bureaucracy*, Oxford University Press, 1-13. PDF

4.   Dynamics of Network Governance in the Face of Emergency
Jörg Sydow, Freie Universität Berlin

Guiding questions: How are loosely coupled networks of actors coordinated in the light of crisis? Can inter-organizational networks be designed ex ante for high reliability?

Core readings

Berthod, O., Grothe-Hammer, M., Müller-Seitz, G., Raab, J., & Sydow, J. (2017). From high-reliability organizations to high-reliability networks: the dynamics of network governance in the face of emergency. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 27(2), 352-371. PDF

Provan, K. G., & Kenis, P. (2008). Modes of network governance: Structure, management, and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(2), 229-252. PDF

Contemporary news article

Nacoti, M. et al. (2020). NEJM Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery, 21 March.

Post-lecture assignment

Write a short (about 250 words each) memo about the following two questions:
1. In which ways were the interorganizational networks of the FED affected by the Covid19 crisis?
2. What can be learned from the FED-governed network for organizing in times of Covid19 crisis?

Background readings

Berthod, O., Grothe-Hammer, M., Hagen, R., & Sydow, J. (2020). Managing resource transposition in the face of extreme events: Fieldwork at two public networks in Germany and the US. *Public Administration*, in print. PDF

Berthod, O., Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2014). Out of nowhere? Interorganizational assemblage as the answer to a food-borne disease outbreak. *Schmalenbach Business Review*, 66(4), 385-414. PDF

Raab, J., Kenis, P. N., Kraaij–Dirkzwager, M., & Timen, A. (2020). Ex ante knowledge for infectious disease outbreaks. In: Glückler, J., Herrigel, G., & Handke, M. (Eds). *Knowledge for Governance*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, in print. PDF

5.   Leading, Sensemaking and the Future

Jochen Koch, European University Viadrina

Guiding question: How do leaders make sense of crisis? How do they attempt to "give sense" to their followers in the light of uncertainty and how do they cope with the challenges of open and transparent communication in crisis situations?

Core readings

Wenzel, M., Krämer, H., Koch, J., Reckwitz, A. (2020). Future and Organization Studies: On the rediscovery of a problematic temporal category in organizations. In: *Organization Studies*, in print. PDF via journal

Cornelissen, J. P., Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. (2014). The contraction of meaning: The combined effect of communication, emotions, and materiality on sensemaking in the Stockwell shooting. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(5), 699-736. PDF

Contemporary news articles
Davidson, J. (2020). The Leader of the Free World Gives a Speech, and She Nails It. NY Mag, March 18.
and
Momtaz, R. (2020). Emmanuel Macron on Coronavirus: 'We're at War'. Politico, March 16.

Post-lecture assignment
Compare the two recommendations formulated by the management consultants Egon Zehnder and McKinsey for leaders to deal with the Corona crisis. What are the similarities and differences in the recommendations and to what extent do they address the tension between necessary uncertainty absorption and open communication of uncertainty? (about 500 words)

Background readings
Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 305–317. PDF

Weick, K. E. (1996). Drop your tools: An allegory for organizational studies. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 301-313. PDF

Background videos (English subtitles will be provided asap)
The influence-process-model of leadership ("Das Einflussprozessmodell")

The identity theory of leadership ("Die Identitätstheorie der Führung")

6.   **Organizational Crisis Communication and Social Media**
      Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg

Guiding question: What opportunities and challenges emerge from the use of social media for organizational crisis communication efforts?

Core readings
Adkins, Gabriel (2010). Organizational networks in disaster response: An examination of the US Government network's efforts in Hurricane Katrina. In: Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S.J. (Eds). *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, Wiley, 93-114. PDF

Etter, M., Ravasi, D., & Colleoni, E. (2019). Social media and the formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Review*, *44*(1), 28-52. PDF

Contemporary news article
Thompson, B. (2020). Zero Trust Information. Strachery Blog, March 11.

Post-lecture assignment
Pick a social media channel of a public organization on the local, regional, national or international level and critically evaluate its communication approach relating to the Covid19 pandemic in the light of the insights you gained from the lecture and the provided literature. Can you identify a certain strategy, and what could explain this strategy? (max 400 words)

Background readings
Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S.J. (Eds). *The Handbook of Crisis Communication,* Wiley. PDF

Etter, M., Ravasi, D., & Colleoni, E. (2019). Social media and the formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Review*, *44*(1), 28-52. [PDF](#)

Knight, E., & Tsoukas, H. 2019. When fiction trumps truth: What 'post-truth' and 'alternative facts' mean for management studies. *Organization Studies*, 40(2), 183-197. [PDF](#)

Olsson, E. K. (2014). Crisis communication in public organisations: Dimensions of crisis communication revisited. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *22*(2), 113-125. [PDF](#)

Rasmussen, Joel & Ihlen, Øyvind (2017). Risk, crisis, and social media. A systematic review of seven years' research. *Nordicom Review*, 38(2), 1-17. [PDF](#)

7.   New and Alternative Organizations to Counter Crisis
Thomas Gegenhuber, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg/Johannes Kepler University Linz

Guiding questions: Guiding questions: What are new and alternative forms of organizing (e.g. platforms)? What is their role in responding to the crisis?

Core readings
Mair, J., & Rathert, N. 2019. Alternative organizing with social purpose: revisiting institutional analysis of market-based activity. *Socio-Economic Review*, 1-20, in press. [PDF](#)

Bauer R.M., & Gegenhuber T. (2015). Crowdsourcing: Global search and the twisted roles of consumers and producers. *Organization*, 22 (5), 661-681 (only read the pages 661-669 to gain an understanding of crowdsourcing processes). [PDF](#)

Contemporary news article
Cunningham, K. (2020). 'People Need to be Supportive': Communities Gather Online in the Coronavirus Crisis, [The Guardian](#), March 16.

Post-lecture assignment
Apply the insights from this session to describe a new or alternative form of organizing formed to address a crisis situation (Covid19 or other) in a short memo (350-500 words, excluding references). Explain what problem your example solves and how this form of organizing operates. Describe how various audiences (e.g. politicians, citizens, media) reacted to the initiative. Close the memo with a brief personal assessment: What did you find particularly surprising or interesting? Imagine you were part of this initiative - what could you do to improve it?

You can reference social media and media articles as sources for your description of your chosen initiative. You can write in a personal form ("I"). For inspiration, check out this [list](#).

8.   Open Science, Data and Commons
Leonhard Dobusch, University of Innsbruck

Guiding questions: How important is open science for fighting Covid19? How are scientific practices and structures affected by the Covid19 pandemic? What is the role of big pharma in responding to the crisis?

Core readings
Denis, J., & Goëta, S. (2017). Rawification and the careful generation of open government data. *Social Studies of Science*, 47(5), 604-629. PDF

Perkmann, M., & Schildt, H. (2015). Open data partnerships between firms and universities: The role of boundary organizations. *Research Policy*, 44(5), 1133-1143. PDF via Journal

Contemporary news article
Kupferschmidt, K. (2020). 'A Completely new Culture of Doing Research.' Coronavirus Outbreak Changes how Scientists Communicate, *Sciencemag*, February 26.

Post-lecture assignment
Search for an open science project on COVID19 and assess what is good/problematic about it based on what you have learned about open science (max. 400 words).

Background readings
Dobusch, L., & Heimstädt, M. 2019. Predatory publishing in management research: A call for open peer review. *Management Learning*, 50(5), 607-619. PDF

Dietz, T., Ostrom, E., & Stern, P. C. 2008. The struggle to govern the commons. *Sciencemag*, 302(December): 611–622. Access via Google Scholar

9.   Entrepreneurship and Innovation for the Common Good
Ali Aslan Gümüsay, University of Hamburg/Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society

Guiding questions: How do entrepreneurial ventures and established companies engage with societal challenges such as the Covid crisis? What is the role of technology?

Core reading
George, G., Merrill, R. K., & Schillebeeckx, S. J. D. (2020): Digital sustainability and entrepreneurship: How digital innovations are helping tackle climate change and sustainable development. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, in print. PDF

Contemporary news article
Lanier, J., & Weyl, E. G. (2020): How Civic Technology Can Help Stop a Pandemic. *Foreign Affairs*, March 20.

Post-lecture assignment
Identify an entrepreneurial venture, write a brief summary of the organization and explain how it engages with the Covid crisis. Also review the success/failure of this venture (300-400 words).

Background readings
Gümüsay, A.A. (2018): Hybrid Organizing in the Face of Grand Challenges. *BOS Blog*, July 3.

Günzel-Jensen, F., Siebold, N., Kroeger, A., Korsgaard, S. (2020): Do the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals matter for social entrepreneurial ventures? A bottom-up perspective. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights,* 13:e00162. PDF via Journal

Tracey, P. (2020): The Corporate Pivot: Radical change in times of crisis. *Cambridge Social Innovation Blog*, March 25.

Watson, I., Jeong, S., Hollingsworth, J., & Booth, T. (2020): How this South Korean company created coronavirus test kits in three weeks. *CNN*, March 12.

10.   Organizing for Resilience in the Global Economy
Elke Schüßler, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Guiding question: Why do the largest economies of the world face difficulties in producing swabs, face masks and ventilators in adequate supply? How can global supply chains be made more resilient?

Core readings
Gereffi, G. (2014). Global value chains in a post-Washington Consensus world. *Review of International Political Economy*, 21(1), 9-37. PDF

Williams, A., Whiteman, G., & Kennedy, S. (2019). Cross-scale systemic resilience: Implications for organization studies. *Business & Society*, 1-9, in press**.** PDF

Contemporary news article
Majoo, F. (2020). How the World's Richest Country Ran Out of a 75-Cent Face Mask. *The New York Times*, March 25.

Post-lecture assignment
Discuss in small groups of 2-3 how the four practices of network management (cf. e.g. Helfen et al., 2018 in background readings and also lecture 4) could be used to make global supply chains for critical goods more resilient. After your group discussion, write up an individual report (400-500 words) about one example that you discussed by specifying the good, the current supply chain structure for this good, the network management practice that seems to be currently applied and how it could be made more resilient. Each group member should report on a different example (either a different good or a different management practice or both).

Background readings
Helfen, M., Schüßler, E., & Sydow, J. (2018). How can employment relations in global value networks be managed towards social responsibility? *Human Relations*, 71(12), 1640-1665. SSRN

Levy, D. L. (2008). Political contestation in global production networks. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 943-963. PDF

Schuessler, E., Frenkel, S. J., & Wright, C. F. (2019). Governance of labor standards in Australian and German garment supply chains: The impact of Rana Plaza. *ILR Review*, *72*(3), 552-579. PDF via journal

Background sources
Covid19 corporate response tracker - How large US companies are treating stakeholders
European trade unions' response to the crisis, ETUC

11.   Inequality, Organizations and Covid-19
     Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich, Leuphana University Lüneburg

Guiding questions: Who is most at risk from this crisis? How does the pandemic challenge modern governance & democracy?

Core readings
Bapuji, H., & Mishra, S. (2015). Inequality and organizations. In: Mir, R., Willmott, H., & Greenwood, M. (Eds.), Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies. Routledge, 439-448. [PDF]

Contemporary news article
Rogers, B. (2020). Work after quarantine. *Boston Review*, April 7

Post-lecture assignment
Explain how the pandemic affects one type of demographic or economic inequality in organisations and enrich your argumentation along practical examples (max. 400 words).

Background readings
Felstead, A., Jewson, N., Phizacklea, A., & Walters, S. (2002). The option to work at home: Another privilege for the favoured few? New Technology, Work and Employment, 17(3), 204-223, [PDF]

Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead, Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality (NBER Working Paper No. 26947). National Bureau of Economic Research. [PDF]

Prasad, A. (2018). When is economic inequality justified?. Business Horizons, 61(6), 855-862. [PDF]

12. How Grand Challenges Link Together
Ali Aslan Gümüsay, University of Hamburg and Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society

Guiding question: How does this crisis relate to other grand challenges, e.g. climate change?

Core reading
Ferraro, F., Etzion, D., & Gehman, J. (2015). Tackling grand challenges pragmatically: Robust action revisited. *Organization Studies*, 36(3), pp. 363-390. [SSRN]

Contemporary news article
Watts, J. & Kommenda, N. (2020). Coronavirus pandemic leading to huge drop in air pollution. *The Guardian*, March 23.

Post-lecture assignment
Present a local, regional or national example as to how Covid-19 has impacted another grand challenge. How do organizations respond to this entanglement? (400-600 words)

Background readings
George, G., Howard-Grenville, J., Joshi, A., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). Understanding and tackling societal grand challenges through management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(6), 1880-1895. [PDF]

Sachs, J. D., Schmidt-Traub G., Mazzucato, M., Messner, D., Nakicenovic, N., Rockström, J. (2019): Six transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Nature Sustainability*, in print. [PDF](#)