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**Article**

## Editorial: Epistemic respect and intellectual humility: foundations for transformative organizational research

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# Editorial: Epistemic respect and intellectual humility: foundations for transformative organizational research

In an era marked by unprecedented technological transformation, evolving work arrangements and heightened awareness of equity and inclusion in organizational contexts, the *Organization Management Journal* finds itself at a critical juncture. The articles featured in this issue, including an examination of affect and attitudes in the gig economy, inclusion strategies for autistic adults in the workplace, and innovative pedagogical approaches to teaching motivation theories, collectively point toward a fundamental need for what we term epistemic respect and intellectual humility in organizational research and management practice.

The convergence of these diverse yet interconnected themes presents an opportunity for us to reflect on how we, as scholars and practitioners, approach knowledge creation, validation and application in organizational settings. This editorial argues that epistemic respect and intellectual humility are not merely ethical considerations but foundational principles that can enhance the validity, relevance and transformative potential of our research endeavors.

## The imperative of our times

The contemporary organizational landscape presents challenges that demand more than traditional research approaches can provide. As Philip, Kosmidou, & Rosen's (2025) meta-analysis reveals, gig economy workers experience complex emotional and attitudinal responses that challenge conventional employment frameworks. Their findings underscore the inadequacy of applying traditional organizational theories to emerging work arrangements without acknowledging the unique epistemological perspectives that gig workers bring to their experiences.

Similarly, Villegas & Ellestad's (2025) examination of workplace inclusion for autistic adults highlights how organizational systems often fail to recognize and value neurodivergent ways of knowing and working. Their work on mitigating the Golem effect, the phenomenon where low expectations lead to decreased performance, demonstrates how epistemic biases in organizational settings can systematically marginalize valuable perspectives and capabilities.

These research contributions exemplify what we call the *epistemic crisis* in organizational studies: our field's persistent tendency to privilege certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others, often unconsciously perpetuating power imbalances that limit our understanding of complex organizational phenomena (Samuelson & Church, 2015).

## Defining epistemic respect and intellectual humility

Epistemic respect refers to the recognition and valuing of diverse ways of knowing and knowledge systems within organizational contexts (Roberts & Wood, 2007). It acknowledges that research participants, whether gig workers, neurodivergent employees or students in innovative pedagogical settings, are knowledge holders whose perspectives constitute legitimate forms of understanding, regardless of their alignment with dominant theoretical frameworks.



Intellectual humility, as conceptualized in virtue epistemology, encompasses an attitude of openness, receptivity and attentive engagement with ideas, positions and problems different from one's own (Chadwick, 2023). In organizational research contexts, it manifests as a willingness to suspend judgment, to extend good faith to participants' accounts even when they challenge researchers' preconceptions, and to recognize the limitations of our own knowledge positions (Yawson, 2021).

Together, these concepts form a foundation for an approach to organizational research that moves beyond token inclusion of diverse voices toward genuine epistemic justice and collaborative knowledge construction. This approach is particularly crucial given the Academy of Management's growing emphasis on sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion, themes that demand fundamental shifts in how we conceptualize knowledge production (Gruber, 2023).

### **The transformative potential of epistemic humility**

Recent psychological research demonstrates that intellectual humility involves acknowledging the limitations of one's knowledge and that one's beliefs might be incorrect (Pohlhaus, 2012). This meta-cognitive ability to recognize the limitations of our beliefs and knowledge becomes particularly relevant when examining the three studies featured in this issue.

Consider how Philip et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers reveals the psychological complexity of gig work experiences. Traditional organizational behavior theories, developed primarily within conventional employment relationships, may inadequately capture the nuanced realities of workers who navigate multiple platforms, face constant performance evaluation and lack traditional job security. An approach grounded in intellectual humility would recognize these theoretical limitations and remain open to alternative frameworks that emerge from workers' lived experiences (Porter et al., 2022).

The psychological research on intellectual humility suggests that individuals demonstrating this trait show greater openness to opposing perspectives, enhanced interpersonal relationships and improved decision-making capabilities (Porter et al., 2022). When translated to organizational research contexts, these benefits manifest as:

- Enhanced validity through diverse perspectives: Research that incorporates intellectual humility produces more accurate representations of organizational phenomena by avoiding the confirmation bias that often shapes data collection and interpretation (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016).
- Improved relevance for practice: By remaining open to practitioners' knowledge and experience, research becomes more applicable to real organizational challenges (Kubiak, 2021).
- Stronger collaborative relationships: Intellectual humility fosters trust and respect in researcher-participant relationships, leading to richer data and more sustainable research partnerships (Leary et al., 2017).

### **Epistemic respect in practice: lessons from current research**

The three articles in this issue provide compelling examples of how epistemic respect can enhance organizational research, even when not explicitly acknowledged as such.

#### *Recognizing emotional complexity in the gig economy*

Philip et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis demonstrates epistemic respect by taking seriously the affective experiences of gig workers rather than reducing them to simple economic actors.

Their systematic analysis of affect and attitudes acknowledges that gig workers possess unique insights into the emotional labor required in platform-mediated work arrangements. Rather than imposing traditional employee satisfaction frameworks, their research allows the complexity of gig work experiences to emerge through careful attention to emotional and attitudinal variations.

Recent field research has revealed that gig workers face unique stressors related to constant performance monitoring, rating systems and job insecurity that traditional employees rarely experience (Lewis, 2025). The psychological impact of negative feedback lingers longer for gig workers, affecting both their well-being and subsequent performance (Lewis, 2025). Philip et al. (2025) research demonstrates how epistemic respect, taking seriously workers' subjective experiences of their work conditions, leads to a more accurate understanding of contemporary work arrangements.

#### *Honoring neurodivergent ways of knowing*

Villegas & Ellestad's (2025) work on supporting autistic adults in the workplace exemplifies epistemic respect through its recognition that neurodivergent individuals possess valuable and distinct ways of processing information, solving problems and contributing to organizational goals. Their examination of the Golem effect reveals how organizational biases about neurotypicality can create self-fulfilling prophecies that diminish performance and inclusion. This research embodies intellectual humility by challenging conventional assumptions about optimal work styles and communication patterns. Rather than viewing neurodivergent approaches as deficiencies to be accommodated, their framework recognizes them as alternative forms of expertise that can enhance organizational capabilities when properly supported and valued.

#### *Transforming pedagogical authority*

Howe & Soderberg (2025) innovative "court of theories" exercise demonstrates both epistemic respect and intellectual humility in educational contexts. By positioning students as capable of engaging critically with motivation theories through debate and argumentation, they recognize student perspectives as valuable contributions to knowledge construction rather than mere receptacles for established wisdom (Porter, Schumann, Selmeczy, & Trzesniewski, 2020). Their pedagogical innovation reflects intellectual humility by acknowledging that learning emerges through dialogue and contestation rather than unidirectional knowledge transmission. This approach aligns with broader trends in management education toward more participatory and experiential learning methods that honor diverse learning styles and ways of knowing.

#### **Methodological transformation through epistemic ethics**

Implementing epistemic respect and intellectual humility in organizational research necessitates fundamental methodological adaptations that simultaneously strengthen both scientific rigor and ethical integrity. These transformations represent not merely procedural adjustments but paradigmatic shifts in how we conceptualize knowledge creation, validation, and application within organizational contexts.

The foundation of this methodological transformation lies in collaborative research design, where the traditional monopoly of researchers over question formulation and methodological choices gives way to genuine stakeholder engagement in research conceptualization (Lundy & Ladd, 2020; Yawson, 2021). This collaborative approach recognizes that those experiencing organizational phenomena possess unique insights that can fundamentally reshape our understanding of complex workplace dynamics. When gig

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workers participate in defining what constitutes meaningful work experiences, they bring lived expertise that challenges academic assumptions about employment relationships. Similarly, when autistic employees contribute to designing inclusion interventions, their participation ensures that solutions address actual needs rather than organizational preconceptions about neurodiversity. This collaborative design process creates conditions for research that is both more valid and more relevant to those it seeks to understand.

Reflexive analysis emerges as another crucial methodological adaptation, requiring systematic examination of how researchers' positioning, assumptions, and institutional contexts shape their approach to inquiry. Intellectual humility demands that we make visible the ways our own perspectives influence what we notice, how we interpret findings and what questions we prioritize (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). This involves implementing structured practices such as regular reflexive journaling, peer dialogue sessions and participant feedback mechanisms on preliminary interpretations (Yawson, Johnson-Kanda, & Yarney, 2025). The objective is not to eliminate researcher influence, an impossible goal, but to render it transparent and subject to critical examination. This reflexive stance transforms potential sources of bias into opportunities for deeper understanding by acknowledging the situated nature of all knowledge claims.

The principle of polyvocal representation challenges the conventional academic tendency toward singular, authoritative interpretations by embracing multiple perspectives and acknowledging areas of genuine disagreement or uncertainty (Arnold & Brennan, 2013). This approach recognizes that complex organizational phenomena may legitimately generate diverse interpretations that resist reduction to false consensus. Rather than viewing disagreement as a methodological failure, polyvocal representation treats it as evidence of the richness and complexity of organizational life (Raju, 2009). This methodological stance enhances validity by capturing nuances that might be lost in attempts to impose artificial coherence on inherently complex social phenomena.

Participatory dissemination extends epistemic respect into the communication phase of research, transforming how findings are shared and with whom. This involves creating multiple formats accessible to different audiences, involving participants in decisions about representation, and ensuring that research benefits flow back to participating communities rather than serving exclusively academic purposes (McDavitt et al., 2016). Such approaches challenge the traditional academic model of knowledge extraction by creating reciprocal relationships where research participants become partners in knowledge creation and dissemination.

Addressing legitimate concerns about scientific rigor, recent scholarship demonstrates that these methodologically innovative approaches often enhance rather than compromise validity by incorporating diverse perspectives that challenge researcher biases and expand analytical frameworks (Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018). The crucial distinction lies between methodological relativism, which abandons standards for evidence and argumentation, and epistemic pluralism, which maintains rigorous standards while recognizing that multiple valid perspectives may exist on complex organizational phenomena. This recognition enhances scientific quality by encouraging more comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

Furthermore, intellectual humility does not require abandoning well-supported theories or empirical findings. Instead, it involves holding all knowledge claims as provisional and open to revision based on new evidence and alternative perspectives. This stance aligns with the finest traditions of scientific inquiry while acknowledging its inherently social and collaborative nature. Through these methodological adaptations, organizational researchers can produce knowledge that is simultaneously more rigorous, more ethical and more useful for addressing the complex challenges facing contemporary organizations.

### **Implications for editorial practice**

As Editors-in-Chief of the *Organization Management Journal*, we are committed to fostering research that embodies these principles while maintaining the highest standards of scholarly rigor. This commitment manifests in several editorial practices:

#### *Inclusive review processes*

We actively seek reviewers who bring diverse perspectives and methodological expertise to the evaluation of manuscripts. This includes scholars from different cultural backgrounds, career stages and epistemological orientations, as well as practitioners who can assess research relevance and applicability.

#### *Recognition of collaborative research*

The journal increasingly values research that demonstrates genuine collaboration between researchers and practitioners, communities or other stakeholders. We recognize that such research often requires longer timelines and different evaluation criteria than traditional academic studies.

#### *Methodological pluralism*

We encourage submissions that employ diverse methodological approaches, including participatory methods, mixed-methods designs and innovative approaches that bridge academic and practitioner knowledge. The goal is not methodological relativism but recognition that complex organizational phenomena may require multiple investigative approaches.

#### *Attention to impact and application*

Consistent with the *Organization Management Journal's* mission to bridge theory and practice, we prioritize research that demonstrates clear relevance for organizational challenges while meeting rigorous scholarly standards. This includes attention to how research findings might be applied by diverse organizational stakeholders.

### **Future directions**

The principles of epistemic respect and intellectual humility point toward several promising directions for organizational research:

#### *Cross-cultural and global perspectives*

As organizations become increasingly global, research must grapple with diverse cultural approaches to knowledge, authority, and workplace relationships. Epistemic respect demands that we move beyond Western-centric theories to incorporate indigenous and non-Western ways of understanding organizational phenomena.

#### *Technology and human–AI collaboration*

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and machine learning creates new questions about human expertise, decision-making authority and the nature of knowledge work. Research in this area requires intellectual humility about the limitations of current theories and openness to new frameworks that can guide human–AI collaboration ([Goryunova & Yawson, 2025](#)).

### *Sustainability and stakeholder capitalism*

The growing emphasis on organizational sustainability and stakeholder value requires research approaches that can incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives and ways of understanding organizational impact. This involves moving beyond shareholder-centric frameworks to embrace more complex and contested notions of organizational purpose.

### *Crisis and resilience*

Recent global crises have highlighted the importance of organizational adaptability and the limitations of predictive theories. Research on organizational resilience requires intellectual humility about uncertainty and epistemic respect for the tacit knowledge that enables organizations to navigate unprecedented challenges.

### *The role of management education*

The pedagogical innovation demonstrated by [Howe & Soderberg \(2025\)](#) “Court of Theories” exercise points toward broader implications for management education. Developing future managers who embody epistemic respect and intellectual humility requires educational approaches that ([Porter et al., 2020](#)):

- model collaborative inquiry by positioning students as co-investigators rather than passive recipients of established knowledge;
- encourage critical engagement with theories and frameworks rather than uncritical acceptance;
- develop reflexive capabilities for examining one’s own assumptions and biases;
- foster appreciation for diverse perspectives and ways of knowing; and
- emphasize the provisional nature of knowledge claims while maintaining commitment to evidence-based reasoning.

These educational goals align with broader calls for management education that prepares students for the complex, uncertain and rapidly changing organizational environments they will encounter in their careers.

### *Organizational practice implications*

The principles discussed in this editorial extend beyond research to organizational practice itself. Leaders who embody epistemic respect and intellectual humility are better positioned to:

- Navigate diverse workforces by recognizing and valuing different approaches to work and problem-solving.
- Foster innovation by remaining open to ideas that challenge conventional wisdom.
- Build inclusive cultures that leverage rather than suppress diverse perspectives and capabilities.
- Adapt to change by acknowledging the limitations of existing approaches and remaining open to learning.
- Make better decisions by incorporating diverse sources of expertise and recognizing uncertainty.

The research on autistic adults in the workplace, for example, demonstrates how organizational leaders' epistemic humility about neurotypical assumptions can unlock valuable capabilities and enhance overall performance (Villegas & Ellestad, 2025).

#### *A call for transformation*

The articles featured in this issue collectively demonstrate the transformative potential of research that embodies epistemic respect and intellectual humility. Whether examining the emotional complexity of gig work, developing inclusive strategies for neurodivergent employees, or innovating pedagogical approaches to theory engagement, these studies point toward a more collaborative, inclusive and rigorous approach to organizational research.

This transformation is not merely an ethical imperative but a practical necessity. The complex challenges facing contemporary organizations, from technological disruption to climate change to workforce diversification, require knowledge and solutions that transcend the boundaries of traditional disciplinary and cultural perspectives. Research that embodies epistemic respect and intellectual humility is better positioned to generate the insights and innovations needed to address these challenges effectively.

#### **Conclusion**

As we move forward with Volume 22.3 of the *Organization Management Journal*, we invite authors, reviewers, and readers to embrace the principles of epistemic respect and intellectual humility in their scholarly work. This involves:

- recognizing the knowledge and expertise that diverse organizational stakeholders bring to research questions;
- maintaining openness to perspectives that challenge established theories and frameworks;
- developing collaborative approaches to research design, data collection and analysis;
- creating inclusive dissemination strategies that reach and benefit diverse audiences; and
- fostering reflexive practices that examine how our own positioning shapes research processes and outcomes.

The studies in this issue provide excellent examples of how these principles can enhance both the rigor and relevance of organizational research. Philip et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis demonstrates the value of taking seriously the complex emotional experiences of gig workers. Villegas & Ellestad's (2025) inclusion framework shows how recognizing neurodivergent capabilities can enhance organizational effectiveness. Howe & Soderberg's (2025) pedagogical innovation illustrates how epistemic humility can transform learning environments. Together, these contributions point toward a vision of organizational research that is more collaborative, inclusive and ultimately more capable of addressing the complex challenges facing contemporary organizations. Embracing epistemic respect and intellectual humility, we can fulfill the *Organization Management Journal's* mission to bridge theory and practice while advancing more equitable and effective approaches to organizational management.

The future of organizational research lies not in choosing between rigor and inclusion, between theoretical sophistication and practical relevance, but in transcending these false dichotomies through approaches that recognize the inherent value of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing. This is both our opportunity and our responsibility as scholars

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committed to advancing understanding that serves human flourishing in organizational contexts.

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