Introduction: Dismantling the master's house using the master's tools

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Dismantling the Master's House Using the Master's Tools[1]:

On the Sociology of Organizational Knowledge

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[1] After Lorde (1984).

ABSTRACT:

In this introduction, we outline some critical reflections on the sociology of knowledge within management and organization theory. Based on a review of various works that form a sociology of organizational knowledge, we identify three approaches that have become particularly prominent ways by which scholars explore how knowledge about organizations and management is produced: First, *reflective* and *opinion* essays that organization studies scholars offer on the basis of what can be learned from personal experience; second, *descriptive craft-guides* that are based on more-or-less comprehensive *surveys* on doing research; third, papers based on systematic *research* that are built upon rigorous collection and analysis of data about the production of knowledge. Whereas in our studies of organizing we prioritize the third approach, that is knowledge produced based on systematic empirical research, in examining our own work we tend to privilege the other two types, reflective articles and surveys. In what follows we highlight this gap, offer some explanations thereof, and call for a better appreciation of all three ways to offer rich understandings of organizations, work and management as well as a fruitful sociology of knowledge in our field.

KEYWORDS:

1. Sociology of knowledge;
2. Production of knowledge;
3. Organization and management theory;
4. Reflexivity

As organizational scholars, we are accustomed to using theoretical lenses to understand organizational practices and outcomes. That is, we conceptualize what people do, feel and think in their everyday organizational interactions through the use of theoretical language and models to uncover individual and/or social antecedents and outcomes. We tend to ignore, however, how our own day-to-day work as scholars – doing research – is subjected to the same pressures and biases, affected by similar factors, and should be accounted for through similar modes of analyses. Rarely are we "looking at ourselves as we look at others" (Nord, 1985, p. 76). We treat our studies and theories as anchor points and as objective truths rather than as constructions embedded within individual, organizational, field and societal contexts.

This volume is dedicated to applying a reflective and critical gaze to the production of knowledge within organization studies. We aim to explore the "underbelly" of our scholarly endeavours, "those thoughts, actions, constraints, and choices that lurk beneath the surface of our well-dressed research publications" (Staw, 1981, p. 225).

In this introduction, we outline some critical reflections on the sociology of knowledge[2] within management and organization studies. Based on a review of the relevant literatures, we identify three approaches that have become particularly prominent ways by which scholars explore how knowledge about organizations and management is produced. In this context, approaches are defined by their substance and form – the diverse uses of "tools of our trade" and their claims for truth. In particular, we ask what is the epistemological basis

[2] The idea that scientific knowledge is embedded within a social context and also affects that very context has been developed and explored within various intellectual traditions under several labels (e.g., sociology of knowledge, sociology of scientific knowledge, sociology of science, philosophy of science), with some important similarities and differences between them. As our approach is broad (see the next section for elaboration) we will use the big tent term "sociology of knowledge".

of a sociology of organizational and management knowledge? What serves as the basis for making claims about the productions of knowledge in our field? We identified three different approaches for using data and theory in a sociology of organizational knowledge: first, *reflective* and *opinion* essays that organization studies scholars offer on the basis of what can be learned from personal experience; second, *descriptive craft-guides* that are based on more-or-less comprehensive *surveys* on doing research; third, papers based on systematic *research* that are built upon the rigorous and systematic collection and analysis of data (in this case, examining methodologies, theories and research practices in organization studies and using various theories in order to explain them and their outcomes).

Adopting a sociology of knowledge approach in our field offers important insights about our own work. Still, whereas in our studies of organizing we prioritize the third approach, that is knowledge produced based on systematic empirical research, in examining our own work we tend to privilege the other two types, reflective articles and surveys. In what follows we highlight this gap, offer some explanations thereof, and call for a better appreciation of all three ways to offer rich insights about organizations, management, and the fruitful sociology of knowledge in our field.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Let us first situate our sociology of knowledge approach in its broader historical and social context. That scientific knowledge is embedded in and influenced by social interactions and forces was acknowledged early on by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill (1859) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1878). These early reflections were overshadowed by a long period of “big science” and scientism – a limiting belief in science’s role in the modern enlightenment project, as expressed by the philosophy of the Vienna circle, American pragmatism and logical empiricism. Much later, during the second half of the 20^{th} century, and with the rise of more critical approaches within sociology and other fields, the more naïve perceptions of science’s objectivism and realism were replaced by critical gazes at the ways science develops in the context of social forces and taken for granted paradigms of thought. Hence, adopting ideas from philosophy, notably Karl Popper (1963), and from sociology and history, particularly Thomas Kuhn (1962), a new generation of sociologists suggested that science is determined not only by its quest for empirical truth but also by social interests and politics (Barnes, 1977; Shapin, 1982; Collins 1983).

The two versions of a sociology of knowledge – the macro-analytic Strong Programme (e.g. Pickering, 1984; Shaping & Shaffer, 1985) and the micro-sociological approach (e.g. Knorr Cetina, 1981; Latour & Woolgar, 1986) both argued that science is embedded within social structures and develops through social interactions constructed within power relations. In particular, sociologists of scientific knowledge argued that the social structure of the scientific community, and the social practices that constitute scientific work, both influence the knowledge produced and legitimated by scientists (cf. detailed reviews by Longino, 2016 and Shapin, 1995).

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, discussions and debates on the sociology of scientific knowledge became increasingly prominent within sociology (Shapin, 1995). The interest in the sociology of knowledge sprang outside of sociological circles, and took hold in a variety of disciplines, including philosophy (Longino, 2016), anthropology (Franklin, 1995), history, literary studies, and feminist and cultural studies (Shapin, 1995). These debates across the social sciences were not trivial with Shapin (1995, p.292) declaring, “what is at stake is nothing less than the proper interpretation of our culture’s most highly valued form of knowledge – its truth”. While earlier studies in the sociology of knowledge focused on the natural sciences, they later moved to explore the social sciences themselves (Leahey, 2008). They thus expanded to include what was termed a sociology of sociology of knowledge (cf., Polner 2010, p. 6).

The Sociology of Organizational Knowledge

Not all scientific disciplines were as receptive to this reflective and reflexive line of thinking about scientific knowledge. Some scholars took it to be a radical assault on the epistemological status of scientific knowledge. The North American version of organization theory tended to be particularly averse to any critical gaze at the production of knowledge (Meyer, 2006). This aversion may be related to a fear of mixing up subject and object: “studying phenomena too close to one’s self”, and of studying “phenomena that they themselves participate in” (Leahey, 2008, p. 35).

Still, in recent years there has been a body of research in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge in management and organization studies that may be explored thematically, highlighting the diverse issues involved in the various stages in the production of scientific knowledge. These explorations include the philosophy and politics of the paradigmatic basis of organization and management theory (Amis & Silk, 2008; Astley, 1985); the limits and problematics of the peer review process (Abu-Saad, 2008; Bedeian, 2004; Burgess & Shaw, 2010; Siler & Strang, 2017; Strang & Siller, 2015; Strang & Siler, 2017); the dynamics of writing and publishing (Cetro, Sirmon & Brymer, 2010; Cummings & Frost, 1985; de Rond &

Miller, 2005; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; Macdonald & Kam, 2007); the interrelations between methodological tools and theoretical conceptualizations (Nord, 2012; Reay & Jones, 2016; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006); the transformations and cross-disciplinary diffusion of theoretical concepts (Bartunek & Spreitzer, 2006; Bort & Kieser, 2011; Oswick, Fleming & Hanlon, 2011; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Whetten, Felin & King, 2009); the ways theorizing takes place (Klag & Langley, 2013; Langley, 1999); the way theories are actually used (Glynn, Barr & Dacin, 2000; Golden-Biddle, Locke & Reay, 2006; Judge et al., 2007; Zupic & Cater, 2015); and, the tensions between North American and European scientific communities and practices (Battilana, Anteby & Sengul, 2010; Grey, 2010; Usdiken & Pasadoes, 1995; Zilber, 2015).

To assess these dispersed efforts on the production of knowledge in organization studies more systematically, we review the literature in light of how the "tools of the trade" are used. Based on our reading of the sociology of organization knowledge literature, we identify three widely used approaches for producing knowledge on how knowledge of organizations and management is produced -- reflective and opinion essays, survey-based craft-guides, and papers based on systematic research.

Reflective and Opinion Essays

These works are based on what can be learned from personal experience. One example is a series entitled “Vita Contemplativa”, run by Organization Studies (e.g. Argyris, 2003; Weick, 2004; Starbuck, 2004; Clegg, 2005; Mangham, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Schein, 2006; Scott, 2006; Whitley, 2006; Bartunek, 2006), inviting scholars to reflect on their (intellectual) life and offer hagiographical insights:

> The purpose of the series is to inject some reflexivity into our field by asking leading scholars, who have spent most of their careers in organization studies and have distinguished themselves with advancing new perspectives, theories, and/or research agendas in our field, to describe the key contribution their work has made and, more crucially, to reflect on their work and the way it has developed over time. In other words, we have invited leading organizational theorists to write paper-length versions of their intellectual autobiographies. (…) What we are aiming at with such autobiographical essays is to help organizational researchers contextualize the development of knowledge in our field, something we tend to overlook in our pursuit of 'the logic of discovery', at the expense of the context of discovery. We hope that the autobiographical essays you will be regularly reading in these pages will be insightful contributions to the history and sociology of ideas in organization studies (Tsoukas, 2003, p. 1177).

Another notable example was the edited volume by Cummings and Frost (1985) exploring how scholars experience the review process. In some of the chapters, "authors have shared their experiences, expectations, feelings, and insights with us in a refreshingly candid and thoroughly professional manner" (Cummings & Frost, 1985: X). This issue still stands at the center of scholars' attention, as is evident from a recent paper by *Journal of Management Studies* editor Gerardo Patriotta (2017, pp.747-748):

> Journal editors certainly have an exciting job: not only do they read studies at the cutting edge of management research, but they also play a role in developing the community of scholars. At the same time, when one is handling large volumes of submissions, manuscripts start to look worryingly similar. This may lead to alienation, unless one acquires an interest in learning from these similarities, identifying patterns, and understanding how they speak to the norms and conventions that define academic knowledge and work. If one distances oneself from the content of submissions and their specific foci, papers can be viewed under a different light, not as individual products, but as communicative artefacts that constitute a genre in their own right. A number of interesting questions then begin to arise: why are academic articles written the way they are? What distinguishes a first submission from a published paper? How do we – as editors, reviewers, and readers – recognize strength and novelty in a contribution?
>
> In 2015, with the assistance of editorial colleagues, I began running a series of workshops on crafting papers for publication on behalf of the Journal of Management Studies (JMS). I had been with JMS for about two years at the time, and I thought this would be a good opportunity for reaching out to the international community of PhD students and junior faculty. My interaction with a number of brilliant young scholars at

> various institutions all over the world raised my awareness of the normative, cognitive, and emotional underpinnings of academic writing. This editorial represents my attempt to share what I have learned from these workshops with the readers of JMS."

A final example is Geppert's (2015) polemic essay on how to strengthen scholars' awareness of the political and critical aspects of their research, based on his own experience. Specifically, Geppert (2015) examines the power of institutional theory jargon to hide political interests and power relations within the field of organization studies, and asks what can be done to counter such tendencies, and to what effect. These reflective articles, offering insights based on the experiences of their authors and their normative positions, form the dominant approach in the sociology of knowledge within management and organization studies.

Survey-Based Craft Guides

These works are based on surveys in order to get a broader and richer understanding of how research is being done in our discipline. Take for example Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) paper on reflexivity, in which they identify "four sets of textual practices that researchers… have used in their attempts to be reflexive" (p. 480). For their review of reflexive textual practices, the authors

> "selected texts in OMT that have explicitly addressed issues related to reflexivity, as well as texts that are frequently referred to in contemporary writings as being reflexive, based on our general familiarity with the literature as well as recommendations from colleagues, reviewers and the editor; although we acknowledge that our selection is illustrative rather than exhaustive" (p. 482).

Based on these texts, the authors identified four different kinds of reflexive practices –multi-perspective, multi-voicing, positioning, and destabilizing. They highlight the shortcomings of each set of practices, especially when employed in ways they deem ineffective, and offer an integrated reflexive approach that combines these practices.

Another example of work that offers insights by highlighting how certain practices are deployed is Siller and Strang's (2017, p. 31) investigation of "how scholarly work is criticized and changed in its evaluation". They draw on authors of articles published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* and analysed their self-reports "concerning the criticism they received and the revisions they made in the peer review process." They then surveyed the actual changes made in the manuscripts throughout the review process. Based on this, they scrutinized the tension between innovation and tradition in the production of knowledge in management and organization studies.

Likewise, Liu, Olivola, and Kovacs (2017) explored the continuous rise in coauthorship within the field of management by surveying published papers and also

> "asking management researchers about their perceptions of coauthorship trends and their reactions to specific authorship scenarios. Comparing the "facts" and the "perceptions" of coauthorship, we suggest that the increase in coauthorship in management reflects not only quality considerations and the need for collaborations, but also instrumental motivations. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for the processes of peer evaluation and education in management" (p. 509).

These studies, based on surveys of best practice or anecdotal data, offer a craft guide that have become quite common in the sociology of organizational knowledge.

Papers Based on Systematic Research

These works adhere more closely to a scientific model of knowledge and insight generation. They are based on the systematic collection and analysis of data and include attempts to offer explanations and theoretical implications of their findings. In other words, this form of sociology of knowledge relates to knowledge in the field as data and applies to the knowledge produced in organizations studies the same theoretical and methodological tools used to explore other empirical phenomena in organizations. Nicolai and Seidl (2010), for example, tap into the "intense debate amongst scholars on how to increase the practical relevance of research" (p. 1257). To contribute to this debate, they go beyond sharing their personal opinion on the matter as such, nor do they build on surveying other scholars' experiences and opinions or the relevant literature. Rather, they explain that

> "the present article aims at making two contributions to the current debate on the practical relevance of organization and management science. First, it develops a taxonomy of different forms of relevance, based on a systematic analysis of a sample of 450 articles from three leading academic journals, as well as of the literature (in English) on the practical relevance of management science, which, at the time of writing, comprised 133 articles, chapters and books. The aim of the exercise is to identify the forms of practical relevance that are explicitly or implicitly referred to in the academic management literature. In contrast to the majority of contributions to the debate on relevance, this article draws on insights from the philosophy and sociology of science in order to discuss the more fundamental obstacles to relevance that are rooted in the social process of scientific knowledge production. Thus, the article's second contribution is that it assesses the extent to which the different forms of relevance fit the social dynamic of science, and consequently examines what forms of relevance can be expected from management science" (p. 1258).

Likewise, Stambaugh and Trank (2010) build on a systematic collection and analysis of data to explore to what extent new theoretical insights diffuse into widely used textbooks in strategy. In particular, they sampled 18 textbooks in strategy, and analyzed whether "institutional research has penetrated the texts" By building on "a comprehensive list of authors, articles, and key terms from institutional theory" (p. 668). Stambaugh and Trank (2010) used both quantitative analysis to measure the coverage of institutional theory in strategic management texts and qualitative analysis to examine the depth of coverage of institutional theory and its modes of use. They found a significant variation in the integration of institutional theory into strategy textbooks. Drawing on theoretical insights from the sociology of knowledge, they explain this variation in light of discrepancies between institutional theory and the discourse of strategy; pressures in the process of textbook publishing; and authors preferences. All in all, Stambaugh and Trank (2010) build upon the sociology of knowledge tradition in that it assumes the importance of textbooks in the legitimation of scientific knowledge, and also contribute to it by highlighting the cultural and social construction of those textbooks. Their research is thus theoretically relevant to the study of the diffusion of theoretical concepts within our field (cf., Bort and Keiser, 2011).

A further example of research-based sociology of organizational knowledge paper is Podsakoff, Podsakoff, Mishra and Escue's (2018) study of high-impact studies in our discipline. Podsakoff et al. (2018) were motivated to study the issue after one of them served as a panelist on the Academy of Management's Organization Behavior Division's Junior Faculty Workshop at the Annual Academy of Management Meeting. Panelists were asked "how junior faculty members can balance the sometimes-conflicting desire to work on high-impact research in their pre-tenure years, while at the same time recognizing that such research might require more than the normal risks associated with publication, or take longer to develop, than less impactful research." Panelists shared their contradictory opinions on the matter, but there seemed to be lack of clear empirical evidence – hence the Podsakoff et al. study. Focusing on extreme cases, they sampled 235 articles each with over 1000 citations from 33 management journals, and compared them with two matched samples of less highly-cited articles. They found that about half of the high-impact articles were written during the pre-tenure period of the authors. Further, the comparisons they made allowed the authors to "identify some of the key attributes that make these articles so impactful." Their study, then, offers research-based-insights as to how to balance productivity and impact in academic careers (see also Haley, Page, Pitsis, Rivas & Yu, 2017).

A final example is McLaren's (2018) critical-hermeneutic analysis of the Gordon-Howell report, usually "blamed" for the diffusion of the "research-based model of business education." Using the report itself and also drawing on secondary data (journal articles, conference proceedings and book chapters), McLaren contextualizes the report in the historical and social moment in which it was written, demonstrating that the report was only part of a variety of factors that pushed US business schools to develop a research-oriented curriculum. Through this study, McLaren sheds a new light on the debate around rigor and relevance in our discipline, and offers insights for its future (for similar historical studies, see Bridgman, Cummings, & McLaughlin, 2016; Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2016; Dye, Mills, and Weatherbee, 2005; Hassard, 2012).

Also within this approach are theoretical articles in which authors develop a theoretical model – in an *Academy of Management Review* style – of the production of knowledge within management and organization studies. One example is Bitektine and Miller's (2015) model exploring how the availability of and restriction on various resources, such as available data, and various institutional pressures, such as institutionalized research methods, drive paradigm evolution and decline.

Three Approaches for the Sociology of Organizational Knowledge

Works in the sociology of organization knowledge fall then within one of three main approaches – reflexive and opinion essays, survey-based craft-guides, and papers based on systematic research. These approaches are considered legitimate sources of data for the production of management and organizational knowledge, and they all offer relevant and timely insights. Still, their claims for truth are based on very different grounds. These differences are manifested in how similar issues are tackled by each approach, as we exemplify below.

Martin (1981) built on her own experience to explain the gap between "rational rhetoric" of methodological sections in texts books and research papers, and the messy reality of actually doing social science research. She offered a reading of the choices researchers make during the research process in light of common theories of organizational decision making. Providing "a realistic descriptive model of the research process" (p. 133), she rejects "rational choice models" of doing research that assume a logical sequence of problem formulation, design, analysis, interpretation and theoretical implications. Instead, Martin (1981) highlights the messy practice involved in producing scientific knowledge. The garbage can model of decision making (Cohen, March, and Olson, 1972; March & Olson, 1976), argues Martin, is well equipped to capture the somewhat accidental flow of problems, resources, choice opportunities and solutions that are involved in a research project. Textbooks and mentors should acknowledge this messy practice in order to train new scientists to be "street smart" when doing research.

Kulka (1981) also deals with the choices made by researchers throughout the research process. But unlike Martin (1981) who used theoretical models to illuminate her personal experiences, Kulka (1981, p.157-158) draws on a semi-systematically collected data set:

> "The rest of this article contains a number of examples of such choices and constraints in the social research process that may serve to illustrate the "state of the art" with regard to how methodological decisions are actually made in behavioral and social science research. Some are examples taken from "candid asides"; or "embarrassed footnotes" in articles published in the professional journals, but they are few indeed. From a review of 3-5 years in each of four journals, it appears that less than 1 article in 40 contains such a description. Other examples to be presented are excerpts from a series of informal interviews with eminent researchers on some of the methodological decisions they have made in the course of their own research. Finally, some of the examples are research anecdotes taken from some of the already published chronicles noted earlier."

Kulka, then, touches upon the same issues as Martin (1981), though through a survey based craft guide, rather than personal approach.

Another set of publications relate to "guidelines on how to satisfy the explicit and implicit expectations of editors and reviewers in management research" (Bajwa, König & Harrison, 2016, p.419). Many such publications "stem from experience-based knowledge, with successful researchers in the field sharing their personal experiences, and thus, often relying on best-practices examples" (Bajwa, König & Harrison, 2016, pp. 419-420). Such was, for example, a seven-part series, "publishing in AMJ", in which the editors gave suggestions and advice for improving the quality of submissions to the journal. The series offers "bumper-to-bumper" coverage, with instalments ranging from topic choice to crafting a Discussion section" (Colquitt & George, 2011, p. 432). Most instalments were based on the authority of the authors as accomplished writers and editors (e.g. Bono & McNamara, 2011; Colquitt & George, 2011; Geletkanycz & Tepper, 2012; Sparrow & Mayer, 2011). As Geletkanycz and Tepper (2012) write:

> "[W]e restrict our attention to *theoretical implications*. In our experience as associate editors, we have found this aspect, which is both important and highly rewarding, often constitutes a major stumbling block. Thus, our aim is to outline some means of more plainly elucidating contributions to theory" (p. 256).

Some instalments in the series, however, were based on the systematic collection and analysis of data (Bansal & Corely, 2012; Grant & Pollock, 2011; Zhang & Show, 2012). Grant and Pollock (2011), for example, analysed 22 winners of the *AMJ Best Article Award* in terms of how they developed their introductions. They also examined 20 of the most recent recipients of the *AMJ Outstanding Reviewer Award* (p. 873). In a similar fashion, Zhang and Show (2012, p.8) add to their personal experiences systematic observations that allow them to formulate how to craft the methods and results of a "good" research project:

> As authors ourselves, we have, admittedly, succumbed to the temptation of relaxing our concentration when it is time to write these sections. We have heard colleagues say that they pass off these sections to junior members of their research teams to "get their feet wet" in manuscript crafting, as though these sections were of less importance than the opening, hypothesis development, and Discussion sections. Perhaps this is so. But as members of the current editorial team for the past two years, we have come face-to-face with the reality that the Methods and Results sections, if not the most critical, often play a major role in how reviewers evaluate a manuscript. … To better understand the common concerns raised by reviewers, we evaluated each of our decision letters for rejected manuscripts to this point in our term. We found several issues arose much more frequently in rejected manuscripts than they did in manuscripts for which revisions were requested. The results of our evaluation, if not surprising, revealed a remarkably consistent set of major concerns for both sections, which we summarize as "the three C's": completeness, clarity, and credibility."

Hence, the same issue in the sociology of organizational knowledge – how to write for top-tier journals in the field – was also approached from a research perspective, based on systematic analysis of empirical data (in this case, decision letters). Another example is Bajwa, König and Harrison's (2016) research that is built on applied linguistics to study the use of hedges, "certain words and phrases to reduce their commitment to a proposition (e.g. it *may* be…, it is *likely* that…, it *seems* that…)" (p. 420), as one explanation for the high proportion of US contributors in the top management journals. They compared the use of hedges in 1991 articles published in US, European and Indian journals, and tested their hypotheses using statistical methods. They found that the use of hedges differs across different regions of the world and argue that it is related to research socialization – which indeed may hamper non-US authors, as their norms, in many cases, do not fit with those of the majority of US reviewers and editors in top-tier journals. Interestingly, the authors conclude their study with a personal observation:

> As nonnative speakers of English, the work that we put into this study made us very sensitive to the use of hedges, as we constantly pondered on whether we should use a hedge to qualify our commitment to certain propositions. Indeed, we added hedges in every proofreading cycle. While we constantly felt that dealing with the subject of hedges, and the knowledge that editors and reviewers might oppose our views if we conveyed them too strongly, should definitely have resulted in us being oversensitive, the use of hedges in this article is around the mean level of our findings. We used 21.98 total hedges per 1000 words, 9.91 modals, 7.61 lexical verbs, and 4.45 nouns, adjectives and adverbs, showing just how wrong our gut feeling that we were being too fuzzy actually was! (Bajwa, Konig, & Harrison, 2016, p. 431).

Another issue much debated, using different approaches, is the fate of various theoretical approaches within our discipline. One such theoretical stream that has attracted much attention in organization studies is institutional theory. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, such debates explore issues of legitimate knowledge, and how we use our theories. Literature reviews are a well-accepted genre in our field, and many were dedicated to institutional theory during the 1980s-2000s (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Scott, 1987; Selznick, 1996; Zucker, 1987), including systematic studies of the (selective) use of institutional theory (e.g. Bowring, 2000; Farahahi, Hafsi, & Molz, 2005; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). Of late, however, we see more debates in personal opinion pieces (e.g. Greenwood, Hinings, & Whetten, 2014; Meyer & Höllerer, 2014), some of which are very personal, as with Reed and Burrell's (2018) opinion essay in *Organization Studies*.

GENERATING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ORGANIZING

VS.

GENERATING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC WORK

There is a discrepancy between what constitutes valid scientific knowledge of organizing and management, and what constitutes valid understanding of how we produce this knowledge. This discrepancy is related to different paradigmatic stances (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In organization and management studies, we have traditionally privileged the positivist paradigm (Amis & Silk, 2008). Accordingly, our research practices reflect the belief that the aim of any scientific inquiry is to explain reality through prediction and control; that the best way to establish facts or laws, is by verifying hypotheses; and that this takes adherence to standards of rigor, including internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, when it comes to exploring our own work as producers of knowledge, we flip sides and rely on different understandings of what is considered as data, who is considered as a valid source of data, and how data are to be analyzed and represented.

Our review of the sociology of knowledge literature in our field suggests that personal experiences, stories and anecdotes constitute the most common sources of "data"; that we believe people may be the best informants on themselves; and that descriptive studies are as good as those testing causal hypotheses or offering comprehensive interpretation based on systematic and rigorous collection of data. When looking on organizing and management, we tend to privilege knowledge generated through empirical, rigorous and usually quantitative studies (Amis & Silk, 2008). When looking at our own craft, however, we tend to privilege knowledge based on personal and collective experience (small N or N=1 studies). The vast majority of reflexive and opinion essays, and survey-based (of either people or texts) craft guides may be likened to conducting an auto-ethnography of sorts. Yet auto-ethnography has struggled for acceptance in our discipline as a valid source of knowledge on organizing and management. Auto-ethnography is, by its nature, a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 273) – very different from what we hold as “ideal” research (Amis & Silk, 2008). How are we to explain this gap?

One explanation is that this discrepancy reflects cognitive biases. It may be a reflection of a self-serving bias, according to which we as scholars want to save our image of ourselves as objective, capable of understanding ourselves from a detached and impartial stand. Specifically, we may entertain a mind-set of self-perceived objectivity in which “people assume that their thoughts and beliefs are, by virtue of being theirs, valid and therefore worthy of being acted upon" (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007, p. 208). We do not believe other people are capable of such a stand, but it is hard to accept that we are just as biased as the common person. This self-serving bias may explain our tendency to accept opinion and reflective essays as a valid source of truth only when they relate to our own reflections and opinions. What *we* think is true; *others* reflections and opinions we see as limited, in that they are "partly ideological and often uncritical and unscientific" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015, p. 146).

It may also be that organization level dynamics are at play. For example, given the pressures on publications and the lengthy and excruciating review process in many top-tier outlets (Gross & Zilber, 2018; Strang & Siler, 2015; Strang & Siler, 2017), authors may opt out from publications based on systematic research whenever possible. If indeed personal and opinion essays get reviewed and evaluated by different standards than manuscripts based on systematic research (Gabriel, 2016), authors may utilize this loophole when dealing with sociology of knowledge, and prefer opinion, personal or survey-based projects. At the same time, outlets face their own competitive pressures to boost citations and rankings (Judge, Cable and Rynes, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2005), which they may do through the celebration of known scholars and their reflexive and opinion essays. It may be, then, that various publication pressures on and from universities and scientific outlets may account for the differential prevalence and legitimacy of sociology of knowledge publications.

Another explanation relates to the status of the sociology of knowledge as a legitimate inquiry in organization studies. Its critical tone and focus on social and cultural forces and structures as determinants of human behaviour, in particular of scholarly work, is so at odds with the positivistic and individualistic depictions common in organization theory. Thus, it should come as no surprise that it is devalued in our discipline, to the degree that we settle for (seemingly) lower standards when it comes to a sociology of knowledge inquiry.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our aim is not to limit what should be considered as valid sources of data in the sociology of knowledge within organization studies. On the contrary, we wish to conclude with a provocative thought: If opinions, reflections and craft-guides can offer so many insights about the work we as scholars do, perhaps it is time to take them much more seriously as valid sources of knowledge about organizing and management in their own right.

As against the “evidence-based” movement in management and organization studies, we follow others (e.g. Morrell & Learmonth, 2015) in calling for better appreciation of the complexity of organizing and managing, which can only be dealt with by using multiple, varied perspectives and approaches. Indeed, each of the three approaches to produce knowledge about the production of management and organizational knowledge builds on different assumptions, resources and tools. Reflexive pieces, based on personal experience and opinions, allow “the freedom to be opinionated; to exercise disciplined provocation… [with a] combination of theory and personal opinion” (The AMLE editorial team, 2018, p. 2). Such essays “give a voice to an author’s creative imagination, enabling him or her to critique assumptions that are rarely questioned and explore new possibilities for intellectual and social change” (Gabriel, 2016, p. 244). Survey based craft-guides allow us to learn from the conventional, often tacit know-how knowledge of seasoned researchers in our field. And research-based pieces offer insights stemming from the systematic collection and analyses of specific, measurable variables or processes. As Morrell and Learmonth (2015, p. 522) argue, “there are radically different ways of looking at the social world and …such differences can be valuable”. Just as we accept knowledge based on different approaches when it comes to our own craft, we should avoid a narrow and singular view of valuable knowledge when it comes to management and organizations. Following Gabriel (2016), we should foster spaces for different kinds of argumentations, in which ideas can be explored and developed in different ways, based on different sources of authority and evidence.

Indeed, papers in this special volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* are all very different and approach the sociology of organizational knowledge from different angles. We start with a set of papers relating to various philosophical aspects of our scientific endeavor. Seibel, in his paper entitled “Pragmatism in Organizations: Ambivalence and Limits” reminds us of the value of anchoring research on organizations in philosophy. He offers a timely and novel interpretation of how pragmatism is helpful to think through what goes on in organizations without falling hostage to our own theoretical blinders. Taking philosophical underpinning more seriously might also allow us to constructively reassess theoretical trajectories such as the one of institutional theory within organization and management studies and expose overlooked or underappreciated links between earlier and more recent theoretical insights. Jackson, Helfeb, Kaplan, Kirsch and Lohmeyer**,** in “The Problem of De-contextualization in Organization and Management Research”, use popular and prominent perspective in organizational theory as a mirror to show that we do not critically enough examine and account for context. The implications of their insights go far beyond the very perspectives they discuss and can be extended to our relationship to contexts we study. Harley and Cornelissen, in “Reframing Rigor as Reasoning: Challenging Technocratic Conceptions of Rigor in Management Research” critique current ideas about rigor in management research as being problematically tied to methodological concerns regarding empirical measurement and observation. Instead, they argue, rigor should be determined based upon the quality of reasoning that is employed in positioning a piece of work.

In a second set of papers, authors tackle large processes affecting our discipline, including new technologies and meaning-related dynamics. Thananusak and Ansari, in “Knowledge Production and Consumption in the Digital Era: The Emergence of Altmetrics and Open Access Publishing in Management Studies” explore how new metrics and open access publishing have altered the management field. They explain how, despite its progress in recent years, management remains well behind fields such as the life sciences in embracing this rapidly changing landscape. Strang and Doskin, in “Peer Review and the Production of Scholarly Knowledge: Automated Textual Analysis of Manuscripts Revised for Publication in *Administrative Science Quarterly*”, show how new big data methods echo previous studies, but also expend our understanding of the review process, so central to what we do. Eriksson-Zetterquist, in her paper “The (re?)emergence of new ideas in the field of organizational studies”, explores how Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Jönsson and Lundin (1977) came up with similar ideas at the very same time, albeit in different corners of our discipline. Eriksson-Zetterquist highlights various social dynamics that underlie innovative thinking within scientific communities. Floris, Grant and Oswick, in “A Discourse Perspective on Creating Organizational Knowledge: The Case of Strategizing” use a case study of strategizing at BHP Billiton to provide a constructionist and discursive perspective on how knowledge is created. In particular, they draw attention to ways in which the discursively embedded concepts of “time horizon” and “context horizon” help configure knowledge production. The broader implications for our understanding of how knowledge and theory are produced and consumed are examined.

A third set of papers explores various common methodological practices. Claus, de Rond, Howard-Grenville and Lodge, in “When Fieldwork Hurts: On the Lived Experience of Conducting Research in Unsettling Contexts”, discuss how prolonged exposure in the field to the lived experience of others can have a profoundly unsettling experience on researchers. Drawing on their own personal experiences as researchers, and interviews conducted with other scholars, Claus et al. develop insights that will be of interest to doctoral students, supervisors, and more seasoned scholars who are determined to develop theory based on fieldwork in subject areas that are morally and/or emotionally challenging. Langley and Ravasi, in “Visual Artefacts as Tools for Analysis and Theorizing”, remind us of the power of visuals to drive theorizing and not simply describe reality. Their essay offers a repertoire of various – rather than a search for the one-best-way – for how to theorize using creative tools. The visual artefacts and maps they showcase are important tools to convey findings and causal relationship. But they are also important analytical instrument for research teams to agree and disagree as well as to refine and adapt or discard conceptual linkages. In other words, they critically affect how we produce knowledge. Reay, Zafar, Monteiro and Glaser, in “Presenting Findings from Qualitative Research: One Size Does Not Fit All!”, identify various styles of representing findings of qualitative research. By defining these styles and outlining their advantages and challenges, Reay and colleagues make a strong case for extending the normative and legitimated repertoire of writing styles within our discipline.

In a final set of papers, authors tackle reflexivity, commonly described as an important practice, certainly within qualitative research, from various angles. Carter and Spence, in “For Social Reflexivity in Organization and Management Theory” argue that social reflexivity is necessary not simply as a deontological commitment, but also as a way of ensuring that the knowledge building in which we are engaged serves society in a meaningful way. They develop their theorizing through an examination of the development of two literatures: the sociology of the professions and institutional theory. In so doing, they formulate several recommendations as to how these perspectives in particular, and organization and management theory more generally, can have an enhanced impact on some of the major societal issues of our time. Gray, in “’Through the Looking Glass’: on Phantasmal Tales, Distortions and Reflexivity in Organizational Scholarship”, builds on her own development as a reflexive scholar, which she candidly shares with readers, to call for a deeper commitment to reflexivity – broadly defined to include many different faces – in our scholarship. Finally, Wright & Wright offer a touching reflection on what happens when researcher and family roles violently collide. In this case, April’s role as a researcher studying an intensive care unit was dramatically reconfigured when daughter Carla was admitted for treatment in her mother’s research site. The paper, “When Research and Personal Lifeworld Collide”, attests to the deep and engaging insights that a considered reflection can elicit, in both authors and readers.

All in all, the 13 papers in this special issue reflect the variety of approaches reviewed in our introduction -- systematic research, survey-based craft guides and reflexive and opinion essays. We believe that the richness of approaches contributes to the richness of insights offered by the volume as a whole.

It is an open question as to whether the very agenda of the sociology of knowledge can be achieved. Can scholars, as “insiders”, explore their own practices, the taken-for-granted structures and social dynamics and pressures that shape their own work? In the title for this introduction, we paraphrased Audre Lorde's (1984) saying "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Lorde, an American writer and poet, feminist and civil-rights activist, argued that no revolutionary change can be achieved by speaking in the hegemonic language and using traditional tools. We use her saying to extend an open invitation for a discussion of what we deem legitimate knowledge about organizations and management as well as knowledge on how we produce that knowledge.

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