

Organizing as Improvisations (Methodological Temptations of Social Constructivism)

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Abstract	Academic communities in social sciences are still dominated by neo-positivist paradigm, but communities of practice developing social constructivism have started to redress paradigmatic imbalances. According to the latter man-made organizational reality is processual and saturated with sensemaking (Weick). Social constructivists succeeded in reconstructing complex organizational disasters and contributed to organizational innovation and change (for instance in the wake of ICT challenges). They belong to postmodernist critics of modernity's failure to regulate social development and contribute to a better understanding of organizing (e.g. implementing a new technology or managing knowledge production) as patchworking and improvising. In spite of discriminating practices, they survive in academic communities.	
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(Methodological Temptations of Social Constructivism)

Motto

Native Americans did not believe that they had sold Manhattan Island for \$23 worth of trinkets, no matter what the Dutch thought. Native Americans revere the land in much the same way that Africans do. No king or clan leader could sell what did not belong to him. On the basis of the European contractual custom, the Dutch may have thought they were purchasing the island from the Indians, but this was obviously a view based on their own commercial traditions (Asante, 2001, 77)

Key words: social constructivism, relativism, managerialism, critical theory, organizing, improvisation

Abstract

Academic communities in social sciences are still dominated by neo-positivist paradigm, but communities of practice developing social constructivism have started to redress paradigmatic imbalances. According to the latter man-made organizational reality is processual and saturated with sensemaking (Weick). Social constructivists succeeded in reconstructing complex organizational disasters and contributed to organizational innovation and change (for instance in the wake of ICT challenges). They belong to postmodernist critics of modernity's failure to regulate social development and contribute to a better understanding of organizing (e.g. implementing a new technology or managing knowledge production) as patchworking and improvising. In spite of discriminating practices, they survive in academic communities.

1. Introduction; neo-positivists, social constructivists and organizational “lifeworld” of ICT

Contemporary organizational sciences are no exception to a general rule, which holds in modern academic communities. Their representatives can be divided into the camp of those who believe that there is an external, objective reality “out there”, pursued by all scientists, natural and social alike, and into the camp of those who believe that social sciences, as opposed to the natural ones, deal with a reality, which has been intentionally constructed and is being continuously reconstructed by human agents, both individual and collective. The debate remains undecided and clearly is being negotiated in a provisional and tentative way, by a tacit peer pressure and other forms of lobbying, none of them methodologically legitimate. This state of affairs is at least a century old, but introduction of ICT provided a new twist in an old methodological tale.

Early in the XXth century this difference resulted in a methodological debate on the status of historical and sociological research. It has been decided that natural scientists explain discovering general laws, while social scientists describe and interpret discovering meanings and intentions and offering new interpretations. To put it in a nutshell – natural scientists explain (no need to suspect nature of playing games – “God does not play dice” in Einstein’s famous dictum), while social scientists interpret (for instance – a validity of the sale of Manhattan by Indians to the Dutch, or a validity of an armed intervention of the United Nations and NATO in Kosovo, or intellectual property in the Internet). Natural scientists discover general laws (since they pursue “nomothetic” sciences), while social scientists offer new understanding (pursuing “idiographic” sciences). The answer to a question “does history make sense?” is thus positive, but restricted. It does, but not once and not for all. Its sense is subject to revisions and reinterpretations, changes and negotiations. But what about theories in natural sciences? Well, they are in exactly the same situation – but positivists have been slow about acknowledging it, creating an impression that theories of natural sciences are somehow more universal than those of the social sciences. A more careful examination of natural sciences – however rarely undertaken by researchers from outside of the ruling paradigm – usually suffices to demonstrate mutability of theories and methodologies in physics or biology, chemistry or medicine. Unfortunately, only rarely do these changes actually draw attention of a more general public (as has recently been the case with the possible undermining of an assumed constant in Einstein’s equations, namely the velocity of light) and even less frequent are events, which demonstrate that theories in natural sciences are as much social constructs as those in the humanities. This duality has remained, although philosophical and methodological formulae underwent a very long evolution from a Viennese circle of neopositivists, who believed that philosophy of science can be reduced to a logical analysis of a language of science (Carnap) to a contemporary philosopher of sciences, employed in Paris and Harvard, who claims that:

“This whole tired question of the correspondence between words and the world stems from a simple confusion between epistemology and the history of art. We have taken science for realist painting, imagining that it made an exact copy of the world. The sciences do something else entirely – paintings too, for that matter. Through successive stages they link us to an aligned, transformed, constructed world. We forfeit resemblance, in this model, but there is a compensation: by pointing with our index fingers to features of an entry printed in an atlas, we can, through a series of uniformly discontinuous transformations, link ourselves to Boa Vista.”(Latour, 1999, 78-9)

Recent theoretical developments and methodological debates in social sciences; sociology, social psychology, philosophy of science and economics illustrate the re-emergence of this age-old dilemma. On the one hand we encounter the positivists, who want to police academic communities sticking to their belief in neo-positivism as the only philosophy of science allowing for a pursuit of truth. Their dogmatism became somewhat muted, and one of their most famous representatives, a founding father of sociobiology, has recently limited his claims to the universal validity of a neo-positivist approach to a concept of *consilience*. In spite of all the differences between natural and social scientists E.O. Wilson believes that everything in real world is organized according to a relatively limited number of fundamental principles (“natural laws”), which can be discovered in each branch of learning, no matter how relativistic and socially constructed it’s theoretical framework may seem to be (Wilson, 1998).

On the other hand we encounter social constructivists, who want academic communities to accommodate spatial, temporal and methodological relativism(1). All these debates result in provisional armistice but no permanent peace treaty in philosophy of science. Rival paradigms can compromise and admit the other’s right to existence for pragmatic reasons. However, as soon as one of them acquires a dominant position in academic establishments, lack of permanent peace treaties allows to re-open hostilities (usually by denying the representatives of another paradigm access to periodicals, peer control and funding, crowding them out from Ph.D. programs and tenures, or even from popular media). Organizational sciences – which emerged in the border area between sociology, economics and political sciences – are trying to come to terms with these troubled and complex legacies. Borders between paradigms, theories and domains of academic inquiry, areas of practical applications and specialized competences are contested and fought daily, as empirical analyses of scientific and scholarly journals clearly indicate. Due to the academic politics, many methodological struggles have been thoroughly politicized by racial minorities, generational cohorts, gender movements, political radicals and by other critics of the academic and political establishments.(2) Methodological clashes and paradigmatic struggles failed to result in a consensus among academic communities of practice. The fact that every theory comes with a paradigmatic price tag attached (i.e. with some blind spots in empirical research and with some gaps in possible applications) is often denied, but always brought

up by paradigmatic competitors. Each paradigm can and will be contested by representatives of competing paradigms (though historical and sociological processes can result in muffling the effect of this critique by refusing, for instance, to publish it in acknowledged journals or present it at prestigious conferences). To be classified along with the representatives of a rival paradigm can have serious consequences for a researcher's career. It is only after the initial imbalance between a dominant positivist paradigm and the social constructivist paradigm has been remedied by creating an alternative sequence of communities of practice, scholarly and scientific journals and international conferences that social constructivism's chances of academic survival have risen(3). Does it mean that we are nowadays dealing with a free marketplace of academic ideas? Perhaps, but even if it is a marketplace, it is a strongly controlled and a quasi-monopolistic one, since the results of an almost two centuries long virtual monopoly of neo-positivists in most academic communities are not easily undone within two decades of challenges.

Most theoretical approaches towards social reality and most scientific explanations of social processes have been shown to manifest a particular ideological bias (they are "embedded" in cultural and institutional clusters). For instance, if we scan the domain of organizational sciences, we can easily discover that a vast majority of research studies have been undertaken with "managerialist" ideological assumptions. It is often tacitly assumed that scientific studies should be an instrument for top managers helping them to gear people, material resources and all sorts of relationships to a single end. Studies undertaken on behalf of the employees or of those marginalized and excluded from running companies and organizations, or those excluded from the lists of stakeholders to be consulted, are fewer and further between. Contested ideological assumptions are sometimes laid bare, but not in the routine proceedings of "normal science", from which they are usually dismissed as "unscientific" - as if unquestioned support for the top management rested on firm "scientific" fundamentals, and as if top managers always knew what was best for them and for their companies.

It is ironic that a much needed support in redressing the abovementioned imbalance between well established positivist academic doctrine and the upcoming social constructivist paradigm arrived from unexpected quarters – namely from the ranks of the system scientists and a growing community of knowledge on information and communication technologies (ICT) in organizations. Writing on the positivist doctrine in academic research as an impediment in developing an understanding and an explanation of organizational change, Claudio Ciborra stated plainly that:

"the information systems field, with its rational views of knowledge, decision making, strategy, and orderly systems development, is based on a narrow model of rational, ideal actors"(Ciborra, 2002, 9)

He postulates that in order to overcome the limitations of a scientific paradigm that “looms large” over the ICT-related organizational developments we should: “point to an alternative center of gravity; human existence in everyday life” (ibid.) In order to drive the point home, Ciborra refers to one of the strongest anti-positivist philosophies of the XXth century, namely a phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, who analyzed an embedding of scientific categories in pragmatic activities of an individual to make sense of his or her daily experience (“life world”). Instead of following Wilson’s idea of consilience, he postulates an arbitrary alignment of entities measured by a community of academic specialists “out there”:

“As Husserl points out, we tend to apprehend and explain the world with the help of categories that claim to define it objectively as a set of given objects and relationships, existing in themselves and capable of being grasped by exact measurement methods. For example, we come to believe that alignment (or lack of it) is out there, and that we need to measure it more exactly, so that we will then be able to re-engineer it.

But such a would-be scientific view of the world is only one among many, the outcome of the practice of a sub-community of specialists. The world out there is the precondition for our understanding of such models and methods; thus it presupposes them, and is far from being presupposed by them.(bold type mine – S.M.)

Translated into our case, there is no pure alignment to be measured out there. It is on the contrary our pre-scientific understanding of, and our participation in, the world of organizations that gives to the notion of alignment a shaky and ephemeral existence as an abstraction in our discourses and representations.”(op.cit.23-24)

The idea that academic communities do not work according to the universally valid principles of a single, universal logic, but pursue their research guided by shaky and ephemeral paradigms, offers little comfort to figures of academic authority. However, in an age of learning, in an environment of open, democratic, agile, “platform”-like and flexible organizations, these anti-positivist voices are being received more favourably than ever before. One does not have to become a full-time relativist to notice significance of improvisation in academic communities of practice.

2. Organizing : “leveling vagueness” of double interacts

What do we call "organizations"? “Institutions”? “Companies”? “Governments”? Grass-roots citizens’ initiatives? Universities? What are their organizational identities? What we usually mean when we say “organizations” are in fact huge and complex flows of interpersonal interactions, with a high level of uncertainty

about the outcomes of all individual interacts and negotiations. In the words of a social psychologist and a theoretician of organization, Karl Weick, we should be speaking of organizing and not of organizations, and we should be using verbs and gerunds instead of nouns. Using nouns we "reify" some aspects of the processes and turn a blind eye to the flows of processes from which they emerged and in which they are continuously being modified. We turn a blind eye to the fact that real life consists of interacts and not of meeting rooms, files and name tags in an organizational diagram or *organigram*. Using verbs and gerunds we account for the dynamic, processual nature of organizational realities. Hence the title of Weick's most influential study - "Social Psychology of Organizing" (and not - of "Organizations"). Hence also significance of empirical studies of actual interactions and actual sense-making procedures in real settings. Therefore cultural anthropology turned out to be much more important than psychology in furnishing methodology for studying sensemaking in organizations (cf. Geertz, 2000). Cultural anthropology cannot be replaced with, for instance, geometry of social forms or of interactive patterns (though there are attempts to follow this route mostly in order to increase the semblance of formalization). This significance of social constructivist approach has tacitly been recognized in both academic communities and in business companies subjected to a rapid, far-reaching change of the entire organizational identity. When Olivetti went from typewriters to computers to integrated telecommunications there was very little of a solid world out there and core identity had to be thoroughly re-engineered. No wonder Olivetti hired Ciborra and not a more positivistically inclined consulting or academic adviser to help them muddle through the uncertain choices. That Ciborra quotes favourably Weick's reconstruction of the Mann Gulch disaster should come as no surprise either – though it might surprise those researchers who had marginalized social constructivists hoping to crowd them out of the consulting services for business community.

Important advances in social constructivist organizational science have been linked to research conducted by Karl Weick. He has been asking simple questions; what do people do when they organize? What actually happens when individuals interact? Most of the definitions used on organizational sciences rely on a rational choice theory. Thus we hear that organizations are purposive patterns of cooperation arranged to reach certain goals. Decision-making is a rational process, only slightly blurred by bounded rationality. In order to understand organizations we have to follow the organigrams, analyze what managers communicate to their employees and study implementation of business plans. None of these appealed to Weick. He went after actual flows of organizing. According to him, real organizational life flowed around and between solid bricks of functions and hierarchies. He has been profoundly distrustful of the tacit rational choice theory. He has been particularly dissatisfied with the infamous "prisoner's dilemma" – a model of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, detecting too many too formalist, idealist assumptions about an individual as a rational choice vehicle. This model is based on a very narrow understanding of rationality – namely as the

instrumental one. Individual agents make rational choices trying to maximize their gain and competing against other individuals, who pursue the same strategy from their point of view. While rational choice theory is still tacitly acknowledged by most of the mainstream positivist social scientists (and is also responsible for sterility and irrelevance of mainstream economic and social sciences in general), it is already meeting increasing resistance of social scientists. For instance, sociologists argue against colonizing effects of this approach:

“The objective environment cannot be reduced to the costs incurred in maximizing our independent and individual preferences, since the socio-historical context shapes preference formation itself(Wagner). Nor can our subjectivity be reduced to cost-benefit analysis, since as moral and affective beings we pursue other goals in other ways (Archer and Williams). (...) Rational choice theory concept of rationality is defective in itself and deficient as a solution.”(Archer, Tritter, 2000, 6)

Sharing these sentiments three decades earlier, Weick decided to develop a processual social ontology, which did not have to assume a rational choice of an isolated individual as a basic building block of organizational and social reality. Weick is not a philosopher, so his designs never assumed a form of a complete philosophical doctrine (though some other researchers, especially in Denmark, have thought about exploiting Heidegger to this purpose). Starting with a concept of a minimal social situation (what it takes to interact and how many parties are there all the time – two or three?) he echoed the debates of early sociologists – Durkheim and Simmel, who have also been asking questions about minimal social situation (Simmel thought that a triad of three interacting individuals is the basic component of social situations) and about assembly rules of society (Durkheim thought that cultural, particularly religious values acted as supra-individual selective devices for new forms of behaviour, allowing a selection of those acts, which supported social order and limited social “anomie”). Minimal social situations are made to be assembled as events in series – hence the concept of the so-called double interact. What is a double interact? When A reacts upon seeing B, B replies, and then A talks back, responding to a reply. A possibility of endless sequences being strung out of this interact is obvious. Weick thought that this is where sources of order in an apparently chaotic and complex reality of modern organizations are to be found.

He has also quoted a famous anecdote of two watchmakers, Hora and Tempus, invented by Herbert Simon. Both watchmakers start with the same task of assembling watches. Each watch requires putting 1000 parts together. They work with the same speed. Their only constraint is that whenever a phone rings, they have to drop parts they have in hand and answer it. A chance that their phone rings is 1:100. Tempus goes about assembling watches from part 1 to part 1000. If a phone rings when he has 999 parts in hand, he has to scramble them anew. Hora has his parts sub-assembled into tens and tens into hundreds. His highest

risk is losing 99 parts. No wonder Hora is much more effective than Tempus. The same holds true for organizations. If they can rely on intermediate stable forms (read: smaller components, self-sufficient business units, self-governing teams, etc.) – they will accomplish their goals even if organization is reengineered, environment unstable and employees get interrupted. If double interacts survive and flourish – the organization as a whole is safer, more robust and reliable than the one, which cannot fall back on them. The problem is, of course, that it is not very easy for top managers to manage basic interacts, not even to monitor them with sufficient regularity.

Weick's major contribution to the social constructivist theory of organization was linked to the insertion of an alternative approach calling for research attention to the lowest level operatives, to the reconstruction of their double interacts and their sensemaking procedures, to the empirical description of organizational reality most mainstream organization theoreticians would never even try to notice. His opening of new methodological perspectives coincided with growth of research conducted according to naturalistic methodology allowing participating observation, closer collaboration with low-level employees of an organization and – generally speaking – a more participative, constructivist research. Another significant development was linked to a critical discourse analysis (language of managers has been scrutinized and its ideological and power components identified). This latter approach often found theoretical support in the concept of deconstruction (introduced by Derrida) and by the researchers pursuing hermeneutical interpretation and critical deconstruction of organizational languages (cf. Guba, Lincoln, 1989, Alvesson, Skoldberg, 2000, Alvesson, Deetz, 2000). Virtually absent from mainstream academic publications, this new generation of critical organizational researchers has already been acknowledged in serious academic resource books – cf., for instance, Hatch's discussion of the most popular and fertile research paradigms (cf. Hatch, 1999). Young researchers close their Ph.D. theses with statements demonstrating the impact of social constructivism on methodological preferences of research communities:

“The moral of the story, if there has to be one, is to be neither too vague, nor too precise; just vague enough. If goals, research phenomena, or companies, are too vaguely described, it might be easy to get lost. There is nowhere to start from, nothing to work with, nothing to stand on. Excessive vagueness paralyzes action and complete chaos prevails. On the other hand, if goals, research phenomena, or companies are too precisely stated, then the whole group loses. None sees room for peculiarities; nor is there place for individual initiative or local adaptation. Excessive precision ignores the particulars – stiffness dominates. The quiz lies in leveling vagueness so that there is room for change and adaptation, space for the peculiar. Chaos and disorder menace on one side; rigidity and authoritarianism on the other. The fuel for action and constructive interaction lays in the delicate leveling of vagueness.”(Barinaga, 2002,159)

Weick had started with a critical analysis of a gap between actual activities of organizing and theories managers justified their actions with. In many cases he found that managers - contrary to empirical evidence and their own actions - believed in "cause maps", in unilateral causation, independent variables, single origins, end phases, etc. The same managers did, however, intuitively grasp that causal loops are more frequent than linear cause-effect sequences, that children socialize parents, responses affect stimuli, means affect ends and actions affect desires. In order to explain these causal loops, Weick decided to analyze organizational processes in terms of interlocked behaviours, which are being selected, and then reinforced and retained or rejected and changed through the organizing activities. An individual drifts through repeated interactions, being partially included in many behavioural interactions and retrospectively assigning meaning ("making sense") of his or her organizational life. In spite of continuous flux organizations do not fall apart even if many individuals and groups abandon or harm them, or when external pressures and internal conflicts threaten them, because of the relative stability of double interactions being constantly assembled and re-assembled by individuals who intuitively reduce uncertainty by cooperating, by following predictable patterns of behaviour and thus by stabilizing some of the ongoing organizational events around them. In Weick's terms they "enact" their organizational environment, thus co-constructing organizational realities as they go along:

"We have purposely labeled the organizational equivalent of variation enactment to emphasize that managers construct, rearrange, single out and demolish many "objective" features of their surroundings. When people act, they unrandomize variables, insert vestiges of orderliness, and literally create their own constraints. This holds true whether these constraints are created in fantasy to justify avoided tests or created in actuality to explain tangible bruises."(Weick, 1979,164)

3. Real life extreme cases and social constructivism

Weick's theory of the evolutionary drift of organizational forms emerging out of the continuous flow of organizing processes leads to two major classes of hypotheses. According to the first class of hypotheses, ecological changes in the environment of organizations favour agility, variety and speed - those organizational forms which turn out to be more flexible, more loosely structured and more improvised on the spur of the moment, tend to be also quicker in exploiting evolutionary windows of opportunity. Moreover, their advantage rests not only with the ability to scan changing environment better - it is also linked to their better maintenance of double interactions and loose couplings, the nuts and bolts of organizing. One should add that Weick has never expressed any views on the so called population ecology of organizations - a small school of thought in organizational sciences which attempts to save the neopositivist assumptions by introducing a comparative study of formal features of large numbers of organizations. Followers of this school hope to come up with valid covering laws

expressing universal preconditions for organizational survival and growth. They employ a biological metaphor by suggesting that a managerial DNA of a successful organizational species can be discovered and manipulated in creating and maintaining future organizations – very much in the spirit of Wilson’s infamous sociobiology. So far, most of the formalizations failed to meet the level of relevance and are basically a formalized reformulation of common sense intuitions about survival and failure of organizations. But since they offer a chance for a dominant neo-positivist doctrine to rejuvenate itself – chances of academic success, or at least of prolonged fighting against the coming social constructivist barbarians, are quite high.

According to the second class of hypotheses, when organizing, managers and managed should avoid reifications, stimulate creativity and generally attempt at “leveling vagueness”. For instance, if some of the loosely structured research communities (which appear much in want of discipline to their professional supervisors, who sometimes are selected from outside of the community of practice, as is the case with deans who are managers rather than academics) with too much of an organizational slack built into them (according to the public authorities or business communities) are disciplined by managers obsessed by criteria of utility, and bureaucratic discipline, their ability to creatively respond to future challenges gradually declines. Organizations lose a requisite variety of organizing options and can only function within an existing environment. Any changes and any unpredicted challenges pose a potential threat, since organizing resources have been lost to a temporary freeze-frame of managerial control. In his latest study entitled "Making Sense of Organizations" Weick presents a number of research projects conducted within the social constructivist school of thought by listing their common themes. These themes are linked to the irrationality of some decision-making processes (organizations are less rational than their managers would like us to believe, employees may pursue value rationality rather than instrumental one, etc.), internal segmentation (organizations are more segmented and far more loosely coupled than their monolithic self-descriptions and neopositivist models indicate) and a relatively small size of stable organizational segments. He sums his discussion up in the following way, drawing our attention to significance of reiterated improvisation:

"Newer models of organization suggest that order occurs in unexpected places and spans fewer people for shorter periods than we thought. These newer proposals, however, do not claim that order is completely absent. Organizations may be anarchies, but they are *organized* anarchies. Organizations may be loosely coupled, but they are loosely coupled *systems*. Organizations may resort to garbage can decision making, but garbage cans have borders that impose some structure"(Weick, 2001, 34)

Nevertheless, extreme distrust of rational choice theories has generated a number of critical, alternative approaches to organizational studies, some of them with a political agenda. For instance, there is a political agenda of feminists, ecologists,

Afro-Americans trying to undo the long-term effects of racism and discrimination, and obviously there are hidden agendas of various methodological schools within the academic communities of practice. The latter, however, stand a better chance of checking their assumptions against actual empirical data than broad political groups. This is due to the fact that even the most extreme academic schools accept the authority of empirical verification, which is relatively simpler than a political verification of a party program (since politicians can claim interfering influences of political opponents and unforeseen circumstances):

"In our dealings with empiricism - broadly defined here as all research in which "pure data" or 'uninterpreted" facts are the solid bedrock of research - we try to take account of the objections which had been raised by hermeneuticians, critical theorists, poststructuralists, linguistic philosophers, discourse analysts, feminists, reflectivists and other trouble-makers - who implicitly or explicitly leave their readers despairing and irresolute vis a vis empirical research - we stubbornly claim that it is pragmatically fruitful to assume the existence of a reality beyond the researcher's egocentricity and the ethnocentricity of the research community (paradigms, consciousness, text, rhetorical manoeuvring), and that we as researchers should be able to say something insightful about this reality. This claim is consistent with a belief that social reality is not external to the consciousness and language of people - members of a society as well as researchers (who, of course, are members of a society)."(Alvesson, Skoldberg, 2000, 3)

The Challenger disaster belongs to the most often quoted cases, since it has been analyzed by Karl Weick along with the Mann Gulch firefighting disaster and the crash of KLM jet liner in Teneriffe airport, to mention but the most dramatic ones. Other authors tackled the poisonous leak in Union Carbide's Indian plant in Bhopal and the nuclear power plant incident on a Three Mile Island or companies as different as those running the Seattle ferries or those trying to preserve the traditional managerial authority with intricate meeting and speech rituals in Sweden.

The Challenger disaster, in which all astronauts died, was caused by leaking rings, which were supposed to seal the fuel tank attached to the booster rocket carrying space shuttle into the orbit. Fuel tank had to be carried by the rocket in the first phase of the flight immediately after launching. Rings have been supplied by Morton Thiokol's company. Thiokol's engineers have advised against launching, since they claimed that a particular range of temperatures at the planned time of the launching were exactly the temperatures at which the seals they had manufactured could spring a leak. They had voiced their opposition very forcefully, but limited their discussion to their own engineering team. Their view was taken further to the managerial team of NASA by a representative of their company, who did not have a technical background. He passed their warning on, but without the underlying reasoning. Moreover, he passed his

warning on by telephone and not in a face to face communication, which further reduced additional clues he might have conveyed with his posture, facial expression and added emphasis:

"Communication between Morton Thiokol and NASA about the wisdom of launching Challenger in unusually cold temperatures was made by conference telephone call, a medium with less variety than face-to-face conversation. With only voice cues, NASA did not have visual data of facial expression and body cues, which might have given them more vivid information about the intensity of Thiokol's concerns."(Weick, 2001, 333)

Since most of the members of the NASA decision-making team were not familiar with technological aspects of fuel tank safety, they voted for launching (for economic and political reasons) and Thiokol's technical advice was overruled. Expected failure of the rings provided by Thiokol did, indeed take place, and the leak of fuel led to an explosion of a booster rocket and a destruction of a space shuttle with all astronauts aboard. When reconstructing the decision-making at the NASA, an SC researcher tries to interpret cognitive maps of organizational realities, which guided actions of relevant participants. He also tries to predict what might have prevented a similar set of members of an organization from making a similar mistake in future by constructing a different "reality" for decision makers:

"What all of this leads us to is an unusual reconstruction of the events of the night of January 27, 1986, when NASA was arguing with Morton Thiokol about whether freezing weather would disable the booster rocket. That conversation apparently took the traditional course of people arguing in linear, sequential fashion, about the pros and cons of a launch. If, somewhere in these discussions, someone has said, "That reminds me of a story", a different rationality might have been applied and a different set of implications might have been drawn. Those, in turn, might have led to a different outcome. There are precedents in history. The solution of the Cuban missile crisis by a surgical airstrike was dropped when Robert Kennedy recalled the story of Pearl Harbour, and portrayed a U.S. attack on Cuba as Pearl Harbour in reverse."(Weick, 2000, 342)

As should be clear from cases discussed above by the representatives of social constructivism, researchers in organizational sciences are trying to generate new insights with their interpretation of critical events, to subject them to a critical analysis (sometimes exploring domination and repression) and finally to generate "transformative re-definition indicating alternative ways of imagining and relating to what exists"(Alvesson, Deetz, 2000, 164). Other applications of social constructivist paradigm in social science research can be found in political ethnography as practiced by Michael Burawoy and his collaborators in Berkeley and within globally distributed network of researchers (cf. Burawoy and Verdery, 1999, Burawoy et al, 2000).

4. Social constructivism's impact upon sciences of organization:

Are social scientists in general and organizational scientists in particular a paradigmatic minority among researches in management and organization compared to the well entrenched representatives of a positivist and conformist view of science? Yes and no. Yes, if numbers of academic handbooks of management and organizational behaviour, development and change are being compared. Most of the popular handbooks are still being written from a dominant paradigmatic perspective – a neopositivist one. No, if scholarly and scientific debates and polemics are being compared; the constructivist and critical perspective is gaining ground and dominant paradigm systematically fails to meet the expectations of researchers, politicians and business managers. This is why representatives of social constructivism have already managed to acquire a firm foothold in research centers, conference networks, editorial boards of professional publications, at the universities and in scientific communities of practice. Suffice it to scan calls for papers for conferences or special issues of established periodicals in order to notice announcements like the one below:

“The special issue on organizing knowledge wants to step back from the engineering approach to knowledge. We invite contributors to reflect on the contradicting relation of knowledge and management. We also invite a broad social, historical, political, ethical and philosophical reflection on the relations of knowledge, practices of organizing, knowledge society, managerial knowledge, and the complex strategies through which the employee selves are constituted. At the same time, we encourage contributing authors to consider that the readers of *International Journal of Internet and Enterprise Management* include practitioners and policy makers apart from scholars. We emphasize strongly the value of creativity on behalf of the authors sharing what can be learnt from their texts.”(Hjorth, 2002).

More radical representatives of social constructivism have successfully criticized a dominant ideology of managerialism in organizational sciences, i.e. an ideology, which claims that all issues encountered in all organizations can be solved when reduced to instrumental questions of proper management. Even high-ranking officials of World Bank (Stieglitz) have increasingly become aware of the limitations of this managerialization of the world (the excluded do talk and strike back), but academic communities have been more reluctant to pick this critique up (being dependent on government funding and business need for expertise). These developments made academic communities aware of a professional conformism of researchers. This in-built conformism limits critical assessment of dominant theories and paradigms and isolates academic communities against new paradigms and theories. Young researchers are dependent on senior ones for funds and advancement according to peer control and are easily socialized into paradigmatic loyalties. This mechanism slows down criticism of dominant theories and emergence of new ones, and damages

growth of knowledge in general. Representatives of social constructivism often point out that a dominant position of a neo-positivist paradigm in scientific communities is being legitimized with an ideology of scientific progress (which implicitly implies that rival paradigms are unscientific and harmful to scientific progress) and sustained by an illusion of rapid cumulative advances of knowledge;

"There is little sense to be made of the view that scientific research moves us ever closer to "the truth". There is no convincing account of how an array of syllables (scientific theory) can increasingly "capture the contours" of what exists. Further, there are important advantages in abandoning the view of science as a march to the truth. First, we remove the competitive posture of the sciences, the attempt to narrow down the range of ideas to the "single best" approximation of reality. Rather, we are invited by constructionist arguments to sustain a multiplicity to keep myriad images and metaphors alive. In this respect it is not an embarrassment to physics to sustain both the wave and particle theories of light; nor is it a problem of psychology that there are multiple theories of mental disorder. With multiplicity comes flexibility. Further, by removing the ideal of "the single truth", we open the door to wide-ranging participation in the dialogues of science. Progress for one is peril for another; the social and ethical significance of scientific inquiry should be subject to broadest scrutiny" (Gergen, 1999, 238-9).

Less radical representatives of social constructivism (either in a political sense of being less critical about academic communities and peer policing or in a methodological sense of being more accommodating and less "dogmatic" vis a vis the other paradigms) have continued their research and teaching with a relatively high degree of acceptance and with a number of interesting theories to their names, for instance theories of social resources mobilization (explaining the emergence of new social movements - cf. McCarthy, Zald, 1979), re-individualization of social life and collective identities (Melucci, 1989,1996), network societies and social impact of the Internet (Castells, 1996, 2001), reflexive modernization and economies of signs and space (Lash, 1999, Lash, Urry, 1994), various aspects of globalization (Featherstone, Lash, Robertson, 1995), management of consumption (Ritzer, 1996,2001), social geography and experience of urban spaces (Harvey, 1996, 2000), face to face interaction (Turner, 2002) and many others. Even in less radical representatives of social constructivism there is a trace of a critical attitude towards organizational realities and a preference for a developing knowledge conducive to a change rather than to a preservation of a status quo at the organizational level. Thus in a study by J.H. Turner, "Face to Face. Toward a Sociological Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour", we read that:

"When people are happy, they rarely push for change; when they are angry, fearful or sad, they are generally open to alternative ways of interacting and relating to corporate and categorical units. Indeed, it is their negative energy

directed at corporate and categoric units that makes people receptive to changing these units. The more the negative emotional energy aroused at the level of the encounter and the more this encounter is connected to other encounters where negative emotional energy exists, the greater will be the effects of emotional arousal in one encounter on others, especially when calls for change are couched in rituals increasing positive emotions focussed on alternatives to the conditions generating negative emotional energy. The key to mobilization of people's sentiments to collective action has always been to tap into negative emotions, particularly those directed at corporate and categoric units as well as the more inclusive institutional domains in which they are embedded , and then to use highly ritualized behaviours to intensify these emotions while, at the same time, offering an alternative that can arouse positive emotional energy about the future. All charismatic leaders have understood this force, and many less charismatic holders of authority and prestige have used it to their advantage to change mesostructures."(Turner, 2002,249)

But “people” (employees, clients, citizens, voters) obviously are not “happy” with the aftermath of the liberal reconstruction of world order after the breakdown of state socialist system. One of the manifestations of this dissatisfaction is the emergence of critical paradigms in organizational sciences. Another is being detected in organizational innovations pointing towards a network and a platform as a new generic form of organizing. Interestingly enough, some of representatives of social constructivism can be found in an emergent field of the Internet. For instance, when trying to answer to question “who controls the Internet?”, some of them are trying to demonstrate that neither “nobody” nor “AOL and US government” is correct. By doing so, they go beyond the purely institutionalist approach and claim that:

“For any complex sociotechnical system, especially one that touches as many people as the Internet, control takes form of institutions, not commands. Contending parties work out rules and procedures that make their interactions less costly, more stable and predictable. They supplement these rules with organizations that monitor compliance and sanction those who break the rules. In such a process control is never perfect and no one gets exactly what he wants.(...) Institutional regimes, particularly at the international level, are not based on ideas or efficiency, but on political bargains over the distribution of wealth. (...) A restricted name space reinforces the land rush mentality and potential for abuse that created the conflicts to begin with. And by reinforcing problems, it rationalizes the continued existence of a restrictive regime that regulates the conflicts via collective action.(...) A form of positive feedback led to the formation and entrenchment of an inefficient regime, just as North described. It is the product of social processes locked into a dysfunctional pattern by a kind of recursive political logic that no one knows how to break out of.”(Mueller, 2002, 11 and 258-9)

5. Birth of social constructivism out of the spirit of radical politicized critique

From the point of view of regulatory agencies of the Internet the above study by Mueller must be considered highly critical of institutional arrangements and organizing dynamics. Awareness that an institution owes its existence to a dysfunctional vicious circle does little to legitimize this institution's continued existence. Social constructivism does not stand alone in this critical venture. It is considered to be one of the main theoretical manifestations of a critical phase in development of the European modernity, the one labeled postmodernity. Let us begin with a definition of modernity and postmodernity in order to better understand the position of critical theoreticians.

The term modernity is used in order to describe a bunch of transformational processes, which impacted politics (especially the French and American revolutions), economics (especially since the commercial, capitalist and industrial revolutions) and science (especially since the encyclopaedist project of Enlightenment turned science into a socially privileged form of knowledge production). The last contemporary expression of the modernist project can be found in Fukuyama's "The End of History" (Fukuyama,1992), where a market economy and a parliamentary democracy are hailed as the only proper organizational frame for human evolution. However, this monopolistic explanation of modern societies has been rightly criticized. First, it does not offer an explanation of mounting problems of global inequalities, unemployment and gray economy, criminal and terrorist networks, and fundamentalist revivals. Second, it does not explain growing disenchantment with formal democracy (which deteriorates into a regent establishment) and with the not-so-invisible hand of the liberal market (which fails to include permanently unemployed sectors of western societies and permanently marginalized nations of the Third World). Third, it does not offer insights into knowledge production by incompatible theoretical means (different methodologies and paradigms, all of which are there to stay). Contemporary social scientists become increasingly aware that modernity may have run its course and that our way of thinking is drifting away from the basic assumptions of the Enlightenment. Postmodernity, a time of uncertainty with respect to our knowledge, doubt and competing claims for validity made by representatives of rival paradigms, has replaced modernity, a period of a secularized faith in progress (roughly from the French revolution to WWII).

These views are not limited to the academic milieu. Comparing cultural, political and economic change in 43 societies, Ronald Inglehart came up with a theory of a postmodern shift in societal goals and individual values. According to him, traditional societies, before modernization took place, had focussed on survival in a steady-state economy, socialized individuals by making them internalize traditional religious and communal norms and legitimized power by traditional authorities. After modernization, the core societal project shifted to maximizing an economic growth. Individual values were linked to the

achievement motivation (fed by mass-scale upward mobility), and power holders were legitimized as rational-legal authorities (justified by a division of the world between nation-states). The postmodern turn replaced maximizing economic growth with maximizing a subjective well-being (hence the emergence of a consumer society and of an experience economy). The achievement motivation has been replaced with postmaterialist and postmodern values. Radical de-emphasis of both legal and religious authorities means that there is no return to the premodern legitimizing of authorities (in spite of fundamentalist attempts to do exactly this). Both legal and religious authorities had been subjected to a critical scrutiny in powerful mass media and to regular institutionalized checks demanded by suspicious citizens (cf. Inglehart, 1997, 76). Due to the presence of modern mass media and new information and communication technologies, individuals acquired access to many social processes, which became increasingly transparent and subject to an ongoing public criticism and re-engineering. Similar results have been obtained by studying shifts in individual values and societal norms towards the postmaterialist, postmodern ones, experienced by the European young generations in the last quarter of the XXth century (cf. Therborn, 1995).

It is against this background of shifting societal and organizational, individual and cultural values (religious fundamentalism is also a form of cultural reengineering) that we should see the fiasco of a liberal attempt at a rejuvenation of earlier forms of capitalism and the present attempt to increase organizational choices in all walks of life. Founding fathers are, not surprisingly, among those who had already fought against neo-positivist doctrines in the 1930ies and against both naked violence of the state socialist regimes on the one hand and the “repressive tolerance” of liberal social order based on class struggle in home countries and colonial exploitation on a global scale on the other. Frankfurt School is clearly a critical case in point. Not surprisingly, European roots of social constructivism include phenomenological philosophy (as the major enemy of positivism in the academic communities) and critical theoreticians of the Frankfurt school (as politically uncompromised critics of nazism, Stalinism and capitalist mass culture at the same time).

6. Social constructivism: a critical improvisation on managerialist theme

We have been using the term social constructivism. What exactly does it mean? Social constructivism is a theoretical term used to characterize a family of theories and theoretical schools in social sciences. What do they have in common? They are explaining a social production of reality (i.e. processes through which human agents make sense of their relationships and activities) and social organization of knowledge (which allows us to make sense) through interactions and communications. Milder versions hold that social factors shape intersubjective interpretations of the world. Stronger versions hold that significant parts of social world, both cognitive and institutional, are constituted

by the very act of interpretation, or by a conflict and a negotiation of an accepted and shared meaning. Needless to say, the intentional nature of human agents and their complex reliance on cultural values play an important role in such interpretations:

"What is special about culture is the manifestation of collective intentionality, and, in particular, the collective assignment of functions to phenomena, where function **cannot** be performed solely in virtue of sheer physical features of the phenomena. From dollar bills to cathedrals, and from football games to nation-states, we are constantly encountering new social facts, where the facts exceed the physical features of the underlying physical reality"(Searle,1995,228).

The first glimpse of social constructivism in sociology can be found in a monumental study "Polish Peasant in Europe and America" published by W.Thomas and F. Znaniecki in 1924 - they are credited with a statement that when people imagine and experience cultural and social constraints as real, then they are real in so far as they have material consequences. Znaniecki and Thomas got absorbed into the mainstream of Chicago sociology and their sociological method based on personal documents (letters, diaries) lost its innovative, critical edge. However, social criticism became widespread again in the 1960ies as an interpretative paradigm (first, in social psychology and sociology, then, in the 1970ies, in organizational sciences). Prompted by rebellious students, researchers started focussing on the production of meaning and rediscovered phenomenology as one of the main anti-positivist schools in philosophy, which influenced methodology of social sciences. In 1966 a significant book by Berger and Luckman - "The Social Construction of Reality" presented a thesis that social reality as experienced by individual actors in modern fragmented society is a collage of multiple individual and collective interactions and interpretations - a social construction and not a stable, objective "external world". The authors were following a critical tradition of the leftist Frankfurt School, whose representative, Alfred Schutz, has been instrumental in merging the insights of a phenomenologist philosopher, Edmund Husserl and one of the major sociologists of the early XXth century, Max Weber.

Meanwhile some schools in sociology (for instance - symbolic interactionism - cf. Goffman, 1959, ethnomethodology, Garfinkel, 1967) were focussing on interpretation of meanings attached by individuals and groups to patterns of activities and communications. Their writings, however, could only become acceptable to the academic communities of practice after Kuhn (cf. Kuhn, 1970) and Feyerabend (cf. Feyerabend, 1975) showed that changes of theoretical paradigms depend on historical and social contingencies and not on mythical "crucial experiments". It became less risky for researchers to flirt with social constructivism also due to the fact that critical philosophies of language undermined the positivist view of scientific reasoning (Wittgenstein) and postmodernists (Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Bauman, Rorty, Sloterdijk) made relativist approach to scientific methodologies respectable.

Some modern representatives of social constructivism do not limit themselves to the acknowledgment of a difference between social and natural sciences, but claim that theories in physics or biology are also artificial social constructs, accepted because of the monopoly of science and a dictatorship of a single paradigm, and not because of some inherent superiority to rival explanations of physical reality (cf. Czarniawska, 1999, Gergen, 1999). Social constructivism, along with other postmodernist theoretical schools in organizational sciences, can perhaps best be viewed as "complicated series of cultural and theoretical inventions, each of which were adjustments to the realities of the world in the second half of the twentieth century" (Lemert, 1997, 17). This dramatic turn in the philosophy and practice of social sciences, which stopped defending themselves against the positivists entrenched in natural sciences and struck back, winning many footholds in academic communities, has been caused by advances in history of science and cognitive psychology. In striking back and demonstrating that far from being universally valid, theories in natural sciences follow the same improvised twists as the ones in social science, critics took on a Darwinian theory of evolution. It been increasingly understood as a very influential, trend-setting and world-constructing science:

"What most people saw as God-given design, (Darwin) saw as mere adaptations to circumstance, adaptations that were meaningless except for the way in which they helped an animal or plant to survive. Much of this was perhaps familiar to a nation immersed in competitive affairs: Darwin had transformed the generalized entrepreneurial ethos of English life into a biological theory which, in turn, derived much of its support from these all-pervasive commitments."(Browne, 1995, 542-3)

Social historians of science and technology have been quick to exploit this analogy between methodological and theoretical choices on the one hand and socio-historical context on the other. According to Steven Fuller, who has critically analyzed emergent knowledge management literature and criticized peer control as a mechanism responsible for conservatism and irrelevance of much of academic research:

"The emergence of knowledge management as a field of inquiry has brought into view two conflicting intuitions that have informed Western conception of knowledge since the time of the Greeks. I have encapsulated this conflict as a military-industrial metaphor. The military side of the metaphor is that the pursuit of knowledge has clear goals that inquirers approximate to varying degrees. The industrial side is that knowledge is perpetually generated and accumulated, so that, like money, one can never have enough of it. The military metaphor attracts more sporting virtues, such as doing the most with the least, whereas the industrial metaphor attracts craft virtues such as hard work and attention to detail in product design. The former is aristocratic in origin, the latter plebeian, and, with the advent of scientific professionalization, it has become bourgeois.

Knowledge is "achieved" according to the military metaphor, "produced" according to the industrial one. (...) There are opportunities here for both an intelligent democratization of inquiry and a mindless natural selection of knowledge producers and products."(Fuller, 2002, 252-3)

According to another historian of science and technology, David Noble (cf. Noble, 1986), different preferences of managers for specific types of knowledge can explain different trajectories of large scale organizational shifts during an implementation of a new technology. His study of robotization in the US manufacturing industries is a case in point. Managers have started introducing robots during the Korean war, when a rapid increase in army demand for airplanes and tanks made them look for quick increase in productivity. They have had fresh memories of full WWII employment and an equally recent history of successful strikes led by powerful trade unions. They distrusted their employees and applied top-bottom approach asking designers and academicians to develop a replacement for unruly labor. Situation was quite different in Japan. There, managers had no powerful trade unions to tackle – to the contrary, they had a disciplined labour force socialized for a collective action. They could thus safely rely on the best practices of the lowest employees - human operators of older machines, while designing the newer ones – i.e. industrial robots. This approach has often been called a player piano (player pianos have been constructed by recording a human performance on a punched card and then reproducing music mechanically according to a human original), bottom up procedure. As a result, robotization proceeded much more quickly and efficiently in Japan than in the USA, where it has been sabotaged by "excluded" human operators. If there was a dialogue between managers and employees, the US managers would be much better prepared to realize their dependence on a narrow class of knowledge products and to broaden a variety of potential solutions they could choose from. Noble's credentials as a historian are impeccable, but his academic career was not smooth, due mainly to the political thrust of his writings. In closing chapters of the abovementioned study, whose subtitle was "The Social History of Industrial Automation", he wrote that:

"Technology is not the problem, nor is the solution. The problem is political, moral and cultural, as is the solution: a successful challenge to a system of domination, which masquerades as progress. Such a challenge will no doubt require opposition to technology in its present form - to buy time and cripple the current attack. And it will require political mobilization and vision, cultural inventiveness and rejuvenation, and a revitalization of moral confidence. But it will also require once and for all a transcendence of the irrational and infantile ideology of technological progress which has confounded Western thinking for at least two centuries - an ideology, which has for too long obscured the realities of power in society, provided legitimation and cultural sanction for those who wield it, and paralyzed any and all opposition."(Noble, 1986,351)

Noble's distrust of a shallow managerialism as an ideology of progress is echoed by other researchers' fascination with Heidegger, as an early philosophical critic of neopositivist fascination with one-dimensional technological progress. This distrust towards the unholy alliances of knowledge and power symbolized by a shallow ideology of managerialism has been manifest in studies of critical theoreticians of organization (Boje on Nike, Ritzer on McDonald's, Urry on tourism, Debord on society of spectacle, Deetz on corporate communications, etc.) and is being continued also in critical studies of knowledge management and the philosophy of science (cf. Fuller, 2000, Boje, 2001).

Other authors often write on "theories of stakeholder enabling", on "organization as a play of multiple and dynamic discourses" or on "ecological futures: systems theory, postmodernism and participative learning in an age of uncertainty" (all these titles are chapters from Boje, Gephart, Thatchenkery, 1996) and complain about the academic establishment's hostility towards critical theories of management in general, and of an ideology of managerialism in particular (one of the chapters in abovementioned book is tellingly entitled: "Storytelling at Administrative Science Quarterly: Warding Off the Postmodernist Barbarians"). Their experience was a share of numerous organizational scientists (e.g. Alvesson, Scott, Burrell, Morgan, Denzin, Burr, Lasch, Turner, Gergen, Smircich, Whitley, Cooper, Guba, Lincoln, Erlandson, Weick, Latour, Bourdieu, Geertz, Harvey), who have been developing critical research strategies. Theoretical approach of Weick, Guba, Lincoln, Erlandson and Alvesson has been applied in organizational change theories in many academic centers, often encountering resistance of their academic communities (cf. van Dongen et al., 1997, Magala, 1997). Generally speaking, the more socially relevant and academically accepted social constructivist theories are, the more frequent are the attempts of neopositivist establishments of academic communities to find a *modus vivendi* by isolating them and limiting their influence upon future researchers(4).

Is there a way to assess future chances of social constructivism in academic institutions? Perhaps a recent emergence of *experience economy* (after manufacturing and service ones) offers a possibility for a more balanced reshuffling of academic cards. Neo-positivistic research methods are not particularly fit for investigating activities, which call for an understanding of client sensemaking and for a reconstruction of subjective memories of particular experiences. Tragedies and comedies in theatres of consumption and general fluidity of organizational forms are more convincingly distinguished and described by the representatives of social constructivism.

Notes

- (1) In spite of many other differences, most of the neopositivists and social constructivists would agree that a constructivist approach leads to relativist consequences, not all of which can be justified on political grounds. Kukla's arguments stand: "Among constructivisms, the only variety that isn't beset by serious conceptual problems is the type that I called reasonable constructivism. This is the unadventurous thesis that every society is able to construct facts about itself. At the other end of the scale of credibility is the strong constructivism which asserts that all ascertainable facts are constructed. This position is as indefensible as any philosophical stance can be. Strong constructivists have yet to show that the infinite regress of constructions generated by their thesis isn't vicious, or that the temporal incongruities generated by their thesis admit of a coherent resolution. They also haven't accounted for what happens when two societies construct incompatible facts. To my mind, the most telling argument against strong constructivism is also the simplest: if all facts are negotiable, then why does anybody ever feel the need to defend a favoured thesis against a factual objection? Why not simply deny the problematic fact? In light of all these unresolved difficulties, I think we're justified in drawing the firm conclusion that the world exists."(Kukla, 2000,160)
- (2) This politicization has not been lost on conservative critics of academic establishments. Any attempt at broadening access to higher education for formerly disadvantaged groups or at a more democratic campus polis are met with a stubborn refusal to see anything but a lamentable loss of standards. "While to cost of college education continues to spiral upward, the curriculum is becoming a wasteland as students design their own programs of study"(London, 2001,77)
- (3) What do we mean when we speak of social constructivist paradigm? A **paradigm** - is usually understood as a set of core assumptions of a school of thought differentiating its followers from the rest of a scientific community and generating scientific research programs. The term has been introduced by Kuhn in order to explain growth of knowledge and social processes within academic communities and developed by Musgrave, Lakatos and others. Kuhn's studies of scientific revolutions were triggered by a growing criticism of the increasingly sterile and socially irrelevant social sciences in the 1950ies and 1960ies. Academic establishments were totally dominated at the time by a positivist paradigm. **Positivism** is a school in philosophy (Comte) and a mainstream in the philosophy of science (Carnap). It has been tacitly and explicitly accepted by a majority of world research communities. It assumes an objective existence of the external world and views history of science as a gradual progress towards the truth - increasingly exact and precise description and explanation of this reality. It is heavily biased towards quantitative methods and towards a

conformist socialization of young researchers. Subjected to a philosophical criticism of Popper and his disciples (Lakatos, Giedymin, Feyerabend), positivism has been rejected in the 1960ies also on political and moral grounds. It has failed to respond to the challenge of postmodernism, but remains a dominant force in academic research communities. **Postmodernism** - a multifunctional term introduced by Lyotard to label an interparadigmatic interregnum after the decline of both neopositivist and postpopperian philosophy of science (ca. 1975-2000), a general distrust of the "grand narratives" in philosophy, art (especially architecture) and politics, and increasing doubts about the feasibility of European modernization program symbolized by the Enlightenment ("postmodernity is modernity without illusions" according to Bauman). One of the postmodernist charges against positivists was that their methodologies reified ("froze") organizational world, impeding change and maintaining status quo increasingly challenged by various groups (e.g. feminists, antiglobalists, racial and ethnic minorities, ex-colonial societies, young generations). **Reification** - a tendency of managers and researchers to treat temporary conventions, definitions, relations and forms of organizing as objective reality, which obscures the processual nature of social reality and impedes effective managerial interventions and an authentic organizational change. Reification is one of the most important stumbling blocks in understanding social reality since it constraints individuals in their sensemaking activities and crowds out alternative conceptualizations of their experience. **Sensemaking** in organizations is an important activity allowing all members to contribute to their organization's functioning. Social life in general is based on a social construction of meanings attached to behaviour, relations and symbolic artefacts, sustained by the flow of reiterated interactions, "enacted" by individuals and groups and subjected to individual and collective changes through conflicts and negotiations. Accounting for this fact we have to decode, deconstruct, reconstruct and decipher construction acts of social reality - which is precisely why social constructivism came about. **Social constructivism** (constructionism) - a family of theories and methodologies in social sciences explaining how individuals and groups "produce" social reality by generating meanings and interpreting relationships, interactions and environments. SC theories of organization focus on communication flows, power asymmetries and change processes. They share an assumption that individuals and organizations move in a socially constructed reality, which had been intersubjectively agreed upon and are sceptical about excessive claims to progress in scientific understanding of the world. They agree that in order to safeguard a sheer possibility of a better, more competitive adaptation to a changing reality, organizations should preserve a requisite variety, by resisting homogenizing pressures of control-based authoritarian management. **Variety** - flexible, loosely structured, networked

organizations with an in-built "slack" generate more internal variety from which more options can be chosen if changes in external environment require a re-adaptation and an organizational change.

- (4) The first outline of the present paper has been linked to a chapter for a handbook on organizational theory co-written with my colleague, M.Sanderse, who collaborated with me researching the extent of embedding of social constructivism in organizational sciences. This particular chapter has often been criticized as “too theoretical”, “too difficult for students”, “demanding many additional explanations” – all of which testify to the resistance against acceptance of this paradigm in mainstream social sciences. On the other hand, the very fact that a chapter on this paradigm was considered by the editors to be a necessary component of the book is a tacit acknowledgement of its growing significance for sciences of management.

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