

Call for Abstracts

Reimagining Hope Beyond the Neoliberal Academy

**Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July
2027, Lancaster University**

Session type: Hybrid Paper Presentations and Exploratory Formats

Convenors: Craig Jones and Beth Suttill, Lancaster University

The past 10-15 years has seen a continuing decrease in the reported levels of trust in HE institutions across a range of national contexts (Hall, 2024; Law and Le, 2023). This pattern coincides and intersects with increasing levels of populism, isolationist dogma, and anti-globalisation rhetoric. Alongside these developments, the international context within which HE (and the world more generally) operates has become less certain as previously taken-for-granted ways of operating and organising have been upended by growing mis-/disinformation campaigns, “post-truth” discourses, and geopolitical tensions or outright conflict.

These shifts in international geopolitical context(s) has led some to declare the ‘end of the world order’. Consequently, as the settings within which HE operates is shifting and in a state of flux, the current moment may be regarded as an interregnum: a period of discontinuity or rupture between one system ceasing and another emerging (Giroux, 2019). Whilst this can be deeply uncomfortable due to the uncertainty that this entails, the interregnum can – indeed, should – be engaged with productively: as a site or situation by and through which to (re)imagine what is possible and to think creatively and critically beyond the preconceived constraints of the diminishing framework(s) that have structured previous engagements.

Whilst this period of uncertainty can generate discomfort and unease, it is also a fertile ground upon which to centre critical questions of hope both within and beyond the neoliberal academy (Freire, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Pleschová et al., 2025). Whilst vacuous managerial jargon mobilises terminology such as “knowledge exchange” and “impact” in distinct and narrowly defined ways, the erosion of trust within HE institutions and the anxieties induced by the current international context demand that we ask some – perhaps difficult – questions of our institutions, the premises upon which they operate, and the ways we engage with our work and the communities around us. Such questions could be, but are not limited to:

- How do we engage with our students to create more hopeful pedagogic engagements and how may these be enacted beyond the lecture theatre/University?
- What is the role of pedagogy in an uncertain world?
- Is there a role for education in promoting positive visions of the future?
- Do we need to teach with ‘hope’ in mind?
- Recognising that the public is a body multiple, which public is HE a ‘good’ for? How do we construe this ‘good’ and what constitutes meaningful engagement/commitment?

- Beyond notions of impact, how can we reimagine engaging with local communities meaningfully? What scales or localities should these include and what processes can be utilised to make these community engagements more hopeful?
- How do we move beyond the jargon of 'impact' to (co-)produce meaningful dissemination and action?
- How can we translate research into local collaboration and (inter)action to address 'wicked problems' within the vicinity of our respective institutions?
- Given the wider challenges facing HEIs, how do we create the resources, bandwidth, and time for this engagement beyond the academy?

As the geopolitical context(s) within which we work and conduct ourselves is in a state of uncertainty, this is – perhaps – an opportunity to critically reimagine the ways in which Management research and scholarship works effectively with different communities and publics, utilising this as a means of thinking critically about – and beyond – the neoliberal academy. Consequently, this session invites papers exploring ideas of how we may begin to reimagine hope within and beyond the neoliberal academy and reflections on any practice(s) that are working towards such ends. This can be within the context of teaching/scholarship, activist research, or theoretical approaches to this topic (or, indeed, any other form of practice that speaks to these themes).

Please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to b.suttill@lancaster.ac.uk and c.jones45@lancaster.ac.uk by December 1st 2026. Acceptance decisions will be communicated by 31st January 2027.

References

Freire, P. (1992), *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Giroux, H. (1992), *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling*, London: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (2019), 'Neoliberalism and the weaponising of language and education', *Race & Class*, 61(1), pp.26-45.

Hall, T. (2024), 'Tackling the loss of trust in the HE sector', *Civic University Network*, <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/tackling-the-loss-of-trust-in-the-he-sector/> [02.07.2026].

Law, S. F. and Le, A. T. (2023), 'A systematic review of empirical studies on trust between universities and society', *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 45(4), pp.393-408.

Pleschová, G., Sutherland, K. A., Felten, P., Forsyth, R., & Wright, M. C. (2025), 'Trust-building as inherent to academic development practice', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 30(1), pp.1–13.