

Call for abstracts

Reclaiming Care: Crafting spaces off/for care in (Un)caring Institutions

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

Session type: Hybrid

Convenors:

Divya Jyoti, Beth Suttill – Lancaster University;

Toma Pustelnikovaite, Lara Pecis – Cardiff University

Contemporary higher education institutions are facing increasing pressures, with recent reports suggesting that four in ten UK universities are facing serious financial challenges (Jeffreys & Shearing, 2025). Even more alarmingly, the Office for Students fears 24 higher education providers are at risk of insolvency and "market exit" in the next 12 months (Bryson & Jeffreys, 2026). These figures highlight the sector's economic fragility that jeopardizes the sustainability of academic labour and diminish the university's ability to fulfil its broader public mission (Pecis & Bauer, 2026).

Within this context, academic and professional service staff witness ambitious transformational projects that aim at fundamentally restructuring their operations and as such question the very role of the university as a public good (Vernon, 2018). At the same time, the work of higher education staff is reshaped: academics are required to focus on outputs and very narrow definitions of 'excellence' in teaching, research and leadership, supported by an ever-stretched pool of professional services staff. Emotional and relational labour, labour of care and collegiality remains marginalised and individualised (Jyoti & Suttill, 2025), undermining the very role of the university as "a force for good steering society toward a better future" (Jensen & Zawadzki, 2024, p. 1215). Yet, without care work universities would not function; universities are dependent on the emotional and relational care for students and colleagues that academics and professional staff offer. As such, Pecis & Bauer (2026) argue, the academic system would erode because its productivity and intellectual exchange depend on networks of trust, empathy, and mutual support.

Given the progressive erosion of our universities, we are compelled to ask whether and how spaces for care in academia and beyond can be generated, by questioning:

- 'Who' is the academy?
- Who carries the burden of care work? And why?
- Should care work be a burden at all?
- Which voices are heard within the academe?
- What are the values underpinning contemporary discourses in the higher education sector?
- How are these values reflected/taken upon/contested beyond academia?
- What values and interests are our institutions serving?

- What tensions emerge between care and competition in contemporary universities?
- How are students positioned within economies of care in academia?
- How are professional services staff positioned within economies of care in academia?
- When does care work/the discourse of care become extractive?
- What would a genuinely care-centred university look like?
- Can care function as a form of resistance, solidarity or collective organising within and beyond academia?
- What would meaningful recognition of care work look like in academia / how do metrics of excellence recognise, obscure and devalue practices of care?

With these questions, we want to invite scholars and professional services staff to question the role of our institutions within their communities and societies at large, and to recognise the often marginalised, burdened and in/visible work of a variety of actors within the academy (i.e., teachers, professional services staff, catering and security, etc) who are central to the operations and functioning of academic institutions and yet often remain hidden/overlooked/ignored.

The stream questions the progressive marketization and neoliberalisation of the university “as an institution estranged from a unifying sense of public purpose, organised under increasingly vacant terms of legitimation and accountability – “excellence”, “student experience”, “research impact”, “knowledge exchange”, “graduate employability/outcomes”” (Call for Proposals, ICMS 2026, Lancaster University). It recognises that caring and regenerative practices have been marginalised vis-à-vis the privileging of “particular forms of epistemic production and dissemination (Boussebaa, 2020; Muzanenhama and Chowdhury, 2023; Parker, 2023; Prasad and Śliwa, 2024; Santos, 2012).” (ICMS call, 2026).

We invite submissions that explore critiques and possibilities within and beyond the business school (and management theory) to include works that:

- Explore experiences and approaches from different temporal, geographic, and culturally diverse forms of managing and organising academia, and what lessons can be learned from different geographical, political and cultural contexts;
- Adopt an interdisciplinary perspective to problematize the current state of academia and to propose alternatives and/or more desirable futures;
- Engage with interventionist research or pedagogy that has a critical/emancipatory intent -where different experiences and possibilities are recognised;
- Draw on own experiences of (un)care and (un)caring within institutions.

The stream aims to continue conversations on the role of academia in society and our communities, its conflicting aspirations and tensions, but also to extend discussions on the central role of those often put at the margin of the ‘academe’, namely professional services staff, forms of organising academia beyond a UK context, and alternative ways of engaging with academic work centred on an ethics of care.

This stream offers a space for reflections and discussions on ‘caring’ in academia and in ‘academic work’. Drawing from our lived experiences and analysis, which highlight how care

work in academia is not just limited to those in 'teaching' roles, this session is open to both academic and professional services colleagues in higher education (HE). Joint submissions from academic and professional services colleagues will be very welcome. The session will include a mix of storytelling-based café session, traditional paper presentations and a creative reflection workshop. To ensure wider participation and limit access barriers, the session will be organised in a hybrid format.

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

References

Boussebaa, M. (2020). In the shadow of empire: Global Britain and the UK business school. *Organization*, 27(3), 483-493. 10.1177/1350508419855700

Muzanenhamo, P. & Chowdhury, R. (2023) Epistemic injustice and hegemonic ordeal in management and organization studies: Advancing Black scholarship. *Human Relations*, 76(1), 3-26. 10.1177/00187267211014802.

Parker, M. (2023) Our magazine, or, why does no-one read us? *Organization*, 30(6), 1287-1292. 10.1177/13505084231182935.

Prasad, A. & Śliwa, M. (2024) Critiquing the Backlash Against Wokeness: In Defense of DEI Scholarship and Practice. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 38(2), 245-259. 10.5465/amp.2023.0066.

Santos, B. D. S. (2012) Public Sphere and Epistemologies of the South. *Africa Development*, 37(1), 43-67.

Bryson, J. & Jeffreys, B., 2026. Students at risk if universities go bust, say MPs. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce3p93j3823o>

Jeffreys, B. and H. Shearing (2025). BBC News: Four in ten universities face financial challenges. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8dgdldnrgo>

Jensen, T. and M. Zawadzki (2024). Contextualizing capitalism in academia: how capitalist and feudalist organizing principles reinforce each other at Polish universities. *Organization*, 31 pp. 1214–1236.

Jyoti, D & Suttill, B 2025, Pastoral Care work in higher education: Breaking the silence, *Journal of Scholarship and Innovation in Management Education* Issue, vol. 1, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.71634/3gg5h675>

Pecis, L. and Bauer, F. (2026), When Thriving for More Collapses the System: The Academic Reproduction of Uncaring Structures. *Br. J. Manag.* e70066. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.70066>