Going beyond the Gender Binary in Organisations: A Posthuman Analysis of Human/Non-Human Relations

Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)

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The Open University

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Project Summary

While a multiplicity of genders is recognised in various Indigenous traditions (Driskill, 2010; Kuwara, 2014), this recognition remains contested in cultures that are rooted in a binary perspective founded on the distinction in two biological sexes. The management and organisation studies literature has documented how in such cis-normative societies, which assume 'individual traits and social roles that correspond to binary gender orientations specified at birth' (Anderson, 2024: 1), those who do not align with these presuppositions are confronted with discrimination and inequality on the labour market and in the workplace (Cancela, Stutterheim and Uitdewilligen, 2025; Ciprikis, Cassells and Berrill, 2020; O'Shea, 2020). Authors have explored transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) workers' coping mechanisms and identity work strategies (Hadjisolomou, 2021; Mizock and Hopwood, 2018; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016), the role of perceptions

and behaviours of managers and co-workers (Dietert and Dentice, 2009; Ruggs et al., 2015; Priola et al., 2018, 2014), and the (in)effectiveness of organisational diversity management and support mechanisms (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016; Primecz and Pelyhe, 2024). In doing so, they have mostly provided insights into the functioning of cis-normative structures of oppression, while fewer studies have empirically identified successful approaches to tackle these mechanisms of disadvantage.

The scholarly community has reflected upon the way in which this body of work favours certain perspectives over others. For example, authors have previously pointed out that most studies have been conducted in cis-normative workplace environments in the US and the UK (Hennekam and Beauregard, 2025), while considerably less attention has been paid to perspectives from the Global South and to non-binary gender work settings (Ashraf, Pianezzi and Awan, 2023). Moreover, studies have often explored workers' experiences from a single identity lens. Authors that have highlighted the role of intersectionality in understanding cis-normative power dynamics (Greene and Ervin, 2024; Humbert et al., 2025; Suárez et al., 2022) emphasize the need for more nuanced insight into these overlapping structures of disadvantage.

A characteristic of this literature that has received less attention, however, is the way in which authors have often deployed a human-centric perspective (see, for example, Hennekam and Beauregard, 2025; Köllen and Rumens, 2022). Such an approach is built on a humanist tradition in which a binary and hierarchical opposition between humans and non-humans is upheld (MacCormack, 2016). This is problematic, considering that in Western philosophical tradition, 'the

human is always primarily male' (MacCormack, 2016, p. 113), and that those who do not comply with specific social gender norms are not recognised as human (Butler, 2004).

A posthuman perspective, which 'challenges the centrality of the human, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans, technology, animals, and the environment while rethinking what it means to be human' (Hebron et al., 2025, p. 3), might be a more fruitful approach to expand this literature, as it creates opportunities to envision alternative structures of power relations. Including entities such as objects, technologies, animals and other non-human living beings in the analysis of power dynamics (Couture, Nicolini and Baeriswyl, 2025) allows to question dualisms and invites relational and non-hierarchical thinking. The posthuman understanding that not only humans but also non-humans have agency (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018; Benozzo et al., 2024) challenges human exceptionalism. It suits a world characterised by developments such as the climate emergency (Jarzabkowski and Pinch, 2013; Labatut, 2023), the rise of AI (Charlwood and Guenole, 2022) and the decolonialisation of scholarship involving the questioning of the separation between humans and non-humans in Western ontology (Banerjee, Sartoris and Valtonen, 2025).

Project Aim

This project intends to make various contributions to the management and organisation studies literature. It aims to:

- Empirically identify previously overlooked power relations and alternative relationalities to go beyond the binaries of male/female and human/non-human entities in organisations or forms of organising.
- Theoretically broaden our understanding of how multidirectional power relations between human/non-human entanglements generate effects on the gender binary within and beyond organisations or forms of organising.
- Develop reflexive and transformative approaches to knowledge production that help to further 'destabilize the white heteromasculine and colonial heritage of the Academy' (Van Amsterdam et al., 2023; p. 1432), expanding the tradition of researching and writing differently by challenging the centrality of humans in extant scholarship.
- Possible topics to explore may include, but are not limited to:
- Alternative forms of organising beyond binary male/female, human/non-human, and living/non-living entities in Indigenous-led organisations
- The role of human/animal relations in disrupting or reinforcing the gender binary in organizations and processes of organising
- Human/technology entanglements involving TGNC knowledge workers in the AI era
- Forms of eco- and TGNC-activism disrupting human/nature and male/female binaries
- Studies adopting an intersectional lens are welcomed, and especially students belonging to at least one social identity group to be studied are encouraged to submit their project proposal.

Methodology

As traditional methodological tools have been developed and deployed based on human-centred assumptions (Couture, Nicolini and Baerswyl, 2025), the project would adopt an alternative approach that is aligned with the post-human principles of decentring human perspectives and capturing co-constituted relationalities between materialities, non-humans and humans. While extant scholarship has often relied on interviews (Hennekam and Beauregard, 2025), post-humanist scholars adopt a range of additional methods (see also Benozzo and Priola, 2026), such as walking-with methods (Salmela and Valtonen, 2019), more-than-human/multispecies ethnography (Beacham, 2019; Sartoris, 2022), creative sound-based methods such as posthuman listening and sonopoetic collaging (Flint, 2022; Perry and Pierce, 2025), and visual approaches such as silhouette analysis and drawing (Höppner, 2022; Smith, 2026). Proposed projects can rely on any qualitative method that is aligned with post-humanism, including more creative methods. Applicants are encouraged to build on feminist methodologies (Haraway, 2004; Valtonen and Pullen, 2020) and Indigenous relational ontologies (Motta, 2023; Arjaliès & Banerjee, 2024) especially if the focus is on Indigenous communities.

Enquiries

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