



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI BERGAMO

Department  
of Management

## Research Seminars Series A.Y. 2025-2026 1<sup>st</sup> Term

October 30, 2025 – 12:30 a.m. (CET)  
In room 22, via dei Caniana 2  
AND Online on Microsoft Teams ([link](#))

**Presenter: Marta Ingaggiati**  
Università degli Studi di Milano

### **TITLE – *Coping with Multipolar Paradox: Three-Body Problem in Public Administration***

**ABSTRACT** – Paradox theory has typically conceptualized tensions as bipolar, emphasizing the need to hold two opposing forces simultaneously. Yet, organizations often face multiple co-occurring demands that cannot be reduced to simple dyadic contradictions. This study advances paradox theory by introducing the concept of multipolar paradoxes, i.e., configuration involving three or more simultaneous and interdependent poles. Drawing on four-year ethnography of reform project within Italian local government agencies, we explore how organizations navigate paradoxes with more than two competing poles. We empirically trace the manifestation of a tripolar paradox, showing how actors navigate the competing demands of legal compliance, performance efficiency and representativeness. We find that actors often oversimplify triadic tensions by framing them as dyadic. This oversimplification neglects the "three-body problem", in which attempts to reconcile tensions dyadically undermine the broader paradox. In such cases, navigating these complexities requires a strong process perspective, one that treats paradox not as a static contradiction to be balanced, but as a persistent and evolving tension. Finally, we highlight the theoretical and practical implications of multipolar paradoxes.

**TYPE OF RESEARCH** – Empirical

**STAGE OF RESEARCH** – Under review

For further information please refer to: [seminars.dipsa@unibg.it](mailto:seminars.dipsa@unibg.it)

This initiative is implemented within the framework and under the coordination of the TRANSET project of the Department of Management, department of excellence for the period 2023-2027, as per L.232/2016