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New trends in organization design

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The field of organization design is undergoing a renaissance. In private, as well as public organizations, we have seen changing organizational forms, a growing amount of importance placed on social networks, and many different experiments with flat organizations (absent hierarchy). This JOD special collection is devoted to exploring new trends in organization design, including new themes and methods within the field that occupy and interest our authors and readers.

What is a trend? A trend is defined as "a line of development" (Mirrian Webster). So what is the general direction in which the field of organization design is developing?

Clearly, one of the "hot" topics preoccupying both researchers and practitioners (Puranam et al. 2014; Van de Ven et al. 2013), and also a recurrent issue in many papers published in Journal of Organization Design, is how to design organizations for the future. Obviously, how we design for the future depends on what the future holds. What we see is that increasingly competitive and multifaceted business landscapes, commonly referred to as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environments (Bennett and Lemoine 2014), require organizations to be adaptive—implementing strategies rapidly and effectively in response to opportunities and challenges in global and local markets (Fjeldstad et al. 2012). Further, how do we design organizations for the future where people want to work? This, to some extent, also depends on the people that occupy these organizations. Current trends indicate that the newer generations have a dislike for authority, be that institutionalized in traditional hierarchical structures, or in traditional views on leadership. Instead, fading hierarchies (for an excellent update on this topic, we recommend our readers to read Bilinger and Workiewic's special collection from October) and the importance of social networks and subunit designs to further decentralization are the topics.

Design and experimentation are moving ahead as natural experiments that explore a portion of the "what might be" space (Burton and Obel 2018). We are observing closely for insights and understanding. What we observed in this special issue is that building the traditional question of how the subunits of an organization are put together into the overall design of the organization; the six articles in this special collection capture a new trend of examining the fundamentals of structure and coordination with novel interpretations, analytics, and data. Organizational design studies today are more fine grained, leading to a deeper understanding of how organizations work and how to create or design them.

Each article in this special collection makes a unique contribution in capturing this new trend. Nonetheless, they can be partitioned into general categories. First, Nobles and Romme give new meaning to what the organizational hierarchy can be. Nobles argues that the hierarchy can, and should, liberate managers and employees for self-motivation rather control and narrow their activities, with strong implications for what leadership is. Romme examines the top-down–bottom-up hierarchical relations of accountability which also liberates the bottom of the organization.

The second set of articles are data driven and examine directly how to design or structure the subunits of organizations. Larner and Walldius examine how collaboration of users and digital platform designers can collaborate to obtain a better design than traditional trade union approaches. Using a field experiment, Hasan et al. examine how joint task design of work can be utilized to create better performance network ties—going beyond social and friendship ties. Worren et al. apply a genetic algorithm model to optimize the large number of subunit interdependencies and design to minimize coordination costs. Finally, Victer develops a data-driven model in a healthcare organization to obtain superior performance and fit between applied knowledge and organizational structure.

Going back a trend builds upon the present (and past) extending into the future. Here in this special collection, the challenge of designing an organization remains fundamental of how to make to subunits of the organization work together to obtain desired performance by the total organization (Puranam et al. 2014; Burton et al. 2020). In these six articles, the new trend here falls along two dimensions: a better and deeper understanding of what organizational hierarchy can be and what it should be, and field and data-driven examinations with implications for which designs work best and how to develop them.

Authors' contributions
The author(s) read andapproved the final manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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