

# Management's counter-history: The neglected past and potential futures of solidarity-based organizing

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Accepted for publication in *Organization*, 29 September 2023

Version of record: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13505084231207987>

Review of Eynaud P and França Filho GC (2023) *Solidarity and Organization: Toward New Avenues for Management*. Palgrave Macmillan.

*Solidarity and Organization* opens with a today familiar mise-en-scène: we are living through the Anthropocene, characterized by mutually-reinforcing crises of environmental and social unsustainability. Social inequalities weaken democracy thereby undermining our ability to act collectively to protect the climate and biodiversity on which we all rely. Against these dual forces threatening societal collapse, Eynaud and França Filho argue we need *solidarity* as a means of re-establishing the *solidity* of society. Despite recent increased attention to the theorization and practice of solidarity in, for instance, the realm of economics, the authors identify a paucity of such exploration in management. *Solidarity and Organization* is thus presented to draw out 'the theoretical foundations of a solidarity-based management' (p. 6).

Chapter 1 briefly outlines the causal relationship between capitalist management and the above 'double unsustainability' before introducing the book's core contention: that management in itself is not to blame, but rather management in its specifically capitalist form, which has crowded out alternatives rooted in public services and civil society associations. Chapter 2 explains how this happened, presenting a history of orthodox management science narrowly aligned with the requirements of the *market* economy, despite the countervailing recognition of a broader variety of economic forms amongst theorists most influential for this young discipline, particularly Adam Smith and Max Weber. A counter-history of management science is then offered, encompassing a wide range of scholarship and practical experiments in solidarity organizing broadly marginalized by mainstream management studies. Alongside thinkers and movements well-known to those of us working in the critical tradition (e.g., Paulo Freire, Axel Honneth, the Rochdale Pioneers), we encounter those that are additionally marginalized via linguistic and North-South dominations, particularly French (e.g., Pierre Leroux, Léon Bourgeois, Charles Gide, *l'économie sociale et solidaire*) and Brazilian (e.g., Milton Santos, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, *mutirão*, *terreiros* and *irmandades*).

With this historical groundwork set, the book turns to its positive proposal regarding the solidarity-organizing relationship. Chapter 3 proposes that, in place of capitalist management rooted in market rationality, a *substantive* management can be developed based on Polanyi's theorizing of the substantive economy and Guerreiro Ramos' work on substantive rationality. Chapter 4 then explores the possibility of solidarity within and between organizations, broadly conceived in terms of democratic governance. Following an extensive mapping of democratic governance approaches across various organization and intra-organizational network types, the authors propose an analytical grid to demonstrate how solidarity economy organizations uniquely diffuse the tension between social utility and financial viability by *reintegrating* the economic into the social. Chapter 5 proposes an account of an 'Other Management' that would effect this reintegration, rooted in the approaches of *gestão social* (roughly translated as solidarity-based management) and the commons, focusing respectively on social and environmental sustainability. Chapter 6 summarizes the overall argument of the book.

This final chapter is revealing of the volume's argumentative shortcomings. Most notably, in its summary of Chapter 4 the importance of the proposed analytical grid appears forgotten, with this declared contribution relegated to one amongst a disjointed list of questions addressed by this chapter: 'democratic governance, solidarity-based territories, the reconciliation of the economic and the social, and social innovation' (p. 226). Indeed, claims regarding the significance of this tool are undermined

by the fact that Chapter 5 does not explicitly mobilize it to substantiate the superiority of *gestão social* and the commons in effecting such reconciliation. It is in fact unclear what the grid itself represents – whether it is the result of inductive analysis regarding the empirics surveyed in Chapter 4 or a composite of the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 3. Subsequent assertions inherit this ambiguity such that it is hard to say, for instance, whether the characteristics of solidarity economy initiatives the authors claim ‘can lead to reconciliation’ (p. 122) are derived from empirical analysis of solidarity economy initiatives otherwise identified, or rather extrapolated logically from the grid as a means of defining what a true solidarity economy initiative would be.

A lack of theoretical precision is also apparent in the treatment of the book’s central concept. Key elements of the authors’ conception of solidarity are revealed indirectly and sporadically throughout the text, such as the almost throwaway aside in Chapter 5 regarding the necessarily *political* character of the solidarity economy. The political reading of solidarity is common but by no means consensus, and naturally has significant implications for what solidarity can *do* (see, for instance, the special issue of *Organization* on solidarity: Fleischmann et al., 2022). Relatedly, Eynaud and França Filho are generally silent on solidarity’s ambivalences (Fotaki, 2022), including its vulnerability to cooptation (Lacerda, 2023). Similarly obscure is the commitment to the idea that solidarity is a fundamentally *local* phenomenon, without the authors ever offering an explicit justification for this premise. We encounter bald assertions that, for instance, the solidarity economy ‘cannot be conceived independently of the idea of territoriality’ (p. 103), but assessing the stringency and plausibility of this claim is impeded by a lacking characterization of ‘territoriality.’ We are thus left in the dark regarding the implications of this view for the applicability of solidarity as a means of addressing territory-transcending challenges, such as carbon emissions. Finally, while the opening pages promise an account of ‘solidarity between humans and nature’ (p. 3), what this might mean is ultimately left unexplained. The introduction of such an unconventional reading of ‘solidarity’ thus serves only to undercut the intuitive appeal of the account.

In sum, I find the book’s argument unclear and its concrete theoretical declarations unconvincing. Its abstruse structure seems to reveal a similar doubt on the part of the authors. By bracketing such claims, however, we can appreciate what is left: an eclectic survey of marginalized and neglected subaltern inquiry. Furthermore, in drawing together these heterogeneous sources *Solidarity and Organization* proposes a number of interesting articulations that warrant further, and more rigorous, investigation. Two of these streams particularly pique my interest.

First, while the notion of ‘solidarity between humans and nature’ may challenge conventional conceptions, that is not to say the perspective is without advocates. Indeed the concept of *ecological solidarity* – rooted in a recognition of the interdependence of humans, non-humans, and the environment – has gained some institutional legitimacy in France, playing a key role in the 2006 National Park policy reform. Organization studies has much to offer the development of this conception, particularly via posthumanist ontologies that reject cartesian dualism (Huopainen, 2022). Moreover, where posited constraints on solidarity are rooted in human characteristics, the advent of posthuman technologies that modify these characteristics (Al-Amoudi, forthcoming) will have significant implications for possible future forms of solidarity-based organizing.

Second and relatedly, *Solidarity and Organization* offers useful perspectives on the exploration of possible alternative futures, drawing particular attention to de Sousa Santos’ epistemology of the South. While there is growing interest in the use of ‘concrete’ or ‘real’ utopias as thinking tools for exploring more sustainable social orders in alternative organizations scholarship, the sociology of emergences underscores the essential role of implementation and experimentation in determining their viability (Elder-Vass, 2022). We may hear echoes here of the tension between theory and practice so central to ongoing debates regarding critical performativity (King and Griffin, 2023). Yet the links Eynaud and França Filho draw between critical epistemology and pragmatic philosophy, specifically Dewey’s social inquiry, may indeed indicate a promising pathway for navigating this impasse.

Originally published in 2019 as *Solidarité et Organisation: Penser une Autre Gestion*, this work garnered such success in French that an English edition was judged worthwhile by the commercial

forces of academic publishing. As a consequence, it can now guide a more expansive readership to those subaltern traditions of thought and practice that have not achieved similar market promotion. While its own argument may not live up to its promises, therefore, *Solidarity and Organization* is nevertheless a valuable contribution to the urgent collective project of exploring sustainable alternatives.

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