

# Changing agents of change in neoliberally framed organizations

Neoliberally  
framed  
organizations

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to invite reflection and action among scholars of gender in management to the shaping and meeting of commitments to universal justice.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In total, 12 women employed as senior scholars in public universities in Aotearoa New Zealand were invited to discuss their career experiences. An observed disjuncture between radical feminist analyses of their career experiences and their liberal feminist responses to issues arising for them prompted reflection on a wider disjuncture in the shaping of justice wherever neoliberal directives prevail, generating this paper's activist call to integrity between analyses and practice among scholars as agents of change.

**Findings** – Implications drawn from the conversations with participants vindicated earlier critiques of diversity management under the conditions of neoliberalism when accommodating damaging social outcomes and systemic compliance is morally compromising.

**Originality/value** – Exploring accommodation of system preserving career strategies of scholars claiming commitment to justice is an evocative and original call to scholarly activism.

**Keywords** Gender, Human resource management, Globalization, Activism, Change management

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 1.

Gender equality is central to the realization of the dignity and rights of all human beings as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is articulated by the United Nations formed in 1948 and to which almost all countries are now member states. Even though gender equality is far from realized globally, the career opportunities for some women within and across many nations, occupations and hierarchies have been enhanced. However, inequality more generally has exacerbated in the jurisdictions where, since the 1980s neoliberal ideas have infused social, political and economic directives. As a case in point, adherence to neoliberal ideas since the early 1980s in Aotearoa New Zealand have produced the exacerbation of inequality in this jurisdiction foreseen by such vanguard critics as [Kelsey \(1996\)](#) and [Hazledine \(1998\)](#).

In this viewpoint paper, we reflect on insights generated from conversations about career aspirations and achievements with twelve senior women scholars in some form of organizational studies whose public and professional profiles demonstrate a significant commitment to social justice and environmental responsibility. During the conversations,



gender issues arose spontaneously and often, as did reflection on the management of their universities and the country generally, a country impacted by a narrow business model associated with the prevailing neoliberal regime in both public and private organizations, large and small. The conversations were intended to explore with participants their experiences and their opportunities to “make a difference” in their realms of influence. An unsettling disjuncture between the often radical feminist analyses of aspects of their lives and their typically liberal feminist responses to the issues that arose for them brought about an opportunity to explore the contrasting contributions of radical and liberal feminist orientations for the critical consideration of neoliberal idea(l)s influencing the governance and management of public universities and by inference, public and private institutions where neoliberal principles prevail.

We begin the paper with a setting the context of our work in our location – Aotearoa New Zealand – a nation at the vanguard of seemingly voluntary uptake of neoliberal values from the 1980s to its direct rejection by the incoming government of late 2017. Next, we review the feminist orientations that have long informed our work as organizational scholars. We then describe a project that forms an explicit aspect of our wider and ongoing feminist considerations of women’s career aspirations, opportunities and outcomes in this jurisdiction, work that was initiated in the early 1990s and later extended by various co-researchers. These three sections set out the orientation from which we have formed a view of the neoliberal drivers characterizing our universities over this time, the career opportunities this has provided for some but in a context where the social and environmental conditions have deteriorated for many. These sections lay the groundwork for the exploration of what can be learned about inequality and marginalization under the conditions of neoliberalism more generally with our mind on the disjuncture we observed between radical analyses and liberal responses described by the participants in our project who have attained career opportunities not afforded many other women or men. We close the paper with a reflection on the future where, as changing agents of change ourselves, we advocate for more radical responses to the critique of neoliberally driven universities, public institutions, business orientations and their incumbent opportunities and exploitations writ large as the trajectory of globalization.

### **Equity and merit in the vanguard of globalizing neoliberal ideas and practice: Aotearoa as a case in point**

As a case in point, Aotearoa/New Zealand is a jurisdiction that demonstrates many examples of groundbreaking social, political and economic innovation relevant on a global stage. The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 between the Crown of England (then Queen Victoria) and a significant number of Maori Chiefs (women included) is still hailed globally as a vanguard acknowledgement of indigenous people as sovereign. While women in this emerging colony are often hailed as the first in Western style democracies to gain the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1893, the indigenous population, women in general and variously marginalized people continued to struggle for fair systemic outcomes in their lives. Aotearoa New Zealand, among the first 51 nations to commit to foundation of the United Nations in 1945 (NZ History), indicates its continued aspirations to be a just and peaceful nation and to make a contribution to the achievement of peace and justice on the world stage.

From the 1970s, the shaping of justice deemed an integral aspect for global peace and stability was to come under challenge through the normalization of a macro-economic doctrine with its roots in the activities in the work of Hayek and the Chicago School of Economics (Humphries-Kil, 2019a). This market-driven doctrine promised productivity

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growth with a trickle down of wealth to its contributors. Early critics of this doctrine such as [Stiglitz \(2002\)](#) and [Kelsey \(1996, 2004\)](#) drew attention to its systemic flaws and risks, concerns vindicated a decade or more later by authors such as [Capra and Luisi \(2014\)](#), [Klein \(2014\)](#), [Korten \(2015\)](#), [Stiglitz \(2014\)](#) and [Shiva \(2016\)](#). In this doctrine, the formulation of justice shifted from a commitment to egalitarianism as promoted by the early signatories of the United Nations to its reformulation of society as a market-driven entity where increased competition would generate productivity and output gains, raise economic performance of organizations and thus of the national and global economy. The benefits of such economic growth, it was promised, would trickle down to all those who had contributed to this growth. Unequal outcomes could be explained through a concurrently promoted doctrine of merit ([Dyer et al., 2014](#), pp. 96, 129, 131). Where systemic obstacles to opportunities to compete were undeniable, policy intervention could be justified. Women's limited but increasingly necessary access to this economic system generated rafts of such interventions, all of them predicated on a definition of justice articulated as the equal opportunities of women to compete for a place in a capitalist economy which would provide the necessary wherewithal for the sustainability of life ([Dyer et al., 2014](#), pp. 159-171).

The move from state influence on managed capitalism to a neoliberal market-driven society in Aotearoa New Zealand is exemplified policy changes intended to promote the participation of women in employment. The Employment Equity Act of 1990, for example, the result of years of activism and policy work, sought to establish equal recognition of work of equal value through policy intervention. As an indication of the rapid and widespread change of ideological direction, it was quickly replaced with the Employment Contracts Act in 1991. This latter Act endorsed competition among occupations and individuals for status and incomes as a form of market-driven, consumer-sanctioned efficiency. The accompanying doctrine of meritocracy promised all individuals the right to bargain freely for their conditions of service. Education for the achievement of equal employment opportunities (EEOs) was to be the shared responsibility of the state, employers and the individual.

Fast forward to more contemporary times, Aotearoa New Zealand remains an active participant of the United Nations to this day. Aspirations to gender equity or equality continued with some remarkable outcomes. By the turn of the twenty-first century, for example, a time neoliberal policies and practices were well established, the top five constitutional positions were held by women. But during this era, poverty, homelessness, employment vulnerability also exacerbated. The predicted social consequences of capitalism in its intensifying neo-liberal form were being realized. Poverty related ill health limiting the quality of life and exacerbating preventable deaths indicate an unsettling exacerbation of the socioeconomic divide ([Rashbrooke, 2013](#); [Asher and St John, 2016](#)). Whatever ills inflicted on the population as a whole were exacerbated in the Maori, Pasifika and other marginalized communities over these years of so-called market freedom ([Marriott and Sim, 2014](#); [Asher, 2014](#)). By 2017 Aotearoa New Zealand exhibited some of the OECD's most dire social indicators, now ranking 34th out of 41 in the EU/OECD for youth suicide and has shameful child poverty indicators as identified by [UNICEF \(2017\)](#) and the Child Poverty Action Group ([Asher, 2014](#)).

The selective privileging of a small proportion of mostly white women in a global context exacerbating inequality and marginalization is a contradiction to aspirations of universal inclusiveness expressed most explicitly in the UDHR and in the ethos universal justice as an ideal of democratic governance. Such selective privileging also stands contrary to the radical feminist ideal of universal inclusiveness. Our reflection on this disturbing contradiction as it has played out in Aotearoa New Zealand has unsettled our sense of ourselves as a just

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people. The work of [Bauman and Donskis \(2013\)](#), work that reminds us to keep our eye on that which disturbs and unsettles us, has linked our thoughts to the work of [Seo and Creed \(2002\)](#) who note such disturbances as the places for our continued work as agents of change in the fluid trajectory that is our humanity.

Where the intensification of neoliberal influence on capitalism and democratic ideas is associated with exacerbating inequalities for many people and with environmental degradation that puts all life at risk, we have a paradox or contradiction to attend to. Discourses of gender, work, and human organization are our sites of inquiry. Feminist theories guide our analyses but these too harbor contradictions and paradox, entwined as they often are in the various denominations of capitalism.

### **Feminist orientations in organizational studies**

Among the vanguard of scholars of gender inequality in organizational studies is research into the unequal representation of women in management exemplified in the early work by [Judy Marshall \(1995\)](#) and by [Calás and Smircich \(1996, 2006\)](#). Practical efforts to enhance employment opportunities for women the world over was also a trajectory endorsed by the gender-related programs of the countries with allegiance to United Nations, Aotearoa New Zealand among them. In this jurisdiction, commitment to EEO has provided career opportunities for a small group of privileged, disproportionately white, women. It has not addressed growing inequality more generally in Aotearoa New Zealand as it has not elsewhere neoliberal policies have dominated ([Verbos and Humphries, 2012](#)).

In her review of neo-liberalism and feminist ideas, [Newman \(2013\)](#) draws attention to two interlinked but diversely generated narratives:

- How neoliberalism has appropriated identity politics; and
- How processes of mainstreaming have served to both acknowledge and depoliticize feminist claims (p. 3).

She illustrates these narratives through an articulation by [Gentz \(2006\)](#) of a “postfeminist” climate and, quoting [McRobbie \(2009, p. 9\)](#): a “disarticulation of a particular image of feminism from other struggles and movements” to form a:

[...] feminism which is then vilified and thrown backwards into a previous era [and] is a truncated and sclerotic anti-male and censorious version of a movement which was [in actuality] much more diverse and open minded (McRobbie cited in [Newman, 2013, p. 3](#)).

Through such processes argues [Newman \(2013, p. 3\)](#), feminist politics are “rendered ‘out of date’ and the ‘spectre’ of feminism is invoked (as anti-male, strident, anti-pleasure) so that it might be undone”. With a focus on the intensification of neo-liberalism, Newman points to the work of [Duggan \(2003\)](#) and [Eisenstein \(2006\)](#) who concern themselves with the hegemonic impact of selective “mainstreaming” of feminist concerns, and to [Fraser’s \(2009\)](#) association of women’s call for emancipation as providing new opportunities for capitalist exploitation. Newman finds such reasoning plausible but insufficiently explored. In the situating of ourselves as activist researchers, we appreciate this mapping of the entanglement of capitalism and feminisms, and seek to contribute to its future exploration.

Our reading of critical organizational studies and of diverse feminist orientations over many years consistently invites us to consider our own action and/or activist engagement in the storying of the futures into being. We have woven the transformational demands of the early radical feminists and of critical organizational scholars more generally with Newman’s action orientation and the view of [Came et al. \(2015\)](#) for whom all scholarly work is (necessarily) activist. In this regard, we are continually attracted to self-reflection, deep

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conversation, and co-enquiry as pertinent to the transformational intent expressed by critical theorists, feminists, as exemplified by Judi Marshall (1999) specifically.

### **Makers of history: changing agents of change; self-reflection and reflection with others as action/activist research(ers)**

Habermas posits humans as the potential makers of history. Our experience and critique of neoliberally driven capitalism in a nation that has followed its doctrines for several decades, and our engagement with feminist organizational studies, informs our reflection on ourselves as makers of history and as agents of change. In a symbiotic process of self-reflection and reflection with others, we seek to expand our identities as action/activist researchers, a process of change in ourselves as changing agents of change. We apply our efforts to enhance critique of knowledge claims in knowledge production contexts in higher education as progressed by Ferree and Zippel (2015), Gill and Donaghue (2016) and O'Connor (2014) and in cultural industries by Conor *et al.* (2015). Their work invites a critical response to the adaptation of corporate practices and ideologies that have implications for the working conditions, the career paths of knowledge workers, and the control over the production of knowledge along gendered lines including the co-optation of feminist knowledge in the context of neoliberally driven universities. Assessment of dynamics between feminism and neoliberalism as articulated by Eschle and Manguashca (2014), Fraser (2013), McRobbie (2015), Newman (2013) and Walby (2011) invite enquiries into the “specific empirical contexts where competing and or overlapping agendas to pursue organizational change may serve or deny the interests of different categories of workers in terms of race, class and gender” (Emejulu, 2011).

Our initial work as feminist researchers on women and careers, employment, work/life balance and so forth (self-disclosing references) was, in the early 1990s, generated from the scholarly critique of the then typical types of policies for emancipatory change in the lives of women. Greater attention to women’s wellbeing in the workplace and improving gender representation in leadership roles, diversifying disciplines and workplaces, promised profound transformation of the dynamics of power and gender in different organizations as discussed by Avdelidou-Fischer and Kirton (2016), Gill (2002), Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013) and Mayer *et al.* (2009). Emerging then was a well-articulated neoliberal discourse among women who believed they were party to a meritocracy in which sexism ought not be tolerated. A critique of capitalism generally, its neo-liberal intensification, and its impact on university governance however was generally deflected, even by organizational theorists of various kinds.

In our personal career experiences and from informal conversations with peers, employment in a neoliberally directed university requires significant attention to its vitality sapping pressures. Inspired by the work of Marshall (1999) on the value of self-reflection in an ethical life, we wished to engage with a group of our peers to explore opportunities for change under our conditions of service in the current neoliberal context of higher education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It was envisaged that such conversations would have the potential to open lines of enquiry and actions in our own lives and the lives of participants as reflections became spoken out, and potential actions considered, enacted, and reflected on.

### **Conversing career experiences, aspirations and commitments to justice with women scholars in organizational studies**

In 2014, over three decades into the rise of neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand, and over 20 years into our research into the career experiences of women through various projects, twelve senior women scholars employed in public universities in this jurisdiction were

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invited into conversations about their lives. Their fields of interests are in diverse branches of organizational studies. Their seniority attests to their career success within the prevailing institutional context. Their public profile includes explicit commitment to various articulations of social justice and environmental responsibility. By virtue of their employment in a public university they are mandated by the Education Act (1989, Section 162) to contribute as a critic and conscience of society. Such profiles were important for selection to participate to assure us of the potential for deep and wide-ranging conversations. Each woman committed to three conversations over a period of eighteen months. The spaces between conversations allowed time for reflection, for new idea(l)s to emerge, and for deepening of earlier conversations. Each woman was invited to edit the transcript of her conversations and to add whatever thoughts came to mind during that process. Many chose to supplement the documentation with email messages and phone calls. Despite their career success as measured by their seniority and career stability, most participants volunteered an unflattering gender analysis of their employment institution. Descriptions of harassment, gendered patterns of opportunity, and radical feminist interpretations of diverse forms of gender inequity were common:

There is quite a lot of old fashion sexism [where I work]. This is the thing that I notice in the University. The idea of a patriarchal dividend expresses that men of a certain generation get privileges just by being men. The University as I see it is currently dominated by white male professors. These men are reaping the benefits of the patriarchal dividend. I think there are ranges of sexist practices right across academia.

Many participants described specific sexism and its beneficial impact on some men in her organizations. The feminist orientation is made explicit in the naming of the system of differential benefit as patriarchal. In response to their experience and observation of gender inequity, almost all participants elaborated on the activities promoting greater gender equality they were aware of, participated in, and sometimes led: participation in women's advancement committees, career development and career events, job promotion workshops, profiling women, mentoring schemes, events (such as the annual suffrage lunch), guest lectures, networking events and collaborative research. The coping mechanisms they describe do not so much resist or transform the neo-liberal conditions of service but are ways to protect themselves and the work they are committed to. Care for others tended to be the support of individual women to help them meet the intensifying performance criteria, strategies that serve to support women to succeed in the status quo, as they had perhaps served the participants. All are generous in their support for other women. Yet, overall, the inequality between women and men appear to remain intransigent.

The stories the women told of their gendered and gendering career experiences are noteworthy because of their intimate knowledge of and success in the current climate characterized as the neoliberal university where patriarchy remains an influential organizing force. Almost all participants were able to explain structural sexism and describe personal experience of it:

There is no gender parity at all. I think it is really unfair. It is gender biased. And I think men are valued and paid lot more than women are in academia. It is not just in academia. The pay gap has always been there and I think it comes down to social perceptions of the value of women.

Their forthright and often deeply personal stories, sometimes witty, sometimes sad, sometimes appalling were infused with examples of coping strategies and of sometimes tolerating bad things in the face of the many good things their career facilitates:



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I wrote [...] a feminist dissertation about men and women's language. It was very ground breaking and successful but I was told I had to change it.

I am interested in work and family research. I am really stereotyped as being in that area. I think areas that women dominate are valued less. Some disciplines are more female dominated and so I think the dynamic there may be slightly different – like nursing and teaching perhaps.

My subject area that isn't necessarily recognised as a real discipline by some of my colleagues and the colleagues that don't recognise it are typically men. Gender definitely influences your research interest I think.

The women in our study were almost all white. Out of the 12, 2 identified as women with an indigenous heritage that informed their orientation to the world and thus their professional practice. Of these 2, 1 articulated a conscious disassociation with (white) feminist orientations. There is much room for feminists to take aboard with regard to this disassociation with liberal white women privilege when the conditions of life for indigenous women and their dependents are among the most degraded in this nation, a degradation exacerbated for most under the neoliberal regime. There is hope for a more radical response in the juxtaposition of indigenous knowledge with the taken-for-granted regime of hyper-individualized competition for the resourcing of work, and the reification of persons as resources endemic in the neo-liberal agenda. Liberal feminist remedies to systemic exploitation fall far short of such recognition.

#### *The university as global business*

Bearing in mind feminist commitments to justice for women in general, conversations with participants were envisioned as an activist project through which to invigorate consideration of career experiences and opportunities for women scholars who had made explicit commitments to matters of social and/or environmental responsibility and who had achieved significant personal career success under the conditions of neoliberalism. The conversations provided opportunities for the elaboration and substantiation of the claim made in the call for papers that efforts to transform knowledge production and knowledge work along neoliberal and managerialist lines has specific (and often negative) implications for gender relations, the organization of gender and the gendering of organizations.

The conversations of the women taken together depict feminist orientations to their analyses of their career experiences in the neoliberally driven university context. These orientations were at times presented in a quite radical feminist turn of phrase by naming patriarchy as a relevant force in their experience. Their responses, however, may be generally categorized as liberal feminists responses that may have served them well in the neo-liberal university, may continue to do so for them, but fall far short of a radical challenge to the inequalities they are witness to within their own universities as examples of market-driven organizations where the currency for engagement is a particularly narrow form of "outputs" that need to be achieved under ever more pressured circumstances likened to a factory form of production:

I think that it is a hierarchical environment and universities have become more factory-like. Certainly business schools have. Whether that's good for human dignity I don't necessarily think so. I am not sure we have got human flourishing on the agenda.

This pressure to subjugate to the rule of (their) market and its factory-like organization is no different in principle than experienced in any other sector driven by the neo-liberal economic directives where the "output" might be cans of beans, social services or journal publications.

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The formulation of education as a global industry demands intensification of outputs by each university as criteria of institutional status (and funding). Globalization has created the expectation that all scholars should to publish in “A Star” journals to keep up the universities’ rankings related to accreditations. The main currency for a promotion in the hierarchy are the individualized contributions to the scores driving the performance-based research funding system (PBRF), the New Zealand version of the evaluation of scholars now in use under various names in neoliberally orientated universities across the world. Its impact generated much spontaneous discussion. The women report that these outputs (measured as PBRF tallies) intensify individualized competition, diminish vitality and creativity, and exacerbate isolation:

We have got a PBRF system which says we must publish in these sorts of journals. We are increasingly told we could only publish in journals and these journals have a very long lead time the work that we are doing is not getting out. PBRF has skewed the way in which we can get our message out there. It is particularly quite challenging in a business school.

Like employees in any organization based on a neoliberal notion of business, workers are always under pressure to generate more outputs for less cost. Some participants suggested this focus undermines their capacity to serve first and foremost as a critic and conscience of the universities, let alone society. A number of the women reflected on their reliance on lower paid women in their professional and domestic circumstances to enable their own career success.

Because of the participants’ professional status as scholars employed in public universities with specialisms in various branches of organization studies, the implications of our shared insights and actions reach well beyond the gates of the university. The limited challenge to the institution, the willingness to comply with vitality sapping organizational pressures is not only a squandering of diversely creative of energies, but diminished also the potential of their voice in their mandate to act as critic and conscience of society in the governance of universities and of jurisdictions subjugated to selective neoliberal interests:

It is a struggle to keep a hold of the big picture when so much of my job is pressured to produce “PBRF outputs”. I am watching the university’s intention now to ‘restructure’ [. . .]. My job may be under threat [. . .] a big job change would be a change in my life and the ways I meet my responsibilities beyond my immediate employment – but not a change in career if I think in a protean way. Protean careers are not only about employment or even solely about work. Even being unemployed entails work. But would this outcome be a good deployment of my experience and commitment as a scholar of over 30 years with a half decent publication record [. . .]?

Moving beyond analyses, the consideration of each of us as makers of history underpinned our process of conversation, of sharing ideas about change in ourselves and the employing organizations. Our aspirations for this research were further the conversations with those participants keen to work with this initial depiction of shared insights and desire for change. A restructuring of our employing university and the disestablishment of our employment has brought this specific project perhaps temporarily to a halt.

### **Changing agents of change; women scholars in neo-liberally framed higher education and beyond**

Scholars employed in publically funded universities in Aotearoa New Zealand are mandated by the Education Act of 1989 to contribute as a critic and conscience of society. The tenured status of scholars in such publicly funded universities is in part to protect freedoms necessary to make such contribution. We acknowledge the responsibilities that come from the related privileges of secure employment and take seriously the mandate to speak out on



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matters that concern us. We are however constrained by the intensification of public universities as modeled on a limited and limiting market driven business model exacerbating individualized competitiveness in dimensions running counter to creative work. The required intensification of outputs is perhaps the most easily observable trend, as is the casualization of academic labor more generally. Less obvious is the loss of capacity to commit to long-term research and the invasion of researcher freedom of focus and dissemination of research based on the requirement to meet publication demands in an increasingly reduced range of outlets as part of the corporate identity of their employer each must serve. Intensified competition within institutions and from without, drives the process of exploitation and marginalization which [Dyer \*et al.\* \(2014, pp. 102-106\)](#) attribute to a form of structural adjustment and necessary personal and organizational flexibility deemed a requirement of market driven globalization.

Women and men made un[der] employed by the restructuring of neoliberally driven universities, public services, and the labor market generally have few options but to attempt to undercut those with seemingly secure jobs. We thus become complicit in the exacerbation of inequality and marginalization in our own occupations. All are required to submit to this system of control. That the system of control may be implemented by a more diverse labor force at all levels, does not address the contradictions we have drawn attention to within our universities, an wherever this form of organization prevails. That a small portion of the world's women (and a few representatives of variously categorized marginalized groups) may be provided with career opportunities to ensure that diversity management statistics are trending towards equal representation across all subjects and levels of appointment does not address systemic exploitation. It merely ensures that the greater diversity of the “[un]secure[d]” as considered by [Humphries and Grice \(1995\)](#) as early as 1995.

By virtue of our influence as organizational scholars, our realms of influence, privileged yet limited as they may be, still ripple beyond our own employment. The current intensification of neoliberal “women and leadership” type workshops, policies, and activism demonstrate this to be the case also beyond the gates of the university. It may be argued that these strategies have had little effect for most women under the prevailing conditions of neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand as reported by [Morton \(2017\)](#).

### **Conversations to disrupt the status quo**

We continue to stand with those critics who have attributed causal associations with the specific degradations that accompany the intensification of neo-liberally informed capitalist idea(l)s globally. We are attracted to the transformational aspirations of such critical theorists in the realms of organizational studies. Our focus is on the nigh-naturalized discourse of neoliberally generated reasoning infused in a market-driven rhetoric reaching nigh algorithmic disassociation from human control. This form of technical or instrumental rationalization appears gender neutral and is applied in practice by women and men alike. It is a form of reasoning that in our realms of experience has nowhere near run its course. Our universities continue to demonstrate this market-driven rationalization in their governance and management practices through their exploitative pressures on the lives of their employees. The extent to which this model of success is representative of the prevailing form of human organization is the extent to which our universities and like organizations stand as examples of contradiction between the processes of market-driven globalization and its claim to aspire to advance universal human dignity and emancipation while tolerating or exacerbating exploitation. A [Polyani \(1944\)](#) inspired re-reversal is required. Our institutions must find the modes of organization, including their financing, that serve the

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ideals of universal justice rather than debate the extent exploitation and marginalization can be tolerated in the service of the [global] economy and its constituent organizations.

The work of [Seo and Creed \(2002\)](#) provides useful guidance to explore normalizing discourses that undermine emancipatory projects where conditions of normalized reasoning generate, obfuscate, and tolerate subjugation and exploitation as the antipathy of emancipation. Seo and Creed apply themselves to the emancipatory potential of locating, illuminating, and acting on contradictions that have the potential to disrupt an unsatisfactory status quo. They see contradictions as the places for a positive disturbance of what is taken for granted if we do not shy away from the task. Their work resonates with that of Habermas who proposes that it is not enough just to show that reason in principle has another side to the crippling calculating technical aspects of contemporary capitalism and its functional application presented as necessary market-freedom which we have characterized as the neoliberal algorithm. Human reason also has the capacity to manifest the values of self-determination, democracy and community. The seeming unknowingness enabling hegemonic control of the neo-liberal regime is being made more open to transformation by the associated human and environmental degradations its critics are exposing to view – including the illumination of the hegemonic interface of neoliberal feminist idea(l)s with the trajectory of globalization.

For [Larner \(2015\)](#), the tide has already turned on this neoliberal trajectory in the governance of universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, at the end of 2017 the newly elected Prime Minister of this jurisdiction announced her government's commitment to the rejection of the neoliberal regime that she associates with the exacerbation of inequality this nation. For us however, the jury is still out. We continue to be concerned with those strategies and coping mechanisms supporting the achievements of the privileged few where they fall short of providing the institutional, professional, and personal transformations needed if the universal emancipatory idea(l)s embedded in the values of the UDHR are to be achieved.

#### *Into the future: conversations for change*

We began our paper with our interpretation of the political, cultural and theoretical domains that inform our identities as researchers, authors and changing agents of change. We set out our intention to craft our research as a contribution to the emancipatory idea(l)s of western democracies. We took guidance from [Seo and Creed \(2002\)](#) who advocate for the location, illumination, and action on the contradictions that have the potential to disrupt an unsatisfactory status quo. The associated disturbance of trust in liberal feminist remedies to systemic injustice has been converted to intensified critical self-reflection, changed directions and processes of inquiry and a call for more radical action for a world worth working for as articulated by [Muff et al. \(2013\)](#), thought leaders converging the values of the United Nations into principles for responsible management education known as the PRME ([Asirvatham and Humphries, 2017](#)).

PRME's vision entails a radical transformation of the education of managers, so far a decade of effort reviewed by [Parkes et al. \(2017\)](#). A robust critique of [neoliberal] capitalism is noteworthy by its general absence in this review. Yet, the transformation of its systemic control and exploitation is necessary to realize the vision of the UDHR and the PRME. It will require the transformation of selves and systems in which, in part, our feminist focus (on now less than clear binary categories of women and men as variously privileged and exploited) requires more attention. The part each individual contributes as system [pre] serving or transforming requires critical reflection on ourselves as much as on the parts of others intrinsically entwined in the shaping of the future.

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*Into the future: reflections for change*

We recognize that we each weave ourselves and are woven into the patterns of enablement and disruption that form the fabric of social life, sometimes knowingly but most often as part of the unknowingness that invigorates the hegemonic control of prevailing powers. Encouraged by the work of sociologists Bauman and Donskis (2013) we continue to extend our attention to a reflection on ourselves as scholars who are changing agents serving as agents for change in the destructive trajectory of seemingly unfettered capitalist market-driven globalization. To limit concern to the numerical (un)equal representation of women and men (or of diversely categorized human beings) is to deflect attention from the ingrained impulse towards exploitation driving capitalist/market-driven globalization. Despite expressions of concern across the political, professional and personal spectrum of opinions, we are witness to an increased tolerance of governments globally to the marginalization of parts of their constituencies – at times to the point of death (Pope Francis, 2015; Humphries, 2007). Such tolerance of exploitation has no place in a political, professional, or personal identity claiming a commitment to principles of justice. Such exploitation contradicts the principles of universal emancipation made explicit in the UDHR to which so many nations have pledged their fealty.

How the current cohort of women scholars who have retained their jobs in the current restructuring of the tertiary sector in Aotearoa New Zealand will respond to the macro changes in the direction of this country and perhaps lead a new era, remains to be seen. Emphasizing this consideration seems to us to be a useful opportunity for reflection on “gender in management” as more women take up positions of authority, leadership or system preserving compliance, here and in other jurisdictions where the “business model” that has prevailed for almost four decades is being reconsidered (Humphries-Kil, 2019b). We cannot come to a definitive opinion on how the challenge to neoliberalism in this country will impact the governance of our tertiary institutions in the future. This radical turn in events was not even on the horizon during the time of the fieldwork. In this light, we have strengthened our purpose for this paper as one of continuous enquiry.

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