

Stream title: Learning beyond the Academy: Power relations, intersecting inequalities, and the politics of learning

Session Type: presentation stream: in-person with some hybrid presentations if necessary

Stream convenors:

- Dr Uzair Shah (he, him, his), Senior Lecturer, Lancaster University Management School, UK
- Dr Dermot O'Reilly (he, him, his), Senior Lecturer, Lancaster University Management School, UK
- Professor Kiran Trehan (she, her, hers), Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Enterprise, Partnerships and Engagement, University of York, UK

The proposed organizers hail from Pakistan, Ireland and the UK, although all have been working in the UK for most of their academic careers and are a mix of mid-level and a senior academic, with a mix of genders and ethnic backgrounds.

Introduction

Both intentional and implicit learning relationships and processes are found within not only formal educational contexts but also work and non-work/social settings. These learning relationships and processes are variably shaped by societal power and socio-cultural dynamics that are mediated through different organisational mechanisms and technologies.

Learning partnerships and processes are often considered to be inclusive, collaborative and empowering, but the lived experience of some forms of these, for example, learning groups or learning communities “can be overly influenced by the idea that learning is unquestionably

good” (Reynolds and Vince 2024: 287). Similarly, inter-organizational partnerships are viewed to offer opportunities for knowledge exchange, capability-building and product/process innovation, but these partnerships have been reported to reproduce relations of power, technological knowledge and skills and institutional influence (Aslam et al., 2023). In another context, digital platforms/technologies, often positioned as democratizing opportunities of learning and participation, have been reported to disadvantage individuals facing social and digital inequalities within diverse settings such as entrepreneurship (Dy et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2025) as well as higher education institutions (Dar et al., 2021; Fernando and Kenny, 2021; Hodgson and Shah, 2017; Timsal et al., 2024).

Narratives of inclusive and collaborative learning tend to gloss over the power dynamics and intersecting inequalities that not only condition knowledge (re-)construction and exchange work but also shape who gets to participate and benefit from learning relationships and processes (Reynolds and Trehan, 2003; Reynolds and Vince, 2024). In this stream, we assume that learning is not a politically neutral activity and view learning partnerships and relationships to be embedded within social systems that perpetuate inequalities and privilege particular social actors, forms of knowledge and expertise, and modes of participation (Kumar et al., 2024; Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2021). We understand learning relationships and processes as important sites through which broader conditions of societal power and inequalities can be organized, contested and resisted (Blackler, 2011; Bristow et al., 2022; Fotaki and Prasad, 2015; Reynolds and Trehan, 2003; Reynolds and Vince, 2024).

By critically examining how power relations and inequalities shape learning dynamics, we aim to encourage richer understanding of the possibilities and limitations of learning as means for empowerment, participation, and advancement in our increasingly unequal and digitally mediated societies. This stream seeks to critically examine the relationship of learning, power and inequalities across various organizational, institutional, technological, and societal contexts. We aim to encourage conversations regarding how inequalities and power relations pertaining to social identities (e.g. class, gender, race, caste, and others), shape participation within learning environments and processes both within and beyond the academy.

This stream aims to attract a wide range of perspectives on politics of learning across diverse settings, contexts and temporalities (McGivern et al., 2018; Plotnikof and Mumby, 2024). We particularly encourage work that helps advance our understanding of critical and reflexive approaches to researching learning, power and inequalities in the context of marginalized

communities. We welcome theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practice-oriented contributions addressing issues including, but not limited to:

- Learning, power relationships and (hidden) inequalities within inter-organizational alliances
- Decolonial, postcolonial and critical approaches to inter-organizational learning
- Examining experiences of collaboration, power and inequalities within industry–consultancy–government partnerships
- Understanding issues of social and digital inequalities, widening participation within higher education/business schools
- Critical management education and pedagogy studies beyond full-time students, that is education with participants that are not full-time students
- Intersectionality, precarity and entrepreneurial learning within resource-constrained settings
- Community-based, informal, and grassroots learning practices in attempts to navigate interlocking inequalities and power relationships
- The role of digital technology/platforms in facilitating (or not facilitating) inclusive participation and learning
- Inclusive forms of learning beyond the academy
- Analytical accounts of, or reflections upon, learning processes intended to be emancipatory, such as critical action research or dialogical reflexive action research, action learning, or Change Laboratories

We aim to facilitate development of an interdisciplinary group of scholars interested in issues of learning, power and inequalities. The stream welcomes contributions drawing upon diverse critical traditions. These could include critical pedagogy, intersectionality, critical management and entrepreneurship studies, actor-network theory, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and digital inequality scholarship.

We welcome submissions that situate the analysis of power, inequalities and learning in diverse empirical settings. This may include higher/further education beyond full-time students,

professional networks, work-organizations, entrepreneurship, transnational partnerships, public services, international development, digital platforms, or community organizations. We particularly welcome PhD and ECR researchers whose work may be at an early stage of development.

Types of Contributions

We invite a broad range of submissions, including:

- Empirical research papers
- Conceptual and theoretical contributions
- Ethnographic and participatory studies
- Critical case analyses
- Methodological reflections
- Reflective accounts of practice-based intervention by different actors e.g. community organizations, activists, policymakers, and/or practitioners

Important dates:

Extended Abstract submissions of 1000 words (excluding references) to be submitted by 1 Dec 2026. Please email the submissions to:

s.shah2@lancaster.ac.uk & d.oreilly@lancaster.ac.uk

Acceptance decisions to be communicated by 31 January 2027.

Final paper to be submitted at least 6 weeks before the conference date. Details about the final paper to be shared later. We anticipate that the presenters will act as discussants for another stream submission.

5. Supporting detail on the Stream:

At the moment, we envisage that a standard venue with internet connectivity for any hybrid presentations should be sufficient for our purposes.

6. References:

- Aslam MS, O'Reilly D and Shah U (2023) Taking the rough with the smooth: A qualitative inquiry into social and cultural practices of knowledge-sharing work in international consultancy alliances. *International Business Review* 32(4). Elsevier: 102081.
- Blackler F (2011) Power, politics, and intervention theory: Lessons from organization studies. *Theory & Psychology* 21(5): 724–734.
- Bristow A, Tomkins L and Hartley J (2022) A dialectical approach to the politics of learning in a major city police organization. *Management Learning* 53(2): 223–248.
- Dar S, Liu H, Martinez Dy A, et al. (2021) The business school is racist: Act up! *Organization* 28(4): 695–706.
- Dy AM, Marlow S and Martin L (2017) A Web of opportunity or the same old story? Women digital entrepreneurs and intersectionality theory. *Human Relations* 70(3): 286–311.
- Fernando D and Kenny EJ (2021) Negotiating a Sense of Fit in Elite Higher Education: Exploring the Identity Work of “Widening Participation” Students. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 20(2): 133–155.
- Fotaki M and Prasad A (2015) Questioning Neoliberal Capitalism and Economic Inequality in Business Schools. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 14(4): 556–575.
- Hodgson V and Shah U (2017) A phenomenographic study of lecturers’ conceptions of using learning technology in a Pakistani context. *Learning, Media and Technology* 42(2): 198–213.
- Kumar A, Soundararajan V, Bapuji H, et al. (2024) Unequal Worlds: Management Education and Inequalities. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 23(3): 379–386.
- McGivern G, Dopson S, Ferlie E, et al. (2018) The Silent Politics of Temporal Work: A Case Study of a Management Consultancy Project to Redesign Public Health Care. *Organization Studies* 39(8): 1007–1030.
- Plotnikof M and Mumby DK (2024) Temporal multimodality and performativity: Exploring politics of time in the discursive, communicative constitution of organization. *Organization* 31(4): 663–682.
- Reynolds M and Trehan K (2003) Learning from Difference? *Management Learning* 34(2): 163–180.
- Reynolds M and Vince R (2024) Being alone together: A critical exploration of learning in “learning group” and “learning community”. In: *Making Sense of the Learning Turn: Why and in What Sense Toys, Organizations, Economies, and Cities Are Learning*. Oxford University Press, pp. 277–291. Available at: <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/being-alone-together-a-critical-exploration-of-learning-in-learn/> (accessed 26 May 2026).

Shah U, Benachour P and Hayes N (2025) Digital inequalities and subsistence entrepreneurship: An intersectional study of women in sub-Saharan Africa. In: *41st European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium-Athens 2025: Creativity that goes a long way*, 2025. Available at: <https://research.lancaster-university.uk/en/publications/digital-inequalities-and-subsistence-entrepreneurship-an-intersec/> (accessed 2 June 2026).

Timsal A, Shah U and Hodgson V (2024) Socio-Digital Disadvantage Within Management Education: A Study of MBA Students' Experiences of Digital Technologies. *Journal of Management Education* 48(1): 52–79.

Zulfiqar G and Prasad A (2021) Challenging Social Inequality in the Global South: Class, Privilege, and Consciousness-Raising Through Critical Management Education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 20(2): 156–181.