

## RESEARCH STATEMENT

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Like many junior researchers I spent much of my time in the doctoral program at the University of British Columbia and then my pre-tenure years, first at Schulich/York and then Ivey/Western, searching for my calling in academe. I'd like to think that I searched further and harder than most – secretly hoping that the more strenuous the search, the more precious the result. In this process I almost recklessly explored (and at times successfully bridged) literatures across domains, disciplines and methodologies. For the most part the publication gods favored these choices. Even papers that struggled in the review process won some accolades. The stars lined up and I got all the funding and partnerships I had looked for – and then some (with four large-scale interventions still ongoing in Canada and East Africa, in addition to several multi-year research projects). New ideas came quicker than closure for old ones, and the research pipeline became a treadmill which had me running faster and faster just to keep up with special issue submission deadlines.

There were a few aha moments along the way – an early paper on entrepreneuring as love stirred up the academy conversation in Denver; followed by an argument about entrepreneuring as contagion that got some heated arguments going at Babson in Madrid. But despite the great vibe, neither paper 'made it' all the way, and I quickly consoled myself that I would leave them on the back burner and get back to these fun projects – right after my defense, then right after tenure – when I'd know how to make these topics stick. I got luckier with subsequent papers on entrepreneuring as coping and hoping, now in print in handbooks and journals. As my interest in the dynamics of resilience and hope aligned well with a turn in the academy towards new form of agency and positive social change, an already full dance card became even busier and my mainstream work gave way more and more to these labours of love. I became an avid reader of critical theory and a fan of processes like flourishing and connecting, which I now chase after in several working manuscripts. I also began teaching myself theories of aesthetics, and began playing with theories of art, play and creativity as generative processes that may enable positive social change – even for agents operating under extreme scarcity and adversity. I even started writing on the balancing act between imagination and reality (realizing the imaginary and re-imagining the reality).

Looking back over the seven years since I defended my dissertation, there were many life-giving moments and relationships which should have at least provided some hints of an underlying calling. Research subjects became close friends, whom I now miss dearly in between 'interviews'. Doctoral students, with both feet in practice, also became close collaborators. Entire research streams on cross-sector partnerships (with Marlene J. Le Ber), eco-fashion (with Kim Poldner), film (with Esther Maier) and cuisine (with Melissa Leithwood) are very much in progress. Each stream generates something new and different, but they all revolve around a deeper question of whether, when and how positive social change happens.

But it was only recently, while in Rwanda in November 2011 collecting data from post-genocide widows and orphans and lamenting the scarce opportunities they have to imagine let alone make a better life for themselves, that something changed for me – and within me. First as a researcher. I started grappling with the painful so-what questions that many of the research participants were naturally asking me – what could I do with their stories, what can I give back to them from the research? Then as a person. When I went back to Rwanda a few weeks ago (during spring break) I received thanks. Thanks for caring about their stories of hopelessness and about the questions of how they found new hope. And

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in a handful of cases, after long silence and crying outbursts, a few of them told me this was the first time they spoke about these moments. And giving voice to their tragic truth, and their almost heroic comeback, gave them hope. Because it gave them the opportunity to give back, the little they had: they gave me their stories and they trusted me to help them make a difference for others. This give and give-back tension may well be ASQ material – I hope it is, although I have little clarity of how I can get there from here. But there is something aesthetic, multi-sensorial, and deeply personal in this journey that I am actively grappling with, trying to understand our role as researchers and our role as human beings in the academy. Reaching as honestly and deeply within myself as I can so I can make a difference for the participants themselves, if not materially at least humanly. I have little practice and our methodological toolkit is woefully inadequate for the challenge – but I believe the time has come for us to ignore any false divides and ask something I have waited for a really long time (all these seven years).

I remember vividly meeting Alan Meyer at the West Coast research conference when I was on the job market as a young innovation scholar. He had just published his organizing far from equilibrium paper, which was then, and is still, one of my favorites. With the confidence that only doctoral students can muster, I recall telling him how much I loved his theory. I did not know yet when, or where, or how, I could use that, I continued, but I was absolutely sure there will be a time and context where I will.

I believe social change requires new theories of organizing – from agency to accountability to awareness. We also need new ways (perhaps aesthetic ways) to make sense of our holistic experience as human beings and undertake connections and actions for which there are few precedents or recipes. And we also need new methodologies to approach our future, more honestly and more boldly than the existing toolkit might allow. I would like to discover and to play my part in this journey, and even though I am still not sure what that looks like, the number of people in my corner is growing and they are expecting me to do something extraordinary. They could care less about that ASQ – but they expect a real difference from these insights, and a real human touch for the theories I may eventually publish. And they set a pretty high bar, one that I am yet unsure I can meet – certainly not on my own. So I am hoping that I can draw inspiration and energy from the wonderful work done at the Centre for Positive Organizational Scholarship. I am already a huge fan of your work, Jane, and have gone cover to cover more than once through all the POS books. But I'd love to have the opportunity to join you this coming year, and become involved in some of the great work going on at the center.

When I came back from my latest trip, I was ready for the calling to finally take hold of my life, scholarly and personally. So I applied for a sabbatical and I reshuffled my teaching portfolio, which has been a huge part of my life in the past seven years. This has fortunately achieved the impact I was hoping for, even a little sooner and a little broader than planned. I have developed programs, curricula, courses and cases I am really proud of – initially because there were none to teach social change, then because I thought I had better stories to tell, and most recently because there are people and moments I come across that ought to get our attention, in the classroom and beyond. By the end of the summer, I will have more than 50 cases, most reprinted in textbooks, along with several case collections, including Africa-first and India-first collections which I think will re-energize how we teach management in the future, and for the future. Some of the time off will give back to the classroom, by preparing a book on Sustainability in Action and mentoring colleagues in Africa and India on case writing and teaching. All the dear wishes on the teaching front have been met, and I have seen several generations of social change agents making a difference. But I think in the next couple of years I have more to give back by stepping

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outside the classroom, sharing the experience I have and especially helping out so that new materials and new pedagogies find their ways into our classrooms. I'd like to volunteer every bit of knowledge and experience, and offer myself as a resource as you are organizing the teaching conference next spring. I am also excited about the opportunity to grow as a teacher and a scholar as I get re-energized and re-inspired by the innovative approaches, exercises, and writing ongoing at the center.

Spending the 2012 academic year (September 2012 through April 2013) at the University of Michigan would mean a lot to me. I fell in love with the school, and Jane and Bob, when I first visited Ross for the doctoral program interview back in the spring in 1998. But life choices at the time forced me onto a different route, and fair regret for not getting to spend my formative years with people I admired deeply lingered ever since. But truth be told I was not ready then. I was too busy searching for my unique voice to fully appreciate how much I needed a community of positive scholarship; too stubborn in my quantitative ways to appreciate the joy of hearing and weaving voices into life-changing narratives; and too ambitious for that next ASQ to breathe in the depth of insight that was such a gift for me recently.

Looking forward to the year ahead, I have seven years of amazing first hand data, all deeply relational, all gathered in contexts that are finally becoming 'fringe' in our theorizing of organizations and organizing processes (when I started they fell quite a ways outside what was then 'normal' or 'good' work, but thankfully the frontiers kept moving in the right direction). I believe this data has answers about a new theory of agency, one that helps us understand new forms of organizing, far from equilibrium. I also believe this theory of agency to be profoundly social and forward-looking. Pro-social, perhaps even society-changing, as it brings to the fore to test, ground and expand our notions of hope, empathy, giving and giving-back, informality and formality, imagination and reality. To start, I have baby-theories that need to mature, and complex thoughts that need to find their simplicity and power. But I need a place and a community where the impossible can take its own contours and find just the right balance of new and old to warrant publication. I would like to see a couple of high-impact papers and a research book come together in this year. Five years back, Jim Walsh encouraged me to keep these then odd research studies going because, he said, they are very different and when the time comes I will be able to fall back on the data to make sense of it all. They may even fit together, he suggested, and uncover a new theories of organizing. I hope the time is right for trying.

I know there are many deserving and productive scholars for whom spending a year at the Center would be a prized reward. But I can honestly say that I am ready in my professional and my personal life to acknowledge and act on my calling, and I can think of no better place of doing so than with you at the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship. I believe that if there is a new theory of agency (which I can't fully imagine yet), it will be there that it comes alive. And if the ongoing work on hope and change grows (as it promises to do, at the intersection of hope and faith especially) I am confident that your higher ground will help me keep this compellingly human. I would also love to feed on and draw on your passion as this work continues. As I return to Canada and I continue the work in East Africa, I can only hope a few new collaborations will show us even higher ground that I cannot foresee here and now.