Research Grants

PROPOSAL

Future Research Leaders 2015

Organisation where the Grant would be held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>University of Leeds</th>
<th>Research Organisation Reference:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division or Department</td>
<td>Leeds University Business School (LUBS)</td>
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Project Title [up to 150 chars]

A Democracy to Come? Investigating Change in Alternative Organizations

Start Date and Duration

a. Proposed start date

01 January 2016

b. Duration of the grant (months)

36

(Applicants)

Name

Organisation

Division or Department

How many hours a week will the investigator work on the project?

Principal Investigator

University of Leeds

Leeds University Business School (LUBS)

15
Objectives

List the main objectives of the proposed research [up to 4000 chars]

The project will depart from traditional assumptions within business and management about benevolent and well-intentioned leaders, to critically investigate from the "bottom-up" the extent to which the democracy we see in organizations today can actually alter management practice. The goal of the research is to work with democratic organizations and practitioner-facing organizations championing democracy in the workplace, to extend knowledge about how we can create alternative organizations that are committed to upholding freedom and equality. In doing so the four main objectives of the project are:

1) To co-produce an alternative organizations network with partners that strengthens links and breaks down barriers between alternative organizations, coaches and academic researchers. This will involve training to become a change practitioner and contributing to the development of a practitioner-oriented manual and web pages. This will help to solidify an international movement that brings together individuals and groups who are passionate about increasing participation and freedom in the workplace. The intention is to inform their practice in a variety of ways and enabling learning between (and change within) workplaces.

2) To develop a practically informed concept of freedom as non-domination in the workplace that builds upon the PI's previous theoretical work and provides a foundation for this network. This concept will act as an anchor around which disparate types of alternative organizations (co-operatives, employee owned companies, sociocracies, holacracies etc) can recognise their commonality whilst adopting different patterns or techniques to achieve and sustain freedom in the workplace.

3) To provide an interdisciplinary framework for studying change in alternative organizations that combines the strengths of political theory (the concept of non-domination), management studies (theories of workplace democracy) and socio-technology (recognising the centrality of technology in enabling greater democracy in the workplace and mediating individual and organizational development).

4) To develop an innovative multi-methods qualitative approach to studying alternative organizations that combines semi-structured interviews with observation and action research, requiring the PI to train as a coach in alternative organization transition, and providing a unique perspective and integration with the user-community.

The overall project objective is to ensure that the project leaves the PI in a position where he is at the forefront of research into alternative organizations. By the completion of the project he will be: a) playing a role in leading a well-established alternative organizations in practice network in the academic community with like-minded scholars in business and management, politics, communication studies and other disciplines across the UK and internationally; b) a central figure in the creation of an online network and database of alternative organizations and coaches that will provide an increasing number of opportunities for research and investigation; c) developing and publishing outputs with a range of people in each of these networks, often together through co-production that cuts across disciplines, industries and sectors; d) in possession of a set of research skills and practitioner skills that will enable world-class research and a capacity to secure successful knowledge exchange beyond academia; e) ready to apply for further funding opportunities that utilise all of these accrued experiences.

These research and project objectives will work in a cumulative fashion to develop the PI in to a future research leader. They will ensure that the alternative organizations community is strengthened and that pursuing freedom at work for employees is a commitment for the PI not just over the next few years but for the next few decades.

Summary
Describe the proposed research in simple terms in a way that could be publicised to a general audience [up to 4000 chars].

The economic instability and uncertainty created by the 2008 financial crisis has encouraged many individuals and groups to re-evaluate the type of society that they wish to live and work within. Evidence increasingly shows that workplaces with less hierarchy, more democracy and greater employee empowerment can not only ensure a more balanced and sustainable economy but can lead to a healthier and happier workforce. The opportunity to work in organizations with fair rates of pay, rights to participate in decision making and the freedom to craft your own job without managers interfering should no longer be seen as a remote possibility. Numerous employee owned companies including Accord and Tullis Russell, and co-operatives such as Suma and Infinity, operate in a way that claim to make these things a reality. Many more companies are going yet further, embracing radical decision making procedures that re-distribute power away from managers ensuring that employees are treated, remunerated and rewarded in a fair manner.

However, for those traditional organizations tempted to make the transition to operate in a more democratic way, it is not a simple and straightforward path to take. Transformational change is notoriously risky and unpredictable and new companies feel particularly vulnerable, perhaps convincing them to stick with the familiar. Despite a government bill in 2012 supporting the development of co-operatives and calls for a ‘John Lewis society’ reflecting a more moral and responsible capitalism, various obstacles stand in the way of companies wishing to make the change. One of the main problems is that here is a lack of information available to firms about what to expect when initiating the transition to become alternative organizations. In short, there was - and there remains - not enough research being conducted in to: a) how organizations can make the transition from top-down hierarchical workplaces to adopt more democratic structures with increased employee power; and b) the opportunities and challenges that organizations face once they have made the transition and are attempting to initiate and pursue change with less hierarchy and more employee freedom and control. This lack of evidence about change makes it a much riskier and unpredictable process for those considering whether to embrace different models of organization in the workplace, and holds back progress leaving the economy unbalanced.

This research project will provide this much needed research across a wide range of democratic companies. It will capture and document the experience of ‘alternative’ organizations and their members as they initiate, and pursue change within the workplace. In doing so, it will provide a radical exploration of the opportunities and challenges faced by employees, elected leaders, coaches and HR professionals whilst adopting and sustaining a democratic organization. Interviews, observation and action research will be used to go inside 24 democratic workplaces and consider how elected leaders facilitate change in contrast to conventional organizations; to what extent employees are free to initiate and pursue change and what constraints they experience in these types of organizations; and how these organizations increase and decrease freedom and accountability in various ways for individuals and groups. By working closely and co-producing research with practitioners in alternative organizations, this project will extend knowledge about change in democratic workplaces. It will broaden the evidence base for workplaces wishing to make the transition away from traditional top-down, hierarchical modes of operation by ensuring that they are fully aware of the challenges and opportunities they are likely to encounter and are better placed to deal with them in innovative and beneficial ways.

Academic Beneficiaries

Describe who will benefit from the research [up to 4000 chars].

The proposed research project will have academic benefits for a number of disciplines and influence individuals and groups who are seeking to apply multi methods qualitative research to understand the application of radical theory in practice. These disciplines include:

MANAGEMENT STUDIES: The study will have a significant influence on management scholars working in the fields of human resources, industrial relations and organizational studies more generally. The proposal has outlined how the project will contribute towards the development of an Alternative Organizations in Practice (A-OP) group, helping it to grow nationally and internationally. The database produced through the study will be accessible to all academics and will be particularly valuable to those wishing to learn more and work more practically with alternative organizations.
POLITICAL SCIENCE: The study will be of interest to academics in this field, particularly empirical political scientists working in the area of democracy and political theorists working in the area of freedom, power and accountability. It will also be the first time that the concept ‘freedom as non-domination’ has been used to analyse workplace democracy in practice, so will be of particular relevance to those theorists from the civic republican tradition. The project will provide a new way of understanding the application of freedom and should help to extend the concept further.

ECONOMICS and other key disciplines: The creation of a database for alternative organizations should bring benefits to academics working on these types of businesses from across various disciplines. These include economics and communication studies, for example, who regularly engage with such organizations. One of the key strengths of the proposed project is that it will build upon the interdisciplinary experience of the PI (his PhD which engaged with politics, philosophy, education and psychology) to create opportunities for new interdisciplinary teams to tackle large and complex issues that require multiple perspectives.

The use of a mixed methods qualitative approach within the study will also lead to academic beneficiaries across the social sciences. In particular, the use of participatory visual methods in alternative organizations employing innovative and obscure approaches to work will provide a unique insight and will demonstrate a strong sign of support for the community of scholars engaged in underappreciated and under-utilised method of research.

Staff Duties

Summarise the roles and responsibilities of each post for which funding is sought [up to 2000 characters]

Principal Investigator (PI): The project will seek funding for 40% of the PI’s time for the 36 month study. This funding will support data collection for the project. It will also support the preparation for, and the organization of, various training, knowledge exchange and impact activities. The 40% will be distributed evenly through the life of the project and an attached work plan sets out in more detail when the various activities will occur. The other 60% will be supported through LUBS. This will support the time spent pursuing activities that will develop the PI into a future research leader such as networking, skills development, writing articles and co-producing outputs with practitioners.

Post-doctoral Research Assistant (PDRA): Salary contributions are requested for a full-time RA for 9 months at grade 7 (which is the normal starting grade for PDRA posts). Main duties will involve working on RQ1 and RQ2 as described in the case for support. The PDRA will therefore play a central role in developing case studies for each of the democratic organizations and in interviewing coaches. They will also analyse this data to develop a journal article on coaching in democratic organizations and undertake relevant Leeds University early career researcher training to ensure that their own development is fully realised during the project.

Mentor(s): Prof. [Redacted] will meet with the PI for an average of 1-2 hours per week and Prof. [Redacted] will meet with the PI for an hour every month. On his external visits to the Universities of Trento and Mondragon he will be mentored by Prof. [Redacted] (Director of [Redacted]) and Prof. [Redacted] (Mondragon University) respectively. The mentors’ time will be covered by the host university.

Impact Summary

Impact Summary (please refer to the help for guidance on what to consider when completing this section) [up to 4000 chars]

The central impact of the project will be to develop a critical tools for change that can be used by organizations wishing to become more democratic. The PI will work with democratic organizations and practitioner-facing organizations championing democracy in the workplace, to increase knowledge and awareness about the most effective ways that alternative organizations are created and sustained. Consequently, there are numerous beneficiaries, such as the 24 alternative organizations being studied:
Equal Exchange (Co-operative, 120 worker owners, fair trade coffee; RI, USA)
Suma (Co-operative; 150 worker owners; wholesale foods; Leeds, UK)
Unicorn (Co-operative; 100 worker owners; grocery; Manchester, UK)
Infinity foods (Co-operative; 100 worker owners; Café and food supplier; Brighton, UK)
Tullis Russell (Co-operative; 750 worker owners; paper supplier; Fife, UK)
Leeds Bread (Co-operative; 5 worker owners; Bakery; Leeds, UK)
Gripple (Employee owned; 220 employees; wire and tensioner suppliers; Sheffield)
Loadhog (Employee owned; 50 employees; Packaging contractors Sheffield, UK)
Parfetts (Employee owned; 550 employees; cash and carry company; Stockport, UK)
Accord (Employee owned; 20 employee; energy company; Aberdeen, UK)
Springest (Holacracy; 40 employees; educational provision website; Amsterdam, Holland)
Best upon request (Holacracy; 200 employees; concierge business; OH, USA)
Kahler (Holacracy; 15 employees; financial services; SD, USA)
Centre for Human Emergence (Holacracy; 20 employees; solutions; Utrech; Holland)
Netcentric (Holacracy; 140 employees; technology consultants; Munich, Germany)
Concept7 (Holacracy; 50 employees; car manufacturing/design company; Groningen, Holland)
Propellermet (Democratic; 50 employees; website and marketing consultants; Brighton, UK)
Surevine (Democratic; 50 employees; digital security; London, UK)
Nixon McInnes (Democratic; 20 employees; marketing consultants; Brighton, UK)
Outlandish (Democratic; 10 employees; web design consultancy; London, UK)
4 x Sociocratic companies- access to be provided by the Sociocracy Consulting Group (See letter).

As the letters of support for each organization suggest, all of these workplaces believe that the results of the study will help
them to learn and develop their own practice as alternative organizations. The workers, leaders and HR professionals
within will be able to reflect on various experiences of change in alternative organizations, not only through the production
of the practitioner manual and the project website but through the general strengthening of the community from which they
can draw upon to share and improve practice. Beyond this initial impact, the research will have impact on other
organizations who are interested in becoming more democratic. These organizations will be reached through the
dissemination events and impact advisory board members who are leading figures in organizations such as Co-operatives
UK, Employee Ownership Association and the WorldBlu network of democratic companies.

In addition to this, the coaching organizations will benefit from the research project as it will allow them to reflect and share
on their own practice. These 9 organizations are:

Cooperative Assistance Network (Co-operatives)
Co-ownership solutions (Employee Ownership)
Realize (Holacracy)
HolacracyOne (Holacracy)
CID Partners (Holacracy)
Sociocracy Consulting Group (Sociocracy)
Synnervate (Democracy)
Conscious Business (Democracy)
World Blu (Democracy)

The coaching organizations and coaches have also agreed to contribute to the development of the practitioner manual.
World Blu will be directly co-producing research outputs on the project and distributing data to their members and through
their web pages. They have a unique insight in to change within alternative organizations and in combination with the PI will
help to increase the impact of the project significantly.
Has consideration been given to any ethical matters raised by this proposal? Yes

Please explain what, if any, ethical issues you believe are relevant to the proposed research project, and which ethical approvals have been obtained, or will be sought if the project is funded? If you believe that an ethics review is not necessary, please explain your view (available: 4000 characters)

The research project has been designed and reviewed by Leeds University ethics committee to ensure that it is undertaken with the utmost integrity, quality and transparency. It involves numerous human participants so ethical considerations revolve around ensuring that these individuals and groups are treated fairly, with respect and are given assurances about the project and data produced. The organizations involved in the research have been fully briefed through 30 minute-1 hour Skype/telephone meeting about the project, its aims and overall purpose. All of the organizations were keen to hear more about the potential impact of the project so time was taken to engage organizational representatives and take advice from them about what to include at this stage. As the letters of support reflect, all of the organizations are supportive and involved with the research outputs and impact elements of the project. They are fully aware of the implications of the research both for the PI and themselves.

Prior to conducting interviews within the organizations, a more specific and tailored summary of the project will be given to individuals taking part. This will ensure that they are fully aware of confidentiality, anonymity and explain how the data will be stored in a secure manner on a password protected external hard drive for the duration of the project. Data will not be stored on multiple devices during the duration of the project to decrease the risk of loss of data to third parties and when being transferred to a laptop during the analysis stage of the project full care will be taken to ensure it is done so appropriately. Guidelines for individual participants will also set out how they are free to leave the research project at any stage (prior or after their interview) and are taking part entirely of their own free will. Finally, it will assure all participants that the PI is entirely independent and has no conflicts of interest that might bias his interpretation of the data.

There are no vulnerable groups involved with the project (animals or children) and there will be few risks of harm coming to the PI or research participants during the project. However, in organizations with heavy machinery (Equal Exchange, Suma), strict safety precautions will be taken. Appropriate spaces for interviews have also been promised by the organizations in the letters for support so that confidential, candid and safe exchanges can take place. If the PI becomes aware through his interviews or observations of any potential danger to the safety or well-being of participants he will follow the procedure of liaising with his main contact in the organization (or an alternative person if necessary) in a discrete fashion allowing them to deal with any issue in their own time. The research will be conducted internationally so it will be necessary to be aware of cultural differences. However, the countries are all advanced western countries with broadly similar access to resources minimising the likelihood of power differentials having an effect on the research-participant relationship.

Due to the inclusion of interviews with HR professionals and leaders that may engage with sensitive issues such as gender, the application requires full ethical approval. As such it will be fully peer reviewed by a Leeds University panel. The project will have full approval by the ethics committee to ensure that there are no obstacles in the way of conducting the research to begin on January 1st 2016. In order to maintain an ethical research project throughout the life course of the grant, the PI will also enrol on Leeds University’s professional development module on ethical research in 2015.
A DEMOCRACY TO COME? INVESTIGATING CHANGE IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION: Following the 2008 financial crash, politicians from across the political spectrum responded to a ‘crisis in capitalism’ by calling for a fairer and more resilient economy. A government bill in 2012 ostensibly supporting the development of co-operatives, efforts to mutualise public sector organizations and calls for a ‘John Lewis society’ (Clegg, 2012) echoed the rhetoric of a ‘moral’ (Cameron, 2012) or ‘responsible’ (Miliband, 2011) capitalism. Despite this rare political consensus on increasing workplace participation and mounting evidence of the resilience of organizations using alternative, co-operative methods during the economic downturn (Pérotin, 2012), key structural challenges remained, holding back many organizations from making the transition. In short, there was – and there remains – not enough research being conducted in to: a) how organizations can make the transition from top-down hierarchical workplaces to adopt more democratic structures with increased employee power; and b) the opportunities and challenges that organizations face once they have made the transition and are attempting to initiate and pursue change with less hierarchy and more employee freedom and control. This lack of evidence about change makes it a much riskier and unpredictable process for those considering whether to embrace different models of organization in the workplace, and holds back progress leaving the economy unbalanced.

In an effort to create the needed evidence, this research project will capture and document the experience of self-proclaimed ‘alternative’ organizations, their members and coaches as they initiate and pursue change within the workplace. In doing so, it will provide a radical exploration of the opportunities and challenges faced by employees, elected leaders, coaches and HR professionals whilst adopting and sustaining democratic organizations. Building upon previous work conducted by Griffin et al (2014a), the study understands democracy in the workplace broadly as a model of organizational decision-making that upholds freedom as non-domination. In this sense, workplace democracy reduces (and ideally eliminates) the possibility of arbitrary interference by managers, either by decreasing the power and authority of managers or by removing them altogether (Pettit, 1997). The study explores five types of ‘alternative’ organizations which take such an approach – a typology which reflects how different democratic workplaces identify themselves but recognises there are significant overlaps. Briefly stated these are (i) worker co-operative organizations – in which workers have a stake within a company and they (rather than what would conventionally called “the management”) make decisions for mutual benefit on a one member, one vote basis (Craig and Pencavel, 1992); (ii) employee owned organizations – in which some or most employees have a stake in the organization, and can influence management decisions whilst accruing annual benefits (Kruse et al, 2010); (iii) Holocratic organizations – in which authority and decision making are distributed throughout the workplace and the CEO’s power is ceded to a constitution (Robertson, 2009); (iv) sociocratic organizations – in which equal employees use a consent based form of governance to participate and make decisions in the organization (Buck and Villines, 2007); and (v) broadly democratic organizations – in which formal and informal participatory decision making procedures are used to distribute power away from traditional management structures (WorldBlu, 2014).

There are numerous studies which explore the emergence of one type of organization set out above i.e. a studies looking purely at worker co-operatives (Borzaga and Spear, 2004; Thornley, 1981; Erdal 2011). However, evidence is still lacking about the experience of change within a wide range of democratic organizations, incorporating broader lessons about how they are created in the first instance and how they are sustained over time. One of the main reasons for this is the tendency to differentiate, at the point of creation, ‘types’ of democratic organization, meaning they are also studied in isolation rather than together. Another reason is that change management studies typically explore traditional firms rather than those that we might consider democratic or who are seeking to become democratic (Beer and Nohria, 2000). Consequently, rather than considering change from the
bottom-up, they explore instances of change which are top-down – from the manager’s perspective – considering how executives might engineer and maintain control of the process (Sturdy and Grey, 2003). Often such control will be portrayed as instances of revolutionary change (Meyer et al, 1993) or radical metamorphosis (Pettigrew, 1985) initiated by heroic leaders (albeit with minimal warning or consultation, and preceded and followed by periods of relative inertia). These narrow models of change simply do not capture the reality of organizations working with democratic structures in which employees can initiate change from the bottom-up and do so regularly either as part of a long-term conversation or as part of a spontaneous collective reaction to immediate concerns.

While certain Management scholars have worked effectively to attack traditional and hierarchical models of organization (Collins, 1997; Griffin, 2014b) and document alternatives (Parker et al, 2013) there is widespread agreement within the community that more could be done to make it more practical and relevant. In this sense, there is an unhelpful gap between the radical theoretical critique being provided by the management community and the democratic organizations and coaches employing practices that are creating alternative workplaces (King and Learmonth, 2014). This study will begin to address this gap by providing an account of change for alternative organizations that considers the implications and challenges faced by employees, elected leaders and HR professionals inside democratic workplaces where change isn’t a temporary, imposed measure or ‘program’ but with the help of coaches is woven in to the very fabric of the organization as a change ‘platform’ (Hamel and Zanini, 2014). The central objective of the project is to explore different types of radical change platforms in alternative organizations and in doing so co-produce a critical account of change with practitioners that can be used by organizations wishing to become more democratic. In doing so, the PI will seek to bridge a gap that has emerged between radical thought and the world of practice in management studies. He will provide evidence of best practice in the creation of democratic organizations in a manner that not only has the potential to directly inform interventions and change behaviour within the workplace, but will attempt to do so in an effort to bring about sustainable growth in an economy that reflects a vibrant and fair society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: A pilot for the project was conducted from August to September 2014 which considered change processes within four alternative organizations. The results suggested that there are numerous issues to contend with when transitioning from traditional structures and embracing alternative models of organizational governance. The research questions are designed from the pilot to enable the project to explore and reveal fresh insights in to the opportunities and challenges faced at an organizational, group and individual level:

1. What organizational narratives are used to justify and reinforce the changing (or changed) identity of the organization as an alternative workplace?
2. What types of challenges do coaches – those who guide transitions within organizations – face during the creation of (and continued stability of) alternative organizations?
3. How do managers/elected leaders facilitate change in these alternative organizations?
4. To what extent are employees free to initiate and pursue change in these organizations?
5. How do human resource professionals initiate, sustain and cope with change in an alternative organization?
6. What methods, structures and processes are employed to increase or decrease the freedom and accountability of individuals and groups within these organizations?

RESEARCH METHODS: SAMPLE: The study will explore 24 alternative companies including 6 co-operatives, 4 employee owned companies, 6 holacracies, 4 sociocracies and 4 broadly democratic organizations. Letters of agreement attached to the proposal explain in greater detail but these organizations were approached because features within them capture freedom as non-domination in
action. They all appear to empower and encourage workers to take control and to limit or eliminate arbitrary interference by managers. The companies are all firms but come from a range of sectors and vary in size (see impact summary for more details). As Spain and Italy have the most established workplace democracy sectors, there is great value in understanding why this is the case (see skills development programme for details of trips to the European Research Institute of Co-operatives and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) [Italy] and Mondragon [Spain]). However, as the study is interested in the challenges faced in becoming and sustaining alternative organizations, it will focus on countries where progress has been slower and where knowledge about change is fuzzier. Consequently, the organizations are located in the UK, US, Holland and Germany. A sample of 250 employees and 70 elected leaders/managers will provide the core data for the study. In addition to this, however, 9 coaching organizations – which have specialist skills to assist with transitions and continuing success of the different types of democratic organizations – have been recruited to the project, with 25 coaches agreed to participate and be interviewed (see letters in appendix).

METHODS: The study employs a multi-method qualitative approach that intricately combines different research methods to answer different Research Questions (RQs) in appropriate ways (Pritchard, 2012). The study has six stages that build cumulatively throughout the life of the project, often running concurrently to reinforce and complement each other where necessary:

STAGE ONE: NARRATIVES OF ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: The first stage of the project will address RQ1 through a narrative analysis that will be conducted on the text and visuals which the organizations (n=24) use to portray themselves externally (Maitlis, 2012; Leach, 2000). Leeds University Business School (LUBS) has particular strengths in the area of visual methods that the PI will seek to utilise throughout the life course of the project (Symon and Cassell, 2012). This first stage will involve working with a post-doctoral research assistant (PDRA) to explore how each democratic organization represents themselves through websites, YouTube, external statements and memos, Twitter, Facebook and their organizational ‘literature’. This will lead to a concise case study on each organization that captures factual information about the business but also sets out a historical narrative of the company and how it has changed. This will help to reveal areas of interest in relation to RQ6 (where freedom as non-domination is most likely to be found [and not found] in the organization) to act as a lens for the main part of the project.

STAGE TWO: COACHING ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: The PI (and PDRA) will conduct semi-structured interviews to explore RQ2 to gain a broad initial insight from the coaches (n=25) about the particular challenges faced in adopting a specific democratic structure. As with all subsequent interviews in the project, they will be transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis assisted by software, NVivo (Oswick, 2012). To improve the validity of the data the PI will also be embedded with different coaches for a short period as they work with companies involved in transition. This will provide an action research and engaged scholarship element to the project that will be reflected in the co-production of research outputs with democratic coaches (Cox, 2012; Van de Ven, 2007). As some forms of organizational democracy being studied are relatively new (there is very little academic literature exploring them in detail), the PI will also train to become a certified practitioner in sociocracy and Holacracy giving him added expertise and added competence within these organizations. This will prepare the PI to understand the systems more effectively and improve the standard and impact of the research at subsequent stages of the project.

STAGE 3: GOVERNANCE IN AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION: RQ3 will be explored in detail at this stage through semi-structured interviews with managers or elected leaders (n=70) in these organizations. The interviews will be stimulated through the innovative use of participatory visual methods (Vince and Warren, 2012) in which managers will be asked prior to the interviews to
photograph three ‘things’ that capture their desire to promote freedom and democracy in the workplace and three ‘things’ that frustrate this most. This photo elicitation will guide discussions in to how the democratic organization has changed the traditional functions of the ‘manager’ or elected leader, in terms of their freedom to act and the accountability and responsibilities that they have in initiating and sustaining change (Mintzberg, 1973). In previous work, Griffin et al (2014b) described the challenges managers face in these situations as ‘certain experiences of the impossible’ – this part of the project will translate these theoretical innovations and track the practical ways in which managers or elected leaders find ways around these impossibilities through the introduction (or perhaps the limitation) of different types of collective and individual forms of participation. The PI will explore the emergence of the kind of democracy in the workplace and consider the implications risk and unpredictability during change has on those in leadership roles.

STAGE 4: WORKERS IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: This stage will build on knowledge accumulated at previous stages to interview regular workers in the alternative organizations (n=226). In doing so, it will capture the ways workers can initiate, contribute towards and resist change within alternative organizations. As in stage 3, where appropriate and possible, employees will be asked to capture images of freedom and constraint within their organizations to stimulate interviews. In doing so this stage will primarily address RQ4 by looking at six central areas: a) Job crafting – the capacity of workers to actively shape what they do within their jobs, giving it greater meaning (Wrezesniewski and Dutton, 2001); b) Participation in decision making – the capacity of workers to contribute to decisions an individual basis but also within self-selected, self-managed teams; c) Accrued benefits – the experience of workers with flexible working hours, temporary contracts, extended paternity leave but also voting on the distribution of bonuses throughout the organization; d) Access to information – the capacity of workers to access information from across the organization; e) Access to an independent judiciary – a fair separation of powers within the organization so that employees receive a fair hearing should they face discrimination or persecution (Bernstein, 1979); f) An enriched culture – the informal rites and subcultures within these organizations which reinforce a commitment to an alternative way of working. All of these features have the potential for facilitating greater freedom, but the study also recognises (and the pilot study confirmed) that they could lead to greater control by dominant individuals and groups (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). This stage will explore these issues in more detail.

STAGE 5: HUMAN RESOURCES IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: At this stage of the project interviews (guided by photo elicitation) will be conducted with human resource professionals (or their equivalent) within alternative organizations (n=24). The weakening of managers and increase in democracy often leads to more opportunities for workers to craft their own job, or decide on pay or bonuses, and influence recruitment, but there may be other unseen implications and challenges within the organization that complicate the introduction of such new processes. Issues such as working with unions, health and safety, individual defence during grievances, gender bias, unconscious discrimination against minorities and implications of power inequalities exist within these organizations (Ben-ner and Jones, 1995). Building on previous stages (particularly stage 4) the interviews will explore RQ5 by asking how ‘democratic’ HR professionals deal with these issues.

STAGE 6: OBSERVING ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: The investigation of RQ1 to RQ6 will be enhanced through an observational element to the study (Braunnon and Oultram, 2012) – observing each organization that will be conducted in parallel with the interviewing process by being embedded within the workplace for 2-3 days (Fetterman, 1989). All of the organizations involved in the study have agreed to allow the PI to observe key meetings and every day operations within the workplace (briefings, interactions), which will include things like shadowing key members of the
A DEMOCRACY TO COME? INVESTIGATING CHANGE IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

organization (McDonald and Simpson, 2014). An account of time spent within different types of
democratic organization will provide a unique and innovative element to the project that in
combination with interviews and action research will capture a rounded and rigorous approach to
studying alternative organizations in practice. It should enable the PI to reflect back on RQ1 – the
external representation of the organization – and begin to consider how accurately these
representations reflect the reality of change and development inside alternative organizations.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS AND IMPACT: There will be a number of academic outputs related to the
project. Journal articles will be produced using the empirical data on: the experiences of leaders and
coaches in alternative organizations (target: Leadership Quarterly); the experiences of employees in
alternative organizations (target: Organization Studies); and the experiences of human resource staff
in alternative organizations (target: Human Resource Management). In addition to these articles, a
conceptual paper advancing a freedom-based theory of workplace democracy will also be developed
that will directly build upon lessons learnt from experiencing numerous alternative organizations
(target: Academy of Management Review). Finally, a paper exploring imagery and language from
everyday life within alternative organizations will also be produced (target: Human Relations). The PI
is currently playing a leading role in the development of an Alternative Organizations in Practice (A-
OP) Group with like-minded scholars and interested practitioners. A key academic output of this
project will be to organize streams on the topic of alternative organizations in practice at the Academy
of Management Conference and European Group for Organization Studies in 2019, solidifying
progress and expanding the A-OP group. A final expected output in this area is that the PI will build
upon the contacts he makes during this project (especially in Spain and Italy) to apply for a European
Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant in 2019, ensuring that he continues the momentum gained on
to a new project in this area.

The research project will also have a variety of outputs with impact beyond academia. The creation of
a practitioner manual exploring change in organizations will feed back directly into the participating
organizations but will also be made freely available on a project web page which will include images
or collages of freedom and democracy in organizations. The manual will also be distributed to
‘gatekeeper’ organizations (such as the Employee Ownership Association) thereafter to reach other
companies. In addition to this, the PI will work with WorldBlu (http://www.worldblu.com/, see
supporting letter) to co-produce outputs to be distributed through their website and will work together
to collate information from a broad cross-section of alternative organizations to contribute to the
development of a database for shared learning. The letters of agreement reflect the commitment of
participating organizations to contribute to this output, and by working closely with World Blu – an
organization who work with hundreds of democratic workplaces – it will make it possible to share
data (textual and photographic) and, in doing so, develop awareness of change in the alternative
organizations community, making the process a much less risky and daunting process.

More generally, the impact of the project will have three main components, all of which will
contribute to the over-arching aim of the project – to increase freedom as non-domination in the work
place. Firstly, the project will have an impact on alternative organizations. Those involved directly
with the study, but also beyond this to other organizations wishing to transition. A final year one-day
dissemination event will help with this, providing the opportunity to deepen the impact of the results
and extend the reach further by inviting all of those companies involved in the project and
representatives from companies considering change from a traditional to democratic workplaces.
Secondly, the project will contribute an innovative multi-methods approach to the study of alternative
organizations. This incorporates traditional qualitative research methods such as interviewing with
more innovative methods such as the action research involved in training to become a fully certified
coach in different types of organizational change. Thirdly, the project will have a significant impact on the provision of development and education opportunities to leaders and workers in alternative organizations. The PI will directly incorporate the research findings into the MA in Managing Change module that he currently leads at LUBS and work with the A-Op group to develop executive education programmes for alternative organizations. At present, executive education focuses heavily upon traditional organizations so this will be an ideal opportunity to incorporate alternative organizations’ needs into courses that widen the scope of the types of organizations that can benefit from universities. In addition to this, preliminary talks have already taken place with Palgrave about the development of a textbook that examines the issue of change management from an alternative perspective. The organizations studied in this project would provide ideal material to develop such a textbook that would have great value to the management education community.

**INSTITUTION AND MENTOR:** The research will be hosted by Leeds University Business School which was ranked 9th in the UK during the 2014 Research Excellence Framework. During this process the School’s environment was judged to be 75% 4* quality, reflecting the depth and breadth of the resources available to its researchers. The PI’s primary mentor for the project (85%) will be Prof. (University of Leeds) who is a world-leading expert on workplace democracy. Her involvement in numerous EU-wide interdisciplinary projects in this area with various international policy organizations (such as the International Labour Organization &World Bank) provide her with the breadth of knowledge, networks and experience ideal for the supporting the PI in the completion of the proposed research project. Prof. has facilitated access to alternative organizations involved with the project (Suma, Unicorn, Tullis Russell, Infinity) and introduced the PI to leading academics in the field to ensure visits to Mondragon University (Spain) and EURICSE at the University of Trento (Italy) are built into the programme of research and skills development. These visits will not only ensure academic skills development but will incorporate visits to democratic companies such as the world-famous Mondragon Corporation. A second mentor, Prof. (University of Leeds) will also be in place for the project (15% of the overall time), to provide expertise on research methods. Prof. is a leading figure in the use of innovative qualitative methods in organizations and has used her extensive experience to advise the PI as he developed the application (, 2012). The PI will therefore have an extremely strong mentor team in a high quality research environment to draw upon and guide him through any issues that he faces.

The PI joined the University of Leeds in his first teaching position in September 2014. In a clear sign of Leeds commitment to his project he was awarded a £2500 seedcorn grant that enabled him to conduct a pilot in the UK and the USA, visiting and interviewing employees at four democratic workplaces. Supported by Profs. and as well as colleagues in the Organizational Behaviour Research Group (OBRG), he has since been given time and resources to develop a proposal that engages with multiple stakeholders and that cuts across multiple disciplines. LUBS have signalled their commitment to the project even further by agreeing to prioritise a PhD student on the business and management pathway to the White Rose DTC to work with the PI. This will ensure that the project will not only contribute towards the development of a future leader but also to the development of two further early career researchers (PDRA and a PhD student) in the area of workplace democracy. This student will conduct research on the project and have a substantial dataset with which to carry out a PhD with high impact built in from the outset. The structure of LUBS has facilitated the development of the project enormously by creating an environment that encourages staff from various divisions (management, economics, work and employment relations, strategy) to explore big and complex problems. This is a legacy of LUBS’ ESRC Future of Work large grant that promoted an environment of interdisciplinary research – a situation that the PI would take full advantage of to act as a launch pad for his career as an academic.
PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

The project will have impact in various ways on different beneficiaries, over a number of years. Most importantly, however, these impacts will cumulatively contribute towards the overall intention of the project which is to increase freedom as non-domination in the workplace. The impact activities have been considered with, and will be supported by, the assistance of the project advisory board involving key players in the facilitation and development of alternative organizations.

**Immediate impacts:** During the project there will be five central immediate impacts. **Firstly,** the PI will be able to feedback results about change to the organizations involved in the project. He will be trained as a sociocracy and holacracy coach, so he will be in a position to work with the companies to improve practice inside the organizations. **Secondly,** as reflected in the attached letters (from the Sociocracy Consulting Group in particular) the PI will work with practitioners to develop his own project web pages that will be used to present project findings in textual and image form. These will be aimed at organizations interested in learning more about transitioning to a more democratic way of working. **Thirdly,** he will also work with practitioners at World Blu to upload data to their web pages and database as well as write practitioner oriented articles. These will be viewed by people through their high-traffic website and via their extensive Twitter links (see World Blu letter for more details).

**Fourthly,** the PI will present his findings at the World Blu practitioner conference attended by hundreds of employees and leaders in democratic workplaces. He will also present the results at academic conferences in the UK (British Academy of Management Conference), Europe (European Group for Organizational Studies Conference) and the USA (Academy of Management Conference).

**Finally,** the third year dissemination event will also bring together practitioners and academics to discuss the central lessons of the project. It will enable current and (especially invited) aspiring democratic leaders and employees to explore how the findings of the research can influence change. This will ensure that outcomes are translated into impact from the outset.

In addition to this, there are three key milestones for impact that the PI will work towards:

**One year post project:** The co-production of a practitioner manual that acts as ‘best practice’ for organizations wishing to become alternative workplaces will be produced by this stage. The PI will work with individuals – primarily coaches – from across the project to put together a manual to be distributed and made available free of charge. This will include a newly developed general approach to change management in all five types of alternative organizations. It will include information and experiences that will demystify issues like transitioning towards a new way of leading, working and organizing people in these types of workplaces. As well as benefitting those who take part directly in the project, the manual will be distributed beyond this through various channels internationally. The PIs established links through his mentor and the invited presentation at the WorldBlu practitioner conference in the US in 2018/9 will ensure that he has a new audience to disseminate his work to.

The action research element of the project will also ensure that the project will have immediate impact in facilitating the transition of multiple organizations in to alternative workplaces. The PI will also be a certified change management coach in sociocracy and Holacracy by this stage as well and will be able to work with organizations in an on-going way. This will be a somewhat unique position for an academic in this area: to be both a world-leading academic (in workplace democracy) but also to be a qualified practitioner in different types of alternative change. This will not only provide practical experience but will work by solidifying contacts both within alternative organizations and within the coaching community. The PI will use these links to work more closely with scholars in the emerging Alternative Organizations in Practice (A-OP) Network that he is playing a leading role within. One year after the project ends this network will have expanded and will continue to meet on an annual basis to share findings and develop work in this area in a way that had not occurred previously. This
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will lay the groundwork for a critical management perspective and network that has impactful activities at its core, intrinsically valued as a part of the research process. There is also potential for the project to feed in to the policy process. All three main UK political parties have supported greater employee participation in the workplace. The project findings will be disseminated to key contacts at the department of health, cabinet office and other government agencies keen on increasing alternative organizations in its different formats. The PI will also make use of contacts at the Employee Ownership Association, Co-operatives UK, Co-operative Development Scotland as well as international organizations such as the Academy of German Co-operatives in Germany and the Sociocracy Consultancy Group in the USA. Finally, by the end of the first year post-project, the findings of the research and all of these experiences will have shaped the curriculum of the change management MA that the PI is teaching both at Leeds but also internationally through executive education.

Three years post project: The PI will work with practitioners from the end of the project to contribute towards the development of an online database of alternative organizations. Whilst impact from the website could be felt as early as one year post-project, the full weight of the impact will begin to be felt slightly after this as organizations are added and its potential is realised. It was felt that the database hosted on the World Blu web page could be co-produced to bring a lasting benefit to organizations wishing to transition to an alternative form of internal governance. At present information about alternative organizations is either non-existent or in short supply and distributed in many different places. There are common lessons to be drawn from these different types of alternative organizations that promote freedom at work which could help them to be more co-operative in developing over time. It will, therefore, act as an international database for co-operation and mutual learning. The involvement of the PI in the development of this network would place him at the forefront of studies in alternative organizations and ensure that he could develop new links with these organizations in an on-going manner. Moreover, the parallel development of the A-Op Network will ensure that academics from management and beyond will be able to contribute to the development of the database ensuring the reach of the impact is significantly greater over time. This will culminate in the production of an impact case study for REF2020 which utilises the articles produced as outputs for this project as underpinning research and the activities described above – evidence and testimonials for this will be collected in an on-going manner. Finally, the PDRA and the PhD attached to the project will also have co-authored outputs published and disseminated by this stage of the project, and will have ideally moved in to an academic position. This will be an essential capacity building element of the project that brings new researchers into an important and at risk area of research.

Five years post project: By this stage the PI expects to be in a leading role in thriving practitioner and academic led networks for alternative organizations. Each will be guided by the broad idea of spreading freedom as non-domination in the workplace in whatever form that might take. This will make it much easier for the PI to co-produce research with keen practitioners and, due to his coaching certification, to continue immersing himself at the cutting edge of development in alternative organizations and feeding this back in to theory testing and creation. It is also expected that a textbook on change management in alternative organizations will be underway by this point, aimed both at students on his MA course but also towards practitioners interested in taking part time courses or executive education. The PI wishes to ensure that the impact of this project is cumulative over time and the development of educational materials is central to making sure that this happens. They will ensure that the change management model and its findings are disseminated to and used by an increasing number of people – who in turn improve it and lead to its evolution. This will, therefore, be one of the most rewarding and important impacts of the project.