Decolonising the Organisation: Reimagining the Modern Workplace

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Chapter 1

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Abstract

Decolonising the organisation requires examining existing policies, practices, and procedures to identify and make proactive efforts to encourage and incorporate pluralistic perspectives in ways of knowing and understanding that have been dominantly influenced by Eurocentric epistemologies. Therefore, this introductory chapter will examine how colonial logics continue to shape modern workplaces, from organisational hierarchies and knowledge flows to cultural norms and managerial practices. It will highlight how conventional models of organisational design, human resources, and leadership draw upon Eurocentric frameworks that marginalise

non-Western epistemologies, perpetuate power imbalances, and undermine inclusive work environments. By situating the modern workplace within broader histories of colonialism and neo-colonial economic systems, the chapter will reveal the ways in which organisational structures reproduce inequities along lines of race, gender, indigeneity, and Global North/Global South divides. It will introduce a decolonial lens as a transformative approach to reimagining work, participation, and organisational purpose. Finally, the chapter will present a roadmap for the remainder of this volume, outlining emerging frontiers and new perspectives in decolonising organisations.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Modern workplace, Inequalities, Inclusion

Introduction

This chapter introduces a decolonial lens as a transformative approach to reimagining work, participation, and organisational purpose. This requires not only reflecting on the sources, methods and implications of knowledge creation, but also addresses specific pathways to follow in organisational practices. The colonial logics continue to shape modern workplaces, from organisational hierarchies and knowledge flows to cultural norms and managerial practices. The conventional models of organisational design, human resources, and leadership draw upon Eurocentric frameworks that marginalise non-Western epistemologies, perpetuate power imbalances, and undermine inclusive work environments. For organisation scholars, it is crucial to recognise and critically evaluate their positionality and privilege, and pay attention to political reflexivity, not just methodological one, and marginalised participants in efforts to support the decolonising agenda (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021).

Decolonising the organisation requires examining existing policies, practices, and procedures to identify and make proactive efforts to encourage and incorporate pluralistic perspectives in ways of knowing and understanding how Western epistemologies and practices have dominantly influenced the world. The issue is not only with the theory, which was created with Western context bias, but also with the actual consequences of colonisation perpetuating in postcolonial reality through Western capitalism. The chapter further clarifies the key concepts and differences between colonial and coloniality, and the role of decolonial studies in challenging the status quo.

The decolonial agenda emphasises the need to examine the multifaceted reality: the ‘real’ economy, politics, disparities, and conduct robust fieldwork to understand these issues and propose proactive solutions to global problems. Theory should assist here, but not dominate or

impose interpretations. We compare the traditions (colonial) practices influenced by Western ideas with the new ways of decolonising management and organisations. These include systemic issues of redefining traditional governance structures and overturning linguistic imperialism, as well as recognising identity diversity and working towards true structural inclusion. Within functional areas of management, Human Resource Management and Global Operations and Supply Chains are also discussed as playing a particular role in decolonising organisations due to their strategic place in defining workplace conditions and outcomes. Finally, the chapter will present a roadmap for the remainder of this volume, outlining emerging frontiers and new perspectives in decolonising organisations.

Colonial Legacies in Organisation and Management Theory and Practices

Management and organisation theory was primarily developed and produced in the European and Anglo-Saxon context, prioritising problems, systems and power of what we now call the Global North. Inevitably, popular management and organisation theories suffer from both explicit and implicit bias (Banerjee, 2022). Historically, the first mentions of management techniques can be dated back to 3000 BC in Iraq, followed by later developments in Egypt, China, Greece, and the Roman Empire. However, it was the colonial era that was marked by the rise of modern corporations, which were created under Dutch and English royal charters to support mercantilist policies of resource accumulation at the expense of colonised nations. Colonialism involved maintaining a direct and dominating administration over a foreign nation or country, financed by external interests, and it entailed the oppression and exploitation of land, people, and their cultures (Couto, Honorato, & de Pádua, 2021). Cultural domination not only threatened the sense of shared reality, values, and practices, but also the historically developed indigenous and traditional body of knowledge and ways of knowing (Clegg, 1989), dismissing it as superstition or ethnoscience (Banerjee, 2022). By the mid-1800s, organisations like the East India Company had become a real territorial power, a form of government, state, and sovereign, demonstrating how politics, economic doctrine, colonial power, and trade merged in force (Stern, 2011). At the same time, in the realm of thought, modernity and enlightenment developed an understanding of rational human knowledge and legitimate knowledge, further silencing traditional forms of knowing and fueling the efficiency agenda (Couto, Honorato, & de Pádua, 2021).

Subsequently, it is not surprising that, from the late 19th century onward, the most influential managerial theories have continued to be Eurocentric and driven by the rationality of efficiency. The fast-changing technology, growth of organisations, and need for coordination of various resources posed key questions around planning, organising, and controlling (Pindur, Rogers & Kim, 1995). Many, if not most, management textbooks report well on various approaches in neat timeline, from Taylor's scientific management (USA), Fayol's (FR) management functions, Weber's bureaucracy (GER) or Hawthorn studies, but without much coverage of the historical underpinnings, paradigms and especially value-based stands on which those theories have been based (Weatherbee & Durepos, 2023). Equally, neither the heavy industry and colonial relations context nor the class, political and capital relations guiding those considerations are acknowledged. It also seems that there is often little appetite in management and organisational studies to critically read the original writings of those seminal authors. When read closely and with a critical mindset, they reveal the labour extractive methods similar to slavery (Cooke, 2003) with a sense of superiority ('stupid', 'phlegmatic', 'ox', 'unable to understand') for the working class. The below quote from one of the Fathers of Management, F. Taylor, shows how the class division is considered a valid reason to subordinate working men and to use manpower as one of the resources to build the capital of people far 'intelligent' than them; quite a similar narrative that colonial powers told about indigenous societies:

> *Now, one of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation is that he shall be so **stupid** and so **phlegmatic** that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the **ox** than any other type. The man who is **mentally alert** and **intelligent** is for this very reason entirely unsuited to what would, for him, be the grinding monotony of work of this character. Therefore the workman who is best suited to handling pig iron is unable to understand the real science of doing this class of work. He is so **stupid** that the word "percentage" has no meaning to him, and he must consequently be trained by a man more **intelligent** than himself into the habit of working in accordance with the laws of this science before he can be successful (Taylor, 1911, emphasis added).*

Furthermore, as the evolution of management theory is often presented as a linear, progressive and developmental process, it implies progress and universalism, treating knowledge as decontextualised, natural, and non-dated (presentism) (Weatherbee & Durepos, 2023). This poses a number of issues from misapplication of those theories because of their popularity

(Filatotchev et al., 2021) or implicitly perpetuating Western bias in management across the world. It shows coloniality as a power pattern which perpetuates beyond colonialism and historical exploitation, but emphasises the presence of a contemporary domination relationship, typically through non-violent means of cultural, economic and structural supremacy. Coloniality of power is based on the concept of race (Quijano, 2007), with the attached categories of superior/inferior, masters/slaves, profiteers/exploited, expats/migrants.

Coloniality of knowledge rejects non-Western logic, while promoting a Western focus on rationality and modernity. It might be a painful realisation for some, but the neocolonial domination of intellectual production is still happening both explicitly and implicitly. It is supported by hard data, for example, through analysis of academic journal publications. The vast majority of top-ranked management journals have a disproportionate number of English native speaking editors, publishing academic authors primarily affiliated with US, British or Canadian institutions, perpetuating not only language imperialism but also undermining or even diminishing non-Western topics and focus. More publication challenges for global South academics mean a lower scope and reach for dissemination, and with fewer citations, their influence on how we think about the world around us is diminished (Murphy & Zhu, 2012).

A Decolonial Shift in Organisational Studies: Pathways to Decolonising the Modern Workplace

Decoloniality, as conceptualised by Quijano (2000) and further developed by Mignolo (2007, 2011), encompasses an ongoing process of challenging the "coloniality of power" that continues to structure contemporary institutions. In organisational contexts, this coloniality manifests through colonial epistemicides, which is the systematic marginalisation of non-Western ways of knowing and organising (Udah, 2024). The decolonial shift requires organisations to recognise that their current structures, practices, and theoretical foundations are not universal truths, but historically contingent formations rooted in colonial relations of power. The urgency of this decolonial imperative is hinged on the growing recognition that traditional organisational models appear inadequate for addressing contemporary and contextualised challenges. As Dar (2017) observes, the persistent inequalities within organisations manifested through racial, gender, and geographical hierarchies cannot be adequately addressed through conventional diversity and inclusion frameworks that leave fundamental power structures intact. Instead, decolonising the workplace requires epistemic disobedience. This means the courage to think and act beyond the boundaries of Western-

centric organisational orthodoxy (Johnson & Mbah, 2024). We have curated six pathways through which the modern workplace can be decolonised. These pathways represent both theoretical and practical approaches to decolonising organisational life, each offering unique contributions to the broader decolonial project.

Transforming Knowledge and Theory

The first pathway towards decolonising the modern workplace involves challenging the dominance of Western epistemology in organisational curricula and leadership theories (Śliwa et al., 2025; Woldegiorgis, 2025). This transformation requires organisations to move beyond the assumption that Western scientific rationality provides the only valid framework for understanding organisational effectiveness. Instead, organisations must embrace epistemic pluralism (Barrett et al., 2025) that recognises indigenous leadership models and community knowledge systems as legitimate sources of organisational wisdom.

Practical implementation of this pathway involves incorporating Indigenous concepts of collective decision-making and leadership that emphasise relationship-building and community responsibility rather than individual authority (Sihela & April, 2025a; Udah, 2024). For instance, organisations might draw upon African concepts of *Ubuntu*, which emphasise interconnectedness and collective responsibility (Asiimwe, 2023; Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024), or the *Bantu-Kongo concept of Mbongi* (Sihela & April, 2025a), a community-based approach to problem-solving and decision-making, adopting indigenous circular governance models that prioritise consensus-building over hierarchical command structures. Similarly, concepts from Buddhist philosophy, such as interdependence and mindfulness, provide different lenses through which to examine organisational dynamics and decision-making processes. African paradigms such as *'Omoluabi'* in Yoruba culture, which emphasises moral uprightness, humility, and communal responsibility (Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023), also offer alternatives to Western leadership models that are rarely taught in business schools despite their relevance to African organisational realities. As Udah (2024) argues, such approaches require organisations to decolonise their research methodologies and embrace participatory approaches that centre the voices and experiences of marginalised communities.

The transformation of organisational knowledge systems also necessitates recognising that community knowledge, often dismissed as "informal" or "traditional", can provide valuable insights for addressing contemporary organisational challenges (Johnson & Mbah, 2024). This might involve creating spaces for storytelling and narrative approaches to organisational

learning that honour oral traditions (Dunn & Cherup, 2021; Shabbar & Sorby, 2025), or implementing mentorship programmes that connect employees from similar cultural backgrounds whilst avoiding the assumption that individuals should assimilate to dominant cultural norms.

Restructuring Governance and Authority

The second pathway involves fundamental transformation of organisational structures that have been shaped by bureaucratic hierarchies and top-down authority models inherited from colonial administrative systems. Traditional organisational structures, with their emphasis on vertical authority and individual accountability (Watson et al., 2024), reflect colonial models of governance that prioritise control and extraction over collaboration and mutual benefit (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001)

Decolonising these structures requires organisations to experiment with flattened hierarchies that distribute decision-making power more equitably. This transformation might involve implementing consensus decision-making processes that honour Indigenous traditions of collective deliberation, or adopting *Ubuntu* governance models that emphasise collective responsibility and mutual accountability (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). Additionally, organisations might explore *ayni* models derived from Andean Indigenous practices that emphasise reciprocity and mutual aid in organisational relationships (Walsh-Dilley, 2017), or imbibe *minka* (collective labour) approaches that prioritise mutual benefit over profit maximisation (Gudynas, 2011).

The redistribution of power can also extend to economic relations within the organisation. This includes addressing pay equity across racial and gender lines, ensuring that value created by employees from marginalised communities is fairly recognised and rewarded, and implementing cooperative ownership models that allow workers to benefit from the wealth they create (Battilana et al., 2022). Such measures can address the systematic devaluation of work performed by racialised and gendered bodies (Pyburn et al., 2023; Quijano, 2000).

Reimagining Human Resource Management

The third pathway focuses on transforming human resource management practices that have been dominated by competency frameworks, standardised Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and individualistic approaches to employee evaluation. These practices often reflect Western assumptions about meritocracy and individual performance that may marginalise employees

from different cultural backgrounds who bring valuable but unrecognised capabilities to the organisation.

Decolonising human resource management requires organisations to adopt contextual recruitment practices that recognise the diverse pathways through which individuals develop capabilities and expertise (Kahn & Louw, 2023). This might involve moving beyond standardised qualifications to recognise experiential learning, community leadership, and cultural knowledge as valuable organisational assets. As Udah (2024) argues, such approaches require organisations to embrace relational accountability, recognising that individual performance is embedded within broader social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, organisations must recognise lived experience as a form of valuable knowledge that can inform organisational decision-making (Lenette et al., 2024). This might involve creating career pathways that honour diverse forms of expertise, or implementing evaluation systems that recognise collective contributions alongside individual achievements. Such approaches challenge the colonial legacy of reducing human value to standardised metrics, whilst opening space for more holistic approaches to human development and organisational contribution (Leroy-Dyer et al., 2025; Shabbar & Sorby, 2025).

Advancing Structural Inclusion and Identity Recognition

The fourth pathway involves moving beyond token diversity initiatives towards structural inclusion that recognises the full spectrum of human identity and experience. Traditional diversity approaches often require marginalised individuals to assimilate into dominant organisational cultures, whilst making minimal changes to underlying power structures (de Souza Santos et al., 2025). This approach perpetuates non-performativity of diversity, i.e., the ways in which diversity initiatives can actually reinforce existing inequalities whilst appearing to address them (Leroy-Dyer et al., 2025).

Structural inclusion requires organisations to create spaces for the recognition of spirituality, gender diversity, racial identity, linguistic diversity, and Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate aspects of organisational life (Ahmed, 2012; O'Donovan, 2018). This might involve implementing flexible work arrangements that accommodate different cultural and spiritual practices, or creating employee resource groups that are empowered to influence organisational policy rather than merely providing social support (Ahmed, 2012). Consider the case of Indigenous Māori organisations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which embed whakapapa (genealogy), tikanga (protocol), and manaakitanga (care and respect) into governance and HR

practices (Rout et al., 2024; Spiller et al., 2011). These values disrupt Eurocentric norms of proceduralism, linear hierarchy, and objectivity in favour of holistic, place-based, and intergenerational models of work.

The recognition of identity diversity must also extend to acknowledging how colonial history continues to shape contemporary organisational experiences (Sihela & April, 2025a). This might involve implementing reparative justice initiatives that provide targeted support to communities harmed by organisational activities, or developing mentorship programmes that specifically support employees from historically marginalised backgrounds (Sihela & April, 2025b). In African contexts, workplace inclusion can also be deepened by acknowledging ethno-linguistic identities, spiritual commitments, and community obligations as legitimate elements of workplace identity, not as distractions or liabilities, as often framed in Western HR policies (Ahmed, 2012; Williams, 2021).

Establishing Linguistic Justice and Communication Democracy

The fifth pathway addresses the linguistic colonialism that manifests through English-only policies and linear, assertive communication norms that privilege Western communication styles. As Drabinski (2019) argued, language is never neutral but carries within it particular worldviews and power relations that can marginalise those who communicate differently. Establishing linguistic justice requires organisations to embrace plural expression that honours different communication styles and linguistic traditions. This might involve providing translation services for important organisational communications, or creating spaces for narrative and oral traditions that honour Indigenous and non-Western approaches to knowledge sharing. The dominance of English and Western communication styles in global organisations often leads to the silencing of multilingual, expressive, and non-verbal forms of communication rooted in other traditions (Nee et al., 2022; Tietze et al., 2021). For instance, in Indian call centres, workers are trained to neutralise their accents to conform to American English standards, which is an explicit form of linguistic imperialism (Tietze & Piekkari, 2020). Additionally, organisations might adopt meeting formats that accommodate different communication styles, recognising that some individuals may prefer circular discussion to linear debate.

The transformation of organisational communication should also address epistemic violence. In this sense, how dominant communication norms silence or marginalise alternative ways of knowing (Spivak, 1994). This requires creating multiple channels for organisational

participation that accommodate different communication preferences and cultural backgrounds (Tietze et al., 2021).

Decolonising Global Operations and Supply Chains

The sixth pathway involves transforming global operations that have been characterised by exploitative supply chains and neo-colonial procurement practices. Many organisations operate within global networks that perpetuate colonial extraction, paying low wages to producers in the Global South whilst capturing value in the Global North (Lahiri & Darity, 2024; Sirohi, 2017). Decolonising global operations requires organisations to implement ethical sourcing practices that ensure producers receive fair compensation for their labour and resources (Hickel et al., 2022). This might involve developing South-South solidarity networks that enable organisations to build mutually beneficial relationships with suppliers from the Global South (Munro & Rahman, 2024), or adopting cooperative ownership models that allow suppliers to benefit from organisational success (Giuliani, 2024). Many organisations that espouse values of inclusion and equity in the Global North continue to rely on exploitative supply chains and precarious labour in the Global South, reproducing neo-colonial relationships where wealth is extracted from the periphery to sustain affluence at the centre (Mercado, 2020).

Furthermore, organisations need to consider examining their role in addressing historical injustices and ongoing inequalities in global supply chains. This might involve investing in capacity-building programmes that strengthen organisations led by and serving marginalised communities, or implementing environmental practices that acknowledge Indigenous knowledge about sustainable resource management (Lahiri & Darity, 2024; Sirohi, 2017).

Table 1.1: Pathways to Decolonising the Modern Workplace

Organisational Domain	Colonial Legacy	Decolonial Pathway
Knowledge & Theory	Western epistemology dominates curricula and leadership theories	Epistemic pluralism; Indigenous leadership models; community knowledge
Structure & Governance	Bureaucratic hierarchy, top-down authority	Flattened hierarchies; consensus decision-making; Ubuntu and *ayni* models

Human Resource Management	Competency frameworks, standardised KPIs, individualism	Contextual recruitment; relational accountability; lived experience as value
Inclusion & Identity	Token diversity; assimilation of marginal identities	Structural inclusion; recognition of spirituality, gender, race, language, indigeneity
Language & Communication	English-only policies; linear and assertive norms	Linguistic justice; plural expression; narrative and oral traditions
Global Operations	Exploitative supply chains; neo-colonial procurement	Ethical sourcing; South-South solidarity networks; cooperative ownership models

On a final note, a decolonial shift in organisational studies is not about replacing one orthodoxy with another; it is about creating space for multiplicity, justice, and dignity in how we think about and practise work. It recognises that the modern workplace is not neutral, it is historically constructed, politically situated, and culturally loaded. Decolonising it involves unsettling inherited assumptions, engaging in reflexive praxis, and designing systems that centre equity, relationality, and collective flourishing. By embracing decolonial approaches, we do not merely repair broken systems, we reimagine the very meaning of organisations in the 21st century.

Emerging Perspectives

The opening chapter of this volume invites readers to treat the modern workplace not as a neutral, technocratic space, but as a historically contingent formation shaped by colonial logics that permeate managerial theory, bureaucratic design, and everyday practices of organising and knowing. It proposes a decolonial lens that is both analytical and reparative, exposing how Eurocentric epistemologies and governance routines perpetuate inequities, while mapping practical pathways to transform knowledge, structures, and relations at work. In this section, we provide an overview of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 advocates community-based participatory research (CBPR), anchored in the 6Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility, Relationships, and Relationality, as an ethical counter to extractive scholarship. It operationalises the opening chapter's call to "decolonise research methodologies," repositioning researchers as guests and collaborators rather than owners of data or interpreters of others' lives. In doing so, it models epistemic pluralism and accountability to communities most affected by organisational decisions.

Chapter 3 extends this epistemic shift by mobilising Śūnyatā (emptiness) as a critical metaphor. Rather than anchoring decolonisation in new absolutes, Śūnyatā foregrounds contingency, relationality, and negative dialectics. This move resonates with the book's insistence that decoloniality must avoid replacing one orthodoxy with another; it must keep open the space of inquiry and refuse essentialised notions of both "the Western" and "the Indigenous." The result is a research posture that dissolves fixed positionalities, including within the researcher, while sustaining critical vigilance about power.

Chapter 4 reframes Nigerian SMEs not as deficient copies of Western forms but as sites where organisational social capital (OSC), including reciprocity, associability and embedded obligations, functions as a strategic resource. It argues that HRM honours local norms and institutions and recognises the productive interplay between formal regulation and informal obligations. This aligns with the opening chapter's critique of universalist managerial prescriptions and its call to rebuild HR systems around contextual capability, relational accountability, and lived expertise.

Chapter 5 embodies the argument in the opening chapter that decolonising organisations requires redistributing epistemic authority, that is, who gets to define problems, name histories, and imagine futures. It does this through digital storytelling and participatory mapping in the Ilha de Moçambique corridor, co-creating an open-air social museum with healers, elders, and community leaders. Here, the researcher becomes a facilitator rather than an interpreter, and digital tools become infrastructures of recognition rather than surveillance. The project exemplifies the tabled pathway on language and communication: amplifying narrative and oral traditions and legitimising plural modes of expression within organisational learning and heritage practice.

Chapter 6 returns to the macro underpinnings by tracing how colonial bureaucratic forms and knowledge hierarchies continue to configure African management education and practice. Its policy-oriented proposals, including curricular redesign, research agendas that centre

Indigenous epistemologies, and methodological pluralism, mirror the first chapter's transformation agenda for knowledge infrastructures and organisational governance.

Chapter 7 proposes an Indigenous DEI model that empirically links perceived knowledge diversity to inclusion, job equity, and performance. It evidences that culturally grounded designs can deliver both justice and effectiveness. Chapter 8 reinterprets Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) in a hierarchical context, probing how relationship quality influences silence and citizenship. Both chapters support the argument that decolonising the organisation requires interrogating assumptions, re-specifying mechanisms, and co-creating measures with sensitivity to local meanings of authority, voice, and obligation.

Chapter 9 introduces reflexive narrative methodology into the UK academy, highlighting the lived experiences of minoritised international doctoral students who navigate Eurocentric norms and institutional structures. It expands on the arguments in Chapter 5, which reclaim place-based memory and reveal how institutional scripts in the Global North police belonging and suppress scholarly voice. Both chapters emphasise the communicative and affective labour of decolonisation and reflect the book's focus on linguistic justice and communication democracy as organisational efforts, not afterthoughts.

Chapter 10 critiques the "ideal worker" archetype and demonstrates how coloniality and neoliberalism co-produce exclusions across various sectors, from academia to the gig economy. Its programme, including intersectional audits, recognition of care and cultural labour, algorithmic accountability, migration justice, tracks closely with the book's call to re-design systems so that inclusion is structural rather than symbolic.

Chapter 11 situates key questions in Nigeria, demonstrating how colonial legacies underpin rigid hierarchies that frustrate work–family integration. It advances culturally responsive policies and participatory decision-making practices that operationalise the governance and HRM pathways, regarding employees as embedded in communities, not as abstract individuals. Furthermore, Chapter 12, through a comparative review and integrative framework, further provincialises Western work–life balance by surfacing non-Western nodes such as identity integration, work–life entanglement, and harmony. Together, these chapters enact the volume's broader proposition that meaningful "balance" cannot be engineered by generic perks but requires re-valuing interdependence, relational obligation, and community wellbeing as legitimate organisational goods.

Finally, Chapter 13 moves the decolonial conversation into algorithmic governance. Its comparative modelling shows how standard pipelines embed and amplify inequities; more importantly, it reframes "fairness" as a historically situated, epistemically accountable commitment rather than a mere target metric. This resonates with the book's insistence that technology and operations are not neutral back-office functions but political sites where colonial extraction and epistemicide can be reproduced or interrupted through design choices, participatory oversight, and redistributive arrangements across supply chains and data ecologies.

In conclusion, the themes throughout the chapters remind us of the book's central idea that decolonising organisations is less about reaching a specific point and more about a continuous process of unsettlement—a dedication to constantly question whose knowledge is valued, who benefits from value creation, and which futures are embedded within our structures and tools. The aim is not to replace one centre with another but to expand the circle of understanding and authority so that multiple worlds of knowing and living can collectively shape organisational purpose.

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