



Introduction

Organizations and their consumers: Bridging work and consumption

Organization
2015, Vol. 22(5) 629–643
© The Author(s) 2015
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1350508415586040
org.sagepub.com



Yiannis Gabriel

University of Bath, UK; University of Lund, Sweden

Marek Korczynski

University of Nottingham, UK

Kerstin Rieder

Aalen University, Germany

Abstract

The last 20 years or so have seen a far-reaching reconfiguration of the characters that dominate the world of organizations. For much of its life, the study of organizations was dominated by two central characters, the manager and the worker, whose relationship with all its tensions, conflicts and accommodations unfolded within a broader environment of markets, governments, shareholders, social institutions, technological forces and so forth. In recent years, however, there has been a substantial movement to change the two-actor show into a three-actor show, the organizational dyad into a triad. The newcomer to the stage has been the consumer, a character whose whims, habits, desires and practices are no longer seen as ‘impacting on’ the activities of managers and workers from the outside, but increasingly as defining them. This introduction to the Special Issue on ‘Organizations and their Consumers’ examines the ramifications of the rise of the consumer and the hegemony of global markets for (1) the nature of organizations and their management, (2) the employees and the labour process and (3) the consumers themselves as they increasingly find themselves doing work, usually unpaid, on behalf of organizations.

Keywords

Consumer, crowdsourcing, customer-oriented-bureaucracy, labour process, normative controls, organization, organizations-as-brands, post-Fordism, prosumer, working customer

Corresponding author:

Yiannis Gabriel, University of Bath, Bath BA2 7AY, UK.
Email: y.gabriel@bath.ac.uk

The last 20 years or so have seen a far-reaching reconfiguration of the characters that dominate the world of organizations. For much of its life, the study of organizations was dominated by two central characters, the manager and the worker, whose relationship with all its tensions, conflicts and accommodations unfolded within a broader environment of markets, governments, shareholders, social institutions, technological forces and so forth. In recent years, however, there has been a substantial movement to change the two-actor show into a three-actor show, the organizational dyad into a triad. The newcomer to the stage has been the consumer, a character whose whims, habits, desires and practices are no longer seen as ‘impacting on’ the activities of managers and workers from the outside, but increasingly as defining them. At times, the referee in the management–labour contest, the consumer is often called upon to take sides, declare winners and losers and even define the rules of the game (e.g. Bauman, 1998; Du Gay, 1996; Gabriel, 2005; Korczynski et al., 2000; Stein, 2007; Sturdy et al., 2001).

The rise of the consumer in organizational theory reflects wider social and political developments. These saw consumer capitalism, and relatedly unrestrained markets, consumer choice, customer service, competition, entrepreneurship and so forth, establish a virtually uncontested hegemony, political and ideological. The global spread of consumer capitalism, massively underpinned by the rise of the Internet and instant access to information and scarcely tempered by 6 years of crisis and austerity, has made old-fashioned distinctions between work and leisure, production and consumption, producer and consumer, untenable. It is now quite obvious that consumers are workers, often doing unpaid work for corporations, and that workers are consumers, often using resources of their employers to consume, legitimately or clandestinely in or out of their workplaces (e.g. Paulsen, 2014). At the same time, ever wider spheres of social and economic activity come under the ambit of markets and commodification. Education, health and many social services become increasingly commodified. Students, patients and other service recipients (including prisoners, job applicants and the unemployed) are addressed as clients with rights and expectations that the providers of these services must address. They must be offered choices, they must be offered information to enable them to make choices, they must be made aware of their rights and so forth (e.g. Fotaki, 2006).

The rise of consumer capitalism and the increasingly uncontested dominance of markets have also produced pronounced shifts in loci of militance and protest. Against a consolidated assault on workers’ rights and organizations undertaken by footloose capital and neoliberal governments, some of the locus of militance has shifted from the sphere of production to that of consumption. Anti-globalization movements, sometimes with overtly anti-consumption messages, have periodically assumed centre-stage in politics, offering at least a glimpse of opposition to mainstream consumer capitalism. Other forms of public protest have emerged in countries crippled by austerity and debt. At the same time, new forms of ‘soft’ opposition against the rule of brands and logos have generated alternative exchange practices, career downshifting and at least a partial disengagement from riotous consumption. Finally, new forms of workplace resistance have materialized whose aim has been to tarnish corporate brands in the eyes of their customers, through whistleblowing, subvertising or culture jamming.

As consumerism infiltrates an ever widening range of social and economic activity, and as the discourses it spawns (markets, competitiveness, customer service, quality, entrepreneurship, innovation, engagement, rankings, audits, etc.) become increasingly unanswerable, many of our traditional assumptions about the nature of work are challenged. Whole sectors of the economy include large armies of employees involved in ‘front line work’—dealing with customers, servicing them, advising them, keeping them happy (Bauman, 2001; Gabriel and Lang, 2015; Korczynski et al., 2000; Ritzer, 1999). Additionally, an increasing proportion of workers in developed countries are now working directly with customers in service and other occupations. Front line work makes

different demands on individuals (both managers and workers) and groups from manufacturing or back office jobs, safely insulated from the critical gaze of the customer. Instead, front line jobs emphasize the importance of the employees' emotional labour, social and verbal skills, appearance and demeanour under pressure (Fineman and Sturdy, 1999; Hancock and Tyler, 2000; Warhurst et al., 2000). At the same time, consumers themselves are increasingly expected to do a considerable amount of work in order to enjoy the fruits of today's consumerism. This has given rise to a new type of consumer, often referred to as the working customer or the prosumer, who becomes a vital actor in generating value to himself or herself but also to the organizations that outsource work to their customers (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Rieder and Voß, 2010).

The aim of this Special Issue is to examine the ramifications of these developments for the world of organizations, and those, like readers of and contributors to this journal, who research them. Following a successful European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) subtheme and an open call to papers, we have selected five papers that probe into different aspects of the relation between organizations and their consumers. Three of the papers we present examine how organizations today seek to deploy unpaid consumers to generate value. Thus, Isleide Fontenelle (2015) uses a Marxist approach to analyse the interpenetration of production and consumption, arguing that since the 1980s, the main focus of management has been shifting from their employees to their consumers, from value created by the former for a wage to value generated by the latter for free. Along similar lines, Bauer and Gegenhuber (2015) focus on the phenomenon of crowdsourcing and the related rise of the 'working consumers' to argue that it represents both an effective means of extracting value from consumers and of camouflaging a more indirect attempt to control these consumers. This theme is further explored by Cova et al. (2015), whose case study of Alfa Romeo and its effort to draw the brand's enthusiasts into its marketing campaigns reveals two things—first, that an organization's marketing professionals strive to control working consumers 'as if they were wage labourers' and, second, that these consumers redefine the role of marketing professionals in ways that involve social and emotional labour to which the marketers were unaccustomed. The other two papers in this Special Issue examine more directly the conflicts between consumers and producers. Schreven (2015) offers an in-depth analysis of the trial over copyright infringement brought by the author J.K. Rowling and Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc. against fans whose disorderly consumption of the Harry Potter product threatened the purity of the brand. She makes a powerful case that the policing of a brand demonstrates both the active appropriation of brands by working consumers and the threats posed by consumers to the symbolic authority of the author. In our concluding article, Reinecke and Donaghey (2015) study the aftermath of the RanaPlaza disaster when the collapse of a building in Bangladesh killed 1129 low-paid workers and injured a further 2500, all of them producing clothes for household brands like Primark, Walmart and Marks & Spencer's. They demonstrate how pressure from a number of consumer organizations and groups *as well as* international labour organizations forced some 180 brand companies to sign an agreement aimed at protecting the welfare of workers. They view this instance as prototypical of an increasing tendency of production and consumption-based organizations creating alliances to defend workers' rights in global supply chains.

All the papers in this Special Issue urge us to reconsider how we theorize entities like 'the organization', 'management', 'employees' and 'consumers'. It is not just that the relations between them are undergoing unexpected transformations, but rather in their very core, these terms are fundamentally changing—thus organizations, management, employees and consumers are being dramatically reconfigured. Production and consumption increasingly merge, places of leisure turn into places of work, technologies of production and technologies of consumption increasingly overlap. As Ritzer et al. (2012) argue 'the ultimate social factories [of our time] are the Web 2.0 sites where prosumers simultaneously consume and produce ideas' (p. 383). In line with

this argument, each of the sections that follow address one particular area currently undergoing a reconfiguration and rethinking as a result of these developments—organizations and their management, employees and consumers.

Organizations and their management

The view that organizations are undergoing a profound transformation is now accepted by nearly all scholars in the field. At the height of the postmodernist vogue, this transformation was attributed to the transition to what was referred to as ‘postmodernity’. Thus, a prescient scholar like Stewart Clegg (1990) could argue,

Where the modernist organization was rigid, postmodern organization is flexible. Where modernist consumption was premised on mass forms, postmodernist consumption is premised on niches. Where modernist organization was premised on technological determinism, postmodernist organization is premised on technological choices made possible through ‘de-dedicated’ micro-electronic equipment. Where modernist organization and jobs were highly differentiated, demarcated and de-skilled, postmodernist organization and jobs are highly de-differentiated, de-demarcated and multiskilled. Employment relations as a fundamental relation of organization upon which has been constructed a whole discourse of the determinism of size as a contingency variable increasingly give way to more complex and fragmentary relational forms, such as subcontracting and networking. (p. 181)

It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the rise of the consumer and, relatedly, globalization, offshoring, financialization and dematerialization of production have all sounded the death knell of the traditional organization. Indeed, some observers (e.g. Davis, 2009, 2013) argue that the large corporations that once dominated industrial societies are on their way out and, along with them, secure employment, health and social benefits and the expectation of ever rising wages and salaries. For the last 30 years, the traditional bureaucratic concept of organization has been under attack by scholars but, equally importantly, by management gurus and opinion shapers. Thus, Tom Peters has sustained as vehement an attack on bureaucracy on the pragmatic grounds that it no longer works; it leads to stagnation, decay and failure. Similar arguments have been proffered by other management opinion shapers who believe that the future belongs to organizations that rid themselves of the iron cage and celebrate creativity, entrepreneurship and freedom (see, for example, Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kanter, 1983; Peters, 1992; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism* represents a cogent account of a capitalism that is reinventing itself through new network-based organizations, enhanced employee autonomy and post-Fordist horizontal work structures.

The Fordist Deal pioneered by Henry Ford and dominant for much of the 20th century according to which workers could expect rising standards of living in return for alienating jobs, is rapidly unravelling (Gabriel and Lang, 2015) and along with it the Fordist organization. Currently Walmart, the US largest employer, employs about as many Americans (1.4 million) as the 20 largest US manufacturers combined, but whereas the average car worker earns more than US\$27 per hour, the average retail employee makes less than US\$11 (Davis, 2013). Under the sway of subcontracting, even manufacturing companies have shrunk in size, so that Nike, the world’s leading sports and shoe company, has a global workforce of only 38,000. Instead of seeking value in ever more streamlined and exploitative production, today’s organizations seek value and profits in design, marketing, distribution, supply chains and general knowhow of their products *and their consumers*—above all, value is concentrated in *the brand* rather than the operations, something that scholars of organizations are gradually realizing (Brannan et al., 2015; Garland et al., 2013; Johnston, 2013; Muhr and Rehn, 2014; Willmott, 2010).

Viewing organizations as brands rather than as production machines or administrative hierarchies has far-reaching implications, as two papers in this Special Issue (Pace, Cova and Skålén; and Bauer and Gegenhuber) argue. Employees are drawn closer to the organization whose brand they embody in their physical appearance; they become, however briefly and reluctantly, part of the brand. But so too are the customers. They become co-producers of the brand in innumerable ways—discovering new uses, new meanings and new ideas to link to the brand; new synergistic combinations of the brand with other brands; and so forth. The next two sections of this introduction take up these issues.

The reconfiguration of organizations from bureaucratic Fordist pyramids to brand-driven clusters of meanings and signs has also led to a far-reaching implications for management. Classical concepts of management hinged on technical control. ‘The [archetypal] manager’, argued MacIntyre (1981),

represents in his character the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations ... The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits. (p. 30)

Today’s manager, by contrast, is less likely to be a rational technician and more likely to be preoccupied with the organizational brand, the customer experience, presentation and the management of meaning and emotion (Gabriel, 2012). If classical management sought to suppress emotion, today’s management is increasingly seeking to commercialize it, turning it into a symbolic and material organizational resource. Far from representing the personification of the Weberian ‘disenchantment of the world’, today’s manager is more likely to act as the orchestrator of collective fantasy and hype. Fantasy and emotion have become driving forces of consumer capitalism leading to what Ritzer (1999) saw as the ‘re-enchantment of the world’ in the new cathedrals of consumption, where consumers are invited to shop, window-shop, observe, be observed, daydream and fantasize all in pursuit of meaning, fulfilment and identity. The core qualities expected of executives today are imagination, flair and the ability to make their customers feel happy, by offering them opportunities to realize their dreams. Value is created not through the methodical and ‘rational’ deployment of resources but through the clever manipulation of images, spectacles and symbols, through symbolic and emotional hype (Alvesson, 2001). Colourless, unimaginative ‘bean-counters’ are not generally able to engage with the consumers, tempt them, lure them and seduce them. Today’s executive must be a psychologist, in tune with trends in the market place, a visionary with imagination and, above all, an entrepreneur constantly exploring and exploiting new ideas. In this way, an all-pervasive narcissism supplants the fanatical attention to detail and obsessive drive to control as the psychological signature of today’s manager.

The control reflex is not, however, extirpated from the managerial mindset. Managing a brand, as Cova et al. (2015) eloquently demonstrate, is far from easy. Seeking to recruit the consumers into the development of the brand is full of dangers and frustrations, something that may lead managers to seek to control consumers ‘as if they were labourers’. Generally, such attempts are nowhere near as effective as attempts to control the Fordist worker through Taylorist regimes. In fact, control as well as resistance in many of today’s organizations assume different modes from their traditional configurations. Organizational theorists have developed a large body of literature on normative, neo-normative and market controls (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Costas and Karreman, 2013; Dale, 2005; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009) supplanting or over-riding traditional bureaucratic controls. Almost equally developed is the literature on resistance to organizational controls (e.g. Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Alvesson and Karreman, 2011; Brannan et al., 2015;

Contu, 2008; Thomas and Hardy, 2011). What is particularly relevant about such resistance is that as organizations are increasingly defined by their brand rather than their operations, they become less vulnerable to traditional forms of worker militancy, like strikes, go-slows and so forth and much more vulnerable to actions, like whistleblowing and boycotts, aimed at undermining or contaminating their brand. Even 'traditional' forms of industrial action, such as picketing and sabotage, become effective when they target an organization's brand rather than its operations, something eloquently demonstrated in Reinecke and Donaghey's (2015) article.

All in all then, with the rise of the consumer, organizations have been undergoing far-reaching transformations, affecting their operations; their structure; their culture; their boundaries; their knowledge-base; their technologies—information and others—the terms of employment they offer their employees; their relations with suppliers, shareholders and other stakeholders; the spatial configuration of their operations and headquarters; the types of control and of resistance they encounter; and many others. The metaphor of the 'glass cage' has been proposed as a replacement of the Weberian iron cage, a cage that entraps people (employees, managers and even customers) not so much through the inflexibility of its formal procedures but through constant exposure to each other's critical gaze and its subtle but irresistible infiltration of the very ways they come to experience themselves (Gabriel, 2005). In contrast to the iron cage's brutal logic of constraint, stifling creativity, fantasy and freedom, today's glass cages allow for more ambivalent and nuanced experiences, highlighting narcissistic display and exhibitionism within ever more subtle forms of surveillance. Glass makes constraints invisible, suggesting openness and transparency and sustaining a powerful illusion of choice and an ironic question-mark as to whether freedom lies inside or outside the glass. Glass also suggests the fragility of today's organization, a fragility that translates into pronounced insecurity and anxiety for those who work in them—the employees.

The employees

So far, the academic study of the implications for employees of the rise of the consumer has been primarily concentrated in the area of front line service work (service work, from now on), that is, where there is a real time interaction between customer and worker. Here, the material presence of the customer within the labour process of the service worker makes the customer difficult to ignore. And yet, the sociology of work and organization studies scholars did largely ignore the customer for many decades. Despite Goffman ([1959] 1971) drawing our attention to the importance of analysing front and back stage forms of behaviour, and despite the brilliantly perceptive analysis of the customer in service work in Chaplin's 1936 film, *Modern Times* (Sayers and Monin, 2009), it was not until Hochschild's 1983 *The Managed Heart* that scholars began to realize that there were large gaps in the existing understandings of service work. Hochschild's book caught a certain zeitgeist, for, in the same decade, management practices began to pay greater attention to the importance of the interaction between service worker and customer, known as 'the moment of truth' for organization—a term that was used without the irony that knowledge of Goffman would have bestowed upon it. Since Hochschild's pioneering focus upon emotional labour, organization studies scholars have developed our understanding of service work by exploring the key role of the customer. Our understanding has been enriched not only through Hochschild's concept of emotional labour but also by (customer-related) focuses upon aesthetic labour (Witz et al., 2003), body work (Wolkowitz, 2006), the role of norms and ideology of customer sovereignty (Korczynski and Ott, 2004) and the role of customers within control systems (Fuller and Smith, 1991). As well as the customer being seen as having relevance as an 'add-on' dimension within the analysis of service work (Korczynski, 2013), some scholars have argued that there are wider theoretical patterns that can be drawn out from an understanding of the role of the customer—for instance, Bryman's

(2004) concept of Disneyization, Korczynski's (2002) ideal-type of the customer-oriented bureaucracy and Ritzer's (1999) concept of 're-enchantment'. Overall, it is clear that these engagements with the role and implications of the customer have served to revolutionize our understanding of the nature of service work.

As we indicated, in the introduction, the rise of the consumer vis-a-vis the organization has key dimensions that spread beyond the actual physical presence of the customer within the labour process. Notably, there has been the rise of the prosumer or working customer, and the rise of customer sovereignty, linked to the extension of marketization, occurring in the name of the collective mass of consumers. This begs the question of the need to consider the implications of the consumer for employees beyond the scope of service work, within the categories of manual work and information/knowledge work. With regard to manual work, there has been some recognition of the increased role of norms of customer sovereignty, particularly with regard to the practices of total quality management, which seek to bring a symbolic presence of the customer within the terrain of the organization (Wilkinson and Willmott, 1995). The wider practices of marketization further push the presence of the collective customer as the market within the sealed walls of the manufacturing unit beyond the symbolic. As Cappelli (1999) puts it, marketization involves bringing the market—the collective customer—within the organization, and stripping away the previous (Fordist) administrative arrangements that had buffered employees from the external market. This weakening of such buffers between production and consumption as internal labour markets and longer term job security is the underpinning of the increasing currency of the concept of 'the precariat' (Standing, 2011). The idea of the precariat centres on the greater insecurity that pertains to direct exposure of workers to market forces. Whether manual workers in the precariat become 'enterprising selves' (Du Gay, 1996) is a moot point, and one that directly connects with the rise of the consumer. In seeking to build bridges between understandings of production and consumption, it becomes easy to lose sight that in some areas, it is the case that the barriers between production and consumption have become stronger rather than weaker. For instance, in the intensified international division of labour in which Taylorist manual labour has been heavily exported to developing countries, there is a new and much wider spatial, social and geographic space between production and consumption (Klein, 2009). Consider the gap between the garment worker within the RanaPlaza complex in Bangladesh, and the consumer in Europe who wears the clothes produced. As Reinecke and Donaghey's paper in this issue shows, however, even here there may be a significant role for the consumer vis-a-vis the manual employee, as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), acting with power based on the possible disruption of marketing and consumption for organizations, step in to seek to regulate terms of employment for these manual workers.

Having considered work where the core labour processes involve people (service work) and materials (manual work), we turn to work where the core labour process involves the manipulation of symbols—information and knowledge work. The longest standing tradition within organization studies here is the literature on professional work. Much professional work involves some direct interaction with customers, usually referred to as clients, or some other label, such as patients, or student, which defines the service-recipient in relation to the relevant body of specialist knowledge, rather than in relation to the market relationship that is implicit in the term, customer. Despite this, the literature on professional work accords only marginal consideration of the role of the customer. The customer is present in the analysis of the project of professional boundary closure where the profession makes claims to act in the interest of the body of customers, and also present in the analysis of socialization into ethics related to customers. But outside of these points, there is largely silence regarding the role of the customer within the theorizing around professional work. Notably, perhaps the most influential scholarship here, Mintzberg's (1993) concept of the

professional bureaucracy, modifies the enclosed model of the bureaucracy only in relation to the processes of the profession, and not in relation to the permeation of the customer within this model. Furthermore, little seems to have changed in terms of the marginalization of the role of the customer within the newer field of the analysis of knowledge work and knowledge management. It is striking that in Hislop's (2013) comprehensive overview of the literature in this field, the customer/client is not accorded an entry as a heading in the index.

Whether this marginalization of the customer was ever appropriate is a question for another day. The key questions now are: whether this is tenable with the rise of the active customer who is able to use websites created by customers to share information with each other, and is thus positioned to challenge the passivity of simply receiving the diagnosis of the profession who alone had access to specialist knowledge; whether this is tenable with the inroads of marketization also into realms of professional work such that the market forces of the collective customer impact more and more directly onto professions and the organization of their work; and whether this is tenable with the rise of the working customers, or prosumers, who collaborate on the Internet directly with organizations, particularly in the areas of marketing and design (Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2015; Cova et al., 2015). The force of these accumulated questions is clearly rhetorical. The time appears ripe for a step-change in the scholarly analysis of professional and knowledge work in terms of a central role for the analysis of the consumer. Such a step-change might turn out to be analogous to the overall revolution in our understanding of service work that has occurred by allowing appropriate space for the customer.

The area of scholarship on knowledge work that has had greatest sensitivity to the role of customers has been that on consultants (Muzio et al., 2007). Perhaps there is much that can be gleaned from this scholarship that can inform a wider understanding of knowledge and professional work. Beyond this, the following areas appear potentially rich avenues to travel down in order to deepen our understanding of knowledge and professional work through an engagement with the rise of the consumer. Within a critical Weberian tradition, there may be space for the joining of the rational-legal authority of organizational hierarchy not only to professional knowledge but also to the figure of the consumer. Such a joining may be able to develop from a conversation between Mintzberg's concept of the professional bureaucracy (or Muzio et al.'s (2007) more recent conceptualizations) and Korczynski's concept of the customer-oriented bureaucracy. A similar journey could be undertaken along the roads laid down by scholarship within the developing area of institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012). This frame would position contemporary knowledge and professional work as informed by three key forms of institutional logic, relating to the bureaucracy, the customer and specialist knowledge. Within some marketing scholarship, there have already been (implicitly colonizing) attempts to reframe organizational analysis through the application of a service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), such that all organizational processes come to be understood in relation to the form of consumption that ultimately occurs. As it stands, much of this literature runs the risk of simply assuming the dominance of one logic—that related to consumer-orientation. As Schreven's paper in this Special Issue clearly indicates, however, to see the organization as simply beholden to the logic of the consumer is dangerously simplistic. Perhaps the key wider sociological question that circles around these issues is whether the greater integration of the consumer within the world of employees represents a move towards a deepening of the social embedding of the organization of paid employment, with the consumer positioned as a social actor, or whether this integration represents a disembedding of paid employment from the social, with the consumer positioned primarily as a (disembedded) economic actor. These are non-trivial issues and ones that only arise by acknowledging the rise of the consumer and seeking to build bridges between our understandings of production and consumption.

The consumers

From the above argumentation, it is already evident that the rise of the consumer cannot be interpreted simply as the rise of consumer sovereignty. Despite the hegemony of consumer capitalism, consumers often find themselves in the clutches of a customer-oriented bureaucracy (Korczyński, 2002). And someone has persuaded this 'sovereign' to work (Dunkel and Kleemann, 2013), specifically, consumption-work (Gabriel and Lang, 2015). In the academic debate on this issue, he or she appears in the gestalt of the *prosumer* (Toffler, 1980), the *digital prosumer* (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), the *working consumer* (Cova and Dalli, 2009) or the *working customer* (Rieder and Voß, 2010). Three different forms of such work can be identified, that differ systematically concerning the role that organizations play; new forms of self-service, new forms of do-it-yourself activities and consumers literally working for others.

Since the 1970s, self-service has become quite familiar, if we think about fast food restaurants, supermarkets and gas stations. However, a multitude of *new self-service activities* has joined these classics of the genre, and the number is growing steadily with the rise of new technologies. The purchase of almost every conceivable product and many services on the Internet has profoundly transformed the nature of trading. Information, consultation and payment are performed by the consumer without the assistance of an employee. Yet, consumer activities cover not only tasks previously performed by salespeople. Mass customization also enables consumers to become involved in the design of products that they later purchase. Examples include t-shirts (<http://www.spreadshirt.com/design-your-own-t-shirt-C59>), sneakers (<http://www.converse.com/landing-design-your-own>), guitars (<https://monikerguitars.com/>) and wallpaper (<http://www.yourownwallpaper.com/>). Self-service is also present in the non-profit sector, for example, in the field of education (a proliferation of 'Massive Open Online Courses', MOOCs).

Beyond the Internet, consumers also rely more and more on self-service technology—specifically vending machines. With the help of these artefacts, they purchase tickets for public transport, withdraw money and administer their bank account (if they don't do so via online-banking), or create their personal photo album at the drugstore. They use automats to buy fast food, borrow books at the library, dispose of returnable bottles, check in at the airport and even to buy small artworks (see, for example, <http://distroboto.com/en/>). Sometimes, the Internet is combined with other technological innovations to offer new forms of self-service. The use of gadgets that allow self-monitoring of health behaviour and the respective outcomes is just one example of such a service that has become quite popular.

A second field of work for consumers is provided by new forms of *do-it yourself activities*. In magazines, blogs and forums in the Internet, consumers inform themselves on advanced do-it-yourself designs and the production of furniture and decoration, photographs and picture editing, upcycling of used products, urban gardening, guerilla knitting and much more. For those who are not overly creative, instructions and complete do-it-yourself kits can be ordered (e.g. on <http://www.etsy.com>). New technologies like three-dimensional (3D) printing enable consumers to develop and produce all kinds of objects that are usually assembled in factories or workshops. In some cases, this trend includes collaborative activities (see below) and is to some degree motivated by resistance against globalization, commodification, ecological destruction and the exploitation of workers in the third world and threshold countries. This trend seems to reflect consumer desires to regain control over production processes as part of a consumer movement which has its roots in the societal changes of the 1960s and 1970s, and in what Gartner and Riessman (1974) described as the *movement of the consumer vanguard* and Toffler (1980) as the *trend towards the prosumer* (a person who consumes what he or she produces).

Self-service and do-it-yourself activities differ insofar as self-service is initiated by organizations wishing to outsource parts of their work to consumers, while do-it-yourself activities are typically initiated by the consumers themselves. Self-service and do-it-yourself activities have in common that what is produced is usually consumed by the prosumer himself or herself.

By contrast, another trend that represents a much more radical change in consumer activities entails *consumer work for others*. One way to organize this is crowdsourcing, which means that a job usually done by an employee is now outsourced to a crowd through an open call in the Internet (Howe, 2006). The crowd not only includes consumers but also other types of people who take an interest in the activity in question. One of the most common examples is product rating by consumers in the field of e-commerce (e.g. book reviews or evaluations of holiday trips). But crowdsourcing is also present in many other fields. Readers become co-creators of news (Deuze et al., 2007). Consumers take part in the development of products (a prominent example is the Fiat 500, Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2015; Kleemann et al., 2008). They also create new products that are later sold by enterprises (open innovation, Von Hippel, 2005; Chesbrough, 2006) and are active in the field of marketing (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008).

It is argued that through their work, consumers create value for organizations and there is debate as to whether and how this could generate surplus value (Arvidsson and Colleoni, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Rieder and Voß, 2013). Usually, however, work in the form of crowdsourcing is unpaid. In some cases, very low wages are provided for micro-tasks outsourced to the crowd (see the example of MTurk (Amazon Mechanical Turk), Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2015). If crowdsourcing is organized in the form of a competition, the ‘winner’ may receive a financial reward or some other prize.

Often, consumers decide deliberately to work, although they will not always refer to it as such (Cova et al., 2015). However, consumers are also contributing to an organization’s business activities without even knowing it, for example, when they visit websites or interact online with respect to products and services. Such forms of ‘the “labor” of consumption’ (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2009: 241) are the object of surveillance through enterprises like Google or Facebook. Information of this kind is stored in enormous customer databases and then enables firms not only to redesign products and services accordingly but also to identify brands that suit specific groups of customers (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2012). These practices not only provoke criticism with respect to violations of privacy, but it is also argued that consumers should receive so-called nanopayments for the bits and pieces of information they provide through their daily activities (Lanier, 2014).

Another way in which consumer work for others is organized is through collaborative activities. Early examples include open source projects like Linux and open content projects like Wikipedia. A more recent development is the maker movement which makes use of the new technological developments mentioned above (Hatch, 2013). On online platforms like <http://makerlab.com>, consumers, users and hackers post projects which they want to develop in cooperation with others (e.g. non-authorized apps for the iPhone). The maker movement also provides so-called makerspace or hackerspace (rooms with equipment like 3D printers or laser cutters, TechShop being a prominent example) that enables users to work on innovations and produce prototypes. In contrast to crowdsourcing, collaborative activities are self-organized by those who work for them. However, the dividing line between such grass root activities and open innovation, initiated by profit-oriented enterprises, is not always easy to draw.

With consumption-work (Gabriel and Lang, 2015), consumers in many cases become linked to the organization in a new manner—as informal or quasi employees (Rieder and Voß, 2010; Ritzer, 1983; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). However, consumers work not just for one organization, but for many, and these links are volatile and quite heterogeneous. There are examples like TripAdvisor (Hanekop and Wittke, 2013), for whose business model consumer contributions are essential. A

contrasting example is the case of Harry Potter, with customers being criminalized for writing fan fiction and thus actively barred from becoming producers (Schreven, 2015). Accordingly, whereas a working consumer can be actively ‘thrown out’ of one organization, he or she can act as the equivalent of a day labourer for another and be part of the ‘permanent staff’ for third.

There are also substantial differences in the scope of consumer activities in this context. While open innovation may offer the chance to develop new ideas and gain recognition, other tasks assigned to consumers offer minimal room for creativity. Bauer and Gegenhuber (2015) provide evidence of this scenario in describing the development of the Fiat 500. Consumers were invited to take part in the design of a new model, although their contributions were limited to some marginal aspects. Nonetheless, the project was a great marketing success.

Certainly, such processes are not devoid of risk, if enterprises keep consumers on too short a leash. This becomes evident from the contribution of Cova et al. (2015) on the case of Alfa Romeo (also owned by the Fiat group) and the community of the Alfisti. The authors show that what is intended as the co-creation of value may in extreme cases develop into a co-destruction of value, if consumers do not accept and perform the role assigned to them by the company. Furthermore, as mentioned above, consumers can also act against the interest of the organization by showing solidarity with employees (such sentiments may be fuelled by their new role as working consumers) and mobilizing for labour rights (Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015). Consumer movements can become quite powerful, not only because consumers can decide freely for or against the purchase of a commodity. The consumer has always been largely unmanageable (Gabriel and Lang, 2015). What is more, the Internet has become a mighty tool in the hands of consumers, given that criticism of organizations can spread with alarming speed. A recent example is Yahoo’s platform for photography, Flickr. In November 2014, Yahoo decided to sell photos of their Flickr-users without allowing the photographers to share in the earnings. After massive protests, however, Yahoo revised their decision 1 month later (Hernandez, 2014). On the other hand, against truly large enterprises, and especially those with a monopoly, consumers may find themselves unable to influence important decisions. Moreover, not all consumers have the time, the financial resources, the skills or the energy to protect their interests.

Even if it is difficult to make sweeping statements on the consequences of such complex developments, it is clear that consumers today differ considerably from those of Fordist capitalism. Today’s consumers are the figures who put traditional employees under pressure in new ways. They represent the market forces to which employees in consumer capitalism are exposed particularly directly today. But these consumers also compete with employees as workers, and generally for free. And finally, lest it be forgotten, workers are consumers in their own right, swapping hats continuously and frequently wearing two hats at the same time.

The arguments presented in this introduction and those taken up in the articles which follow suggest that the meaning of ‘organization’ must be overhauled, something that readers of this journal will not need reminding. This overhaul will bring the work done by scholars of organization ever closer to work done by their peers in consumer studies and marketing as well as numerous other social sciences. Current disciplinary distinctions will become increasingly untenable, fuzzy and permeable. How the academic institutions of research and teaching will respond to this remains an open question.

References

- Ackroyd, S. and Thompson, P. (1999) *Organizational Misbehaviour*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. (2001) ‘Knowledge Work: Ambiguity, Image and Identity’, *Human Relations* 54: 863–86.
- Alvesson, M. and Karreman, D. (2011) ‘Decolonializing Discourse: Critical Reflections on Organizational Discourse Analysis’, *Human Relations* 64: 1121–46.

- Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (2002) 'Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual', *Journal of Management Studies* 39: 619–44.
- Arvidsson, A. and Colleoni, E. (2012) 'Value in Informational Capitalism and on the Internet', *The Information Society* 28(3): 135–50.
- Bauer, R. M. and Gegenhuber, T. (2015) 'Crowdsourcing: Global Search and the Twisted Roles of Consumers and Producers', *Organization* 22(5): 661–81.
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001) 'Uses and disuses of urban space', in B. Czarniawska and R. Solli (eds) *Organizing Metropolitan Space and Discourse*, pp. 15–32. Malmo: Liber Ekonomi.
- Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E. and Priola, V. (2015) 'Brands at Work: The Search for Meaning in Mundane Work', *Organization Studies* 36: 29–53.
- Bryman, A. (2004) *The Disneyization of Society*. London: Sage.
- Cappelli, P. (1999) *The New Deal at Work: Managing the Market-Driven Workforce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Chesbrough, H. W. (2006) *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology*. Boston, MA: HarvardBusinessSchool Press.
- Clegg, S. (1990) *Modern Organizations: Organization Studies in the Postmodern World*. London: Sage.
- Contu, A. (2008) 'Decaf Resistance—On Misbehavior, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces', *Management Communication Quarterly* 21: 364–79.
- Costas, J. and Karreman, D. (2013) 'Conscience as Control—Managing Employees through CSR', *Organization* 20: 394–415.
- Cova, B. and Dalli, D. (2009) 'Working Consumers: The Next Step in Marketing Theory?' *Marketing Theory* 9: 315–39.
- Cova, B., Pace, S. and Skälén, P. (2015) 'Marketing with Working Consumers: The Case of a Carmaker and its Brand Community', *Organization* 22(5): 682–701.
- Dale, K. (2005) 'Building a Social Materiality: Spatial and Embodied Politics in Organizational Control', *Organization* 12: 649–78.
- Davis, G. F. (2009) 'The Rise and Fall of Finance and the End of the Society of Organizations', *Academy of Management Perspectives* 23: 27–44.
- Davis, G. F. (2013) 'After the Corporation', *Politics & Society* 41: 283–308.
- Deal, T. E. and Kennedy, A. A. (1982) *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Denegri-Knott, J. and Zwick, D. (2012) 'Tracking Prosumption Work on eBay: Reproduction of Desire and the Challenge of Slow Re-McDonaldization', *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(4): 439–58.
- Deuze, M., Bruns, A. and Neuberger, C. (2007) 'Preparing for an Age of Participatory News', *Journalism Practice* 1(3): 322–38.
- Du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London: Sage.
- Dunkel, W. and Kleemann, F. (2013) 'Customers in Service Relationships', in W. Dunkel and F. Kleemann (eds) *Customers at Work: New Perspectives on Interactive Service Work*, pp. 3–16. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fineman, S. and Sturdy, A. (1999) 'The Emotions of Control: A Qualitative Exploration of Environmental Regulation', *Human Relations* 52: 631–63.
- Fleming, P. and Sturdy, A. (2009) "'Just Be Yourself!": Towards Neo-Normative Control in Organizations?', *Employee Relations* 31: 569–83.
- Fontenelle, I. A. (2015) 'Organisations as producers of consumers', *Organization* 22(5): 644–60.
- Fotaki, M. (2006) 'Choice is Yours: A Psychodynamic Exploration of Health Policy Making and its Consequences for the English National Health Service', *Human Relations* 59: 1711–44.
- Fuller, L. and Smith, V. (1991) 'Consumers' Reports: Management by Customers in a Changing Economy', *Work, Employment and Society* 5(1): 1–16.
- Fuchs, C. (2014) 'Digital Prosumption Labour on Social Media in the Context of the Capitalist Regime of Time', *Time & Society* 23(1): 97–123.

- Gabriel, Y. (2005) 'Glass Cages and GlassPalaces: Images of Organization in Image-Conscious Times', *Organization* 12(1): 9–27.
- Gabriel, Y. (2012) 'Under New Management: Subjects, Objects and Hubris, New and Old', *Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie* 13: 241–64.
- Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. (2015) *The Unmanageable Consumer*. London: Sage.
- Garland, J., Huisig, R. and Struben, J. (2013) 'What If Technology Worked in Harmony with Nature? Imagining Climate Change through Prius Advertisements', *Organization* 20: 679–704.
- Gartner, A. and Riessman, F. (1974) *The Service Society and the Consumer Vanguard*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goffman, E. ([1959] 1971) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Hancock, P. and Tyler, M. (2000) 'The Look of Love: Gender and the Organization of Aesthetics', in J. Hassard, R. Holliday and H. Willmott (eds) *Body and Organization*, pp. 108–29. London: Sage.
- Hanekop, H. and Wittke, V. (2013) 'Customers Working for Customers: Collaborative Web 2.0 Services', in W. Dunkel and F. Kleemann (eds) *Customers at Work: New Perspectives on Interactive Service Work*, pp. 197–222. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hatch, M. (2013) *The Maker Movement Manifesto: Rules for Innovation in the New World of Crafters, Hackers, and Tinkerers*. London: MacGraw Hill.
- Hernandez, B. (2014) 'An Update on Flickr Wall Art', in Flickr blog, Retrieved February 2, 2015, from <http://blog.flickr.net/2014/12/18/an-update-on-flickr-wall-art/>
- Hislop, D. (2013) *Knowledge Management in Organizations: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: OxfordUniversity Press.
- Howe, J. (2006) 'The Rise of Crowdsourcing', *Wired*, June. Retrieved January 30, 2015, from <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html>
- Johnston, A. (2013) 'Branded Lives: The Production and Consumption of Meaning at Work', *Organization* 20: 635–41.
- Kanter, R. M. (1983) *The Change Masters*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- Kleemann, F., Voß, G. G. and Rieder, K. (2008) 'Un(der)paid Innovators: The Commercial Utilization of Consumer Work through Crowdsourcing', *Science, Technology & Innovation Studies* 4(1), Retrieved October 10, 2008, from <http://www.sti-studies.de>
- Klein, N. (2009) *No Logo*. New York: Macmillan.
- Korczynski, M. (2002) *Human Resource Management in Service Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Korczynski, M. (2013) 'The Customer in the Sociology of Work: Different Ways of Going beyond the Employer-Worker Dyad', *Work, Employment and Society* 27(6): NP1–P7.
- Korczynski, M. and Ott, U. (2004) 'When Production and Consumption Meet: Cultural Contradictions and the Enchanting Myth of Customer Sovereignty', *Journal of Management Studies* 41(4): 575–99.
- Korczynski, M., Shire, K., Frenkel, S., et al. (2000) 'Service Work and Consumer Capitalism', *Work, Employment and Society* 14: 669–87.
- Lanier, J. (2014) *Who Owns the Future*. (2nd edn) London: Penguin Books.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981) *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- Mintzberg, H. (1993) *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*. London: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Muhr, S. L. and Rehn, A. (2014) 'Branding Atrocity: Narrating Dark Sides and Managing Organizational Image', *Organization Studies* 35: 209–31.
- Muzio, D., Ackroyd, S. and Chanlat, J. (eds) (2007) *Redirections in the Study of Expert Labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paulsen, R. (2014) *Empty Labor: Idleness and Workplace Resistance*. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversity Press.
- Peters, T. S. (1992) *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Peters, T. S. and Waterman, R. H. (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Prahalad, C. K. and Ramaswamy, V. (2004) 'Co-Creating Unique Value with Customers', *Strategy & Leadership* 32(3): 4–9.

- Reinecke, J. and Donaghey, J. (2015) 'After Rana Plaza: Building Coalitional Power for Labour Rights between Unions and (Consumption-Based) Social Movement Organisations', *Organization* 22(5): 720–40.
- Rieder, K. and Voß, G. G. (2010) 'The Working Customer—An Emerging New Type of Consumer', *Psychology of Everyday Activity* 3(2): 2–10.
- Rieder, K. and Voß, G. G. (2013) 'The Working Customer—A Fundamental Change in Service Work', in W. Dunkel and F. Kleemann (eds) *Customers at Work: New Perspectives on Interactive Service Work*, pp. 177–96. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ritzer, G. (1983) 'The McDonaldization of Society', *Journal of American Culture* 6(1): 100–7.
- Ritzer, G. (1999) *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Ritzer, G. and Jurgenson, N. (2010) 'Production, Consumption, Prosumption. The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital "prosumer"', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10(1): 13–36.
- Ritzer, G., Dean, P. and Jurgenson, N. (2012) 'The Coming of Age of the Prosumer Introduction', *American Behavioral Scientist* 56: 379–98.
- Sayers, J. and Monin, N. (2009) 'Chaplin's Modern Times: Service Work, Authenticity and Nonsense at the Red Moon Café', in M. Korczynski and C. MacDonald (eds) *Service Work: Critical Perspectives*, pp. 13–30. New York: Routledge.
- Schreven, S. (2015) 'On the Case of the Missing Detail and the Twisted Truth about Hard Work', *Organization* 22(5): 702–19.
- Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Stein, M. (2007) 'Toxicity and the Unconscious Experience of the Body at the Employee-Customer Interface', *Organization Studies* 28: 1223–41.
- Sturdy, A., Grugulis, I. and Willmott, H. (2001) *Customer Service: Empowerment and Entrapment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Thomas, R. and Hardy, C. (2011) 'Reframing Resistance to Organizational Change', *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 27: 322–31.
- Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W. and Lounsbury, M. (2012) *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process*. Oxford: OxfordUniversity Press.
- Toffler, A. (1980) *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2008) 'Service-Dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 36(1): 1–10.
- Von Hippel, E. (2005) *Democratizing Innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Warhurst, C., Nickson, D., Witz, A., et al. (2000) 'Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the "new" Glasgow', *Service Industries Journal* 20: 1–18.
- Wilkinson, A. J. and Willmott, H. (1995) *Making Quality Critical: New Perspectives on Organizational Change*. London: Routledge.
- Willmott, H. (2010) 'Creating "value" beyond the Point of Production: Branding, Financialization and Market Capitalization', *Organization* 17: 517–42.
- Witz, A., Warhurst, C. and Nickson, D. (2003) 'The Labour of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Organization', *Organization* 10(1): 33–54.
- Wolkowitz, C. (2006) *Bodies at Work*. London: Sage.
- Zwick, D., Bonsu, S. K. and Darmody, A. (2008) 'Putting Consumers to Work. "Co-creation" and New Marketing Govern-Mentality', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8(2): 163–96.
- Zwick, D. and Denegri Knott, J. (2009) 'Manufacturing Customers. The Database as New Means of production', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9(2): 221–47.

Author biographies

Yiannis Gabriel is a Professor of Organizational Theory at Bath University, UK. Yiannis is known for his work into organizational storytelling and narratives, leadership, management learning, psychoanalytic studies of work and the culture and politics of contemporary consumption. He is Senior Editor of *Organization Studies* and has been Editor of *Management Learning* and Associate Editor of *Human Relations*.

Marek Korczynski is a Professor of Sociology of Work at Nottingham University, UK. He received his PhD from Warwick University. He has been a Visiting Professor at Karlstad University, Sweden. His research focuses upon the sociology of service work, social theory and work, ethnographic studies of the workplace and music and work.

Kerstin Rieder is a Professor for Health Sciences and Social Sciences at Aalen University, Department Health Care Management, Germany. Prior to this, she was a professor at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland. Her research focuses on the psychology and sociology of interactive service work, occupational health and the working customer.