

Administrative Science Quarterly
1–3

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DOI: 10.1177/00018392231166842

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Martin Kornberger. *Strategies for Distributed and Collective Action: Connecting the Dots*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 229 pp. \$62.50, hardcover.

Mountain bikes, operating systems, apps, and more apps—each exemplifies the role of lead users in driving innovation. Users who are most deeply involved in pushing existing tools and technologies in new ways are more likely to discover the limits of standard practice as well as novel possibilities (p. 98). These familiar lessons apply no less to the study of organizations and organizing itself. When it comes to pushing organization theory in new directions, look to the lead users—in this case, to Martin Kornberger, a scholar of strategy.

Strategies for Distributed and Collective Action begins with a mismatch between inherited theory and empirical observation. In 2015, a flood of refugees swept through Europe, overwhelming state capacities. But in the process of swamping existing institutions, the crisis also provoked surprising kinds of collective action. The possibility for such novel configurations was exemplified by the Train of Hope in Vienna, which evolved from nothing to a major, improvised yet also choreographed mobilization of volunteer individuals, civil society groups, and networks that collaborated with state agencies to help asylum seekers. What sort of an organization was this? What sort of theoretical imagery is required to understand how coordination and purpose emerged in response to this crisis?

Kornberger's central claim is that the Train of Hope, like the response to COVID-19—as well as aspects of academic life, art worlds, soccer games, Lawrence of Arabia, and platform industries—exemplifies “new forms of distributed collective action, forms of coordination that combine the scale of markets, the ability of movements, the resourcefulness of crowds, the ingenuity of open-source and peer-to-peer networks, and—this is crucial—at the same time, [these forms] are purpose-driven and goal-directed” (p. 6). As such, these cases do not align with the major theoretical imageries that guide much of organizational analysis. Kornberger identifies four of these familiar imageries, each with a small set of representative theorists: “the invisible hand of the market, the visible hand of the manager, institutions and grassroots explanations such as social movements” (p. 9). The first half of the book works through each of these perspectives, identifying their roots in now-classic theory (e.g., Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman, among others, for markets). These chapters remind us of the joys of diving deep into theoretical arguments, wrestling with the implications of authority, norms, and identities. In each discussion, Kornberger assesses both the durable contributions of a line of theorizing and its limits in accounting for his central puzzle: distributed and collective action. He takes valuable insights from each, but none is judged up to the task of understanding “open, polycentric, and plural networks” (p. 91).

The second half of the book turns to “connecting the dots” by providing alternative theoretical imagery to illuminate how forms of distributed collective action operate. Kornberger advances three key organizing elements: interface design, architectures of participation, and evaluative infrastructures. These elements take on salience in the context of some “shared concern” that generates the “we” or the “collective” in collective action (p. 112). On this point, Kornberger draws inspiration from Michel Serre’s discussion of a soccer game: “What makes the teams that play soccer a collective? . . . it is the ball that organizes the movements of the twenty-two people on the pitch” (p. 121). The players on the field, of course, are embedded in or entwined with the hierarchical organization of the team-as-enterprise, the league, the media systems, and the networks or associations of fans. The ball is a “quasi-object . . . that moves between actors, and through its moves (actual or potential) it weaves, as a corollary of its process, the collective” (p. 123). Distributed action mobilized around purpose requires new forms of leadership, specifically diplomacy understood as “the art of introducing quasi-objects into networks of actors, seeding and sharing concerns that might guide future collective action” (p. 178).

Shared concern, Kornberger contends, functions like a soccer ball, focusing and organizing a complex choreography of diverse organizations and actors in efforts such as the Train of Hope (p. 126) or a forward-looking planning process in the city of Sydney: “Through creating feedback and feed-forward loops, and through envisioning a shared (present) future, strategy creates this simultaneity for collective action” (p. 167). This piece of the analysis points toward questions beyond the scope of this book, to the supply side of shared concerns. Crisis seems an obvious candidate in the form of unanticipated exogenous shocks to the system. Yet, thanks to intrepid investigative reporters and skeptical scholars, we now have extensive documentation of how crisis is constructed or, perhaps even more insidiously, disappeared as a deliberate strategy for demobilizing action.

The recognition of a crisis or shared concern shapes how collective action does (or does not) develop. If quasi-objects organize distributed action, opening examples focus the reading of a wide-ranging, complex, and sophisticated argument. By introducing the Train of Hope early in the text, Kornberger invites us to filter his argument through cases of emergent, change-oriented social action. But the power of the argument is that it can also reveal some of the vulnerabilities of a world organized through distributed action. Take, for example, the discussions of research science and publishing that thread through the volume. While the relatively open architecture of collaboration and peer reviewing is central to the enormously powerful collective enterprise, might it also figure in recent findings of the dramatic slowing of innovation and disruptive breakthroughs? How do the dynamics of reviewing communities and evaluative metrics reorient the attention and effort of individual researchers and research groups? More generally, how do these expansively distributed forms of collective action depend upon—and thereby make themselves potentially vulnerable to—the actions of platform firms that have the power to set the terms of participation? These questions in no way undercut the power of Kornberger’s analysis. Instead, they point to the ways in which the theoretical imagery of distributed, collective action will push us to ask new questions about power, politics, and social change very broadly construed.

In this, organizational scholars are not that different from mountain bikers. Given the latest product, they easily succumb to a desire to tinker, to use the latest thing in a new way. Some of that will be evident in new scholarship; other impacts will emerge in entrepreneurship or activism. And further testimony to the clarity and liveliness of Kornberger's argument is that it quickly provoked thoughts of new courses, specifically new hybrids of social theory and organizational analysis. *Strategies for Distributed and Collective Action* shares many features of Gareth Morgan's well-known *Images of Organization* (1997), as it reminds us of the power of basic theoretical imageries anchored by vivid examples. But Kornberger dives more deeply into the foundational assumptions and epistemologies of different theoretical traditions, reanimating long-familiar arguments for seasoned readers and inviting graduate students to engage critically with classic texts and novel social phenomena. Each wave of theorizing about organization was grounded in the experience of specific episodes of sweeping social change or organizational innovation. Finding ourselves in exactly such a time, Martin Kornberger offers an incisive and enthusiastic guide to how we might meet this moment.

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