In his classic paper, *Manifesto for a relational sociology*, Emirbayer (1997) declares that ‘social thinkers from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, national traditions, and analytic and empirical points of view are fast converging upon this [a relational] frame of reference’ (p. 311). As part of an increasingly global (social) scientific community, the end of the Cold War, colonialism shifting from physical occupation to the epistemic production of territories, and the need to understand and communicate with non-Western societies, relational approaches offer a productive direction for scholarship (Prandini, 2015). The catalyst for these approaches – the plural is deliberate – is the critique of the substantialist, or entity-based, approaches that have come to dominate contemporary social thought and analysis.

Key thinkers in contemporary relational sociology include: Crossley (2011); Depelteau and Powell (2013; Powell & Depelteau, 2013); Donati (2011); Fuhse (2015); Emirbayer (1997); Mische (2011); and White (2007). While originally very much centered in New York (notably White at Harvard University and Tilly at Harvard then Columbia, and what Mische labels the ‘New York School of Relational Sociology’), Italian Donati has been developing his position for over 30 years (Donati, 1983, 1991, 2015), Fuhse hosted an international symposium at Humboldt University of Berlin in 2008, and there is a strong Canadian network – primarily advanced through a research cluster within the Canadian Sociological Association (La Société Canadienne de Sociologie). Prandini (2015) reminds us that while major methodological advances occurred in the United States, relational sociology has strong roots and seeds in the European tradition, owing to the work of Marx, Simmel, Tarde, Elias, Luhmann, Bourdieu and Latour, just to name a few. As Emirbayer notes, interest in relational scholarship is beyond national boundaries.

A similar shift, although far less diverse, is taking place in the broader management / leadership sciences. Covering perspectives such as social exchange, leader-member exchange, vertical dyadic linkage, among others, and well captured in Uhl-Bien and Ospina’s (2012) *Advancing relational leadership research: a dialogue among perspectives*, relational approaches now feature prominently in key journals (Dinh et al., 2014), and are perceived to be at the cutting-edge of contemporary thought and analysis (Hunt & Dodge, 2000).
However, the mobilization of relational approaches remains problematic. Sociologists argue the distinction between substantialist and relational accounts, whereas in the leadership literatures both entity-based (substantialist) and relational epistemologies are grouped under the label of relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006). To further highlight some of the tensions of language across fields, Emirbayer’s classic article uses ‘transactional’ (somewhat synonymously with relational) as a label, yet in leadership and management literatures it has a very different history in opposition to transformational leadership. What remains however is a shift from leader-, or person-, centric accounts to recognition of practice being co-constructed by actors (although Uhl-Bien mobilizes a leader-followers binary), something that to be understood requires attention to relations.

If the social world is relational, to which there is at scale multi-disciplinary support, then it cannot be understood from an individualist point of view nor a collective perspective (or holism). After all, both the individualist and holist assume stability of the object – a scalable equivalence. It is however difficult to define, once and for all, relations. Donati (2015) contends that society does not have relations but is relations, therefore, relations are the very stuff of what we call ‘the social’ and the basic unit of analysis for the social sciences. But in moving beyond the substantialist or entity-based approaches, relations need to be thought of as not a thing. They are at once, the process of and emergent from, action. This requires conceiving of the object of scholarship in new ways. Privileged within such a perspective are the abstract systems of distance played out in action and the unfolding description of practice. But as Savage (2009) argues, this form of description is not about causality per se, rather the relating of actions to other actions. The task of the scholar is not to define ‘fields’ in any universal terms (as is often done with the appropriation of Bourdieu), but to observe and describe actions as they are, with all their complexity and diversity. This requires the mobilization of methodological resources facilitating the inscription of actions in particular spatio-temporal conditions. The inscribing of action is fundamental to avoiding the errors of essentialism, substantialism and/or reductionism.

Depelteau (2015) contends that relational approaches are only useful if they can propose new solutions to fundamental issues when compared with existing theorizations. In other words, if relational approaches do not generate some form of intellectual turmoil for organizational scholars then they offer little more than noise.

**We invite proposals** that critically question the construction and role of relations, relationships or relational approaches in the scholarship of organizations. This can include, but not exclusively, the construction of the research object, the explanatory power or descriptive value of relations/relationships, or the centrality of relationships to organizations. If relational approaches are at the cutting edge of contemporary thought and analysis, how can we theorize and understand relationships and relations in the organizing of social groups and institutions?

**We further intend for our theme** to raise searching questions about just what counts as relations / relationships in the first place. We encourage proposals that query, for example, substantialist or relational approaches. We invite discussions about the scholarly value of relational approaches. And we remain open to proposals that offer innovative insights or critiques of relational approaches.

**Submission details**

Abstracts of up to 400 words are due by 5:00pm 26 February 2016. Working papers for the accepted abstracts of 3,000-6,000 words are due by **03 June 2016** and will be distributed to registered participants prior to the Workshop to enable pre-reading and meaningful engagement with ideas. For all enquiries and abstract submission please email Dr Scott Eacott (s.eacott@unsw.edu.au).
Workshop Overview
This Educational Policy and Leadership Research Group and Office of Educational Leadership sponsored Workshop is designed to facilitate high quality interdisciplinary scholarship advancing understanding of organizations and organizing with particular reference to educational institutions. Its primary aim is to advance cutting-edge theoretical and methodological insights by bringing together a small and competitively selected group of scholars, who will have the opportunity to interact in-depth with ‘working papers’ and share insights in a stimulating and supportive environment.

Key Dates
Call for papers 28 Nov 2015
Abstracts close 26 Feb 2016
Notification of acceptance 18 Mar 2016
Registration opens 18 Mar 2016
Full papers due 03 June 2016
Distribution of papers 17 June 2016
Workshop begins 14 July 2016

Venue
This Workshop will take place in the John Goodsell Building at the University of New South Wales. UNSW is located in Sydney, one of the most breathtakingly beautiful cities in the world. Our campus is within easy reach of world-famous beaches and iconic landmarks, as well as the buzzing centre. The campus is easily accessible via public transport.

Registration
There is no registration cost, but this does not include travel or accommodation for speakers or participants. Numbers are limited to 20 places due to room capacity and the explicit expectation of purposeful dialogue around ideas. It is expected that all registered participants attend for the full two days and commit to reading the papers prior to attending.

Scholarly Advisory Committee
Prof Jeffrey Brooks (Monash University); Prof Colin Evers (University of New South Wales); Prof Gabriele Lakomski (University of Melbourne); A/Prof Paul Newton (University of Saskatchewan); Dr Richard Niesche (University of New South Wales); A/Prof Gus Riveros (Western University); and A/Prof Jane Wilkinson (Monash University).

Workshop Hosts
Scott Eacott, Ph.D., is Senior Lecturer, Director of the Office of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. He is widely published in the field of educational leadership with research interests and contribution falling into three main areas: relational approaches to educational administration scholarship; leadership preparation and development; and strategy in educational leadership. His latest book, Educational Leadership Relationally, articulates and defends a relational approach to scholarship in educational administration. E: s.eacott@unsw.edu.au