THE PRODUCTION OF MANAGERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY
RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Series Editor: Michael Lounsbury

Volume 38: Configurational Theory and Methods in Organizational Research
Volume 39A: Institutional Logics in Action, Part A
Volume 39B: Institutional Logics in Action, Part B
Volume 40: Contemporary Perspectives on Organizational Social Networks
Volume 41: Religion and Organization Theory
Volume 42: Organizational Transformation and Scientific Change: The Impact of Institutional Restructuring on Universities and Intellectual Innovation
Volume 43: Elites on Trial
Volume 44: Institutions and Ideals: Philip Selznick’s Legacy for Organizational Studies
Volume 45: Towards a Comparative Institutionalism: Forms, Dynamics and Logics Across the Organizational Fields of Health and Higher Education
Volume 46: The University Under Pressure
Volume 47: The Structuring of Work in Organizations
Volume 48A: How Institutions Matter!
Volume 48B: How Institutions Matter!
Volume 49: Multinational Corporations and Organization Theory: Post Millennium Perspectives
Volume 50: Emergence
Volume 51: Categories, Categorization and Categorizing: Category Studies in Sociology, Organizations and Strategy at the Crossroads
Volume 52: Justification, Evaluation and Critique in the Study of Organizations: Contributions from French Pragmatist Sociology
Volume 53: Structure, Content and Meaning of Organizational Networks: Extending Network Thinking
Volume 54A: Multimodality, Meaning, and Institutions
Volume 54B: Multimodality, Meaning, and Institutions
Volume 55: Social Movements, Stakeholders and Non-market Strategy
Volume 56: Social Movements, Stakeholders and Non-market Strategy
Volume 57: Towards Permeable Boundaries of Organizations?
THE PRODUCTION OF MANAGERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY: NEW APPROACHES TO WRITING, PRODUCING AND CONSUMING THEORY

EDITED BY

TAMMAR B. ZILBER
Hebrew University, Israel

JOHN M. AMIS
University of Edinburgh, UK

JOHANNA MAIR
Hertie School of Governance, Germany

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China
CONTENTS

List of Contributors vii

About the Editors xiii

Introduction  Dismantling the Master’s House Using the Master’s Tools: On the Sociology of Organizational Knowledge
Tammar B. Zilber, John M. Amis and Johanna Mair 1

Chapter 1  The Problem of De-contextualization in Organization and Management Research
Gregory Jackson, Markus Helfen, Rami Kaplan, Anja Kirsch and Nora Lohmeyer 21

Chapter 2  Pragmatism in Organizations: Ambivalence and Limits
Wolfgang Seibel 43

Chapter 3  Reframing Rigor as Reasoning: Challenging Technocratic Conceptions of Rigor in Management Research
Bill Harley and Joep Cornelissen 59

Chapter 4  Knowledge Production and Consumption in the Digital Era: The Emergence of Altmetrics and Open Access Publishing in Management Studies
Trin Thananusak and Shaz Ansari 77

Chapter 5  Peer Review and the Production of Scholarly Knowledge: Automated Textual Analysis of Manuscripts Revised for Publication in Administrative Science Quarterly
David Strang and Fedor Dokshin 103

Chapter 6  The (Re?)Emergence of New Ideas in the Field of Organizational Studies
Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist 123

Chapter 7  A Discourse Perspective on Creating Organizational Knowledge: The Case of Strategizing
Maurizio Floris, David Grant and Cliff Oswick 141
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>When Fieldwork Hurts: On the Lived Experience of Conducting Research in Unsettling Contexts</td>
<td>Laura Claus, Mark de Rond, Jennifer Howard-Grenville and Jan Lodge</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Visual Artefacts as Tools for Analysis and Theorizing</td>
<td>Ann Langley and Davide Ravasi</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Presenting Findings from Qualitative Research: One Size Does Not Fit All!</td>
<td>Trish Reay, Asma Zafar, Pedro Monteiro and Vern Glaser</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>For Social Reflexivity in Organization and Management Theory</td>
<td>Chris Carter and Crawford Spence</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>‘Through the Looking Glass’: on Phantasmal Tales, Distortions and Reflexivity in Organizational Scholarship</td>
<td>Barbara Gray</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>When Research and Personal Lifeworlds Collide</td>
<td>April L. Wright and Carla Wright</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index                                                                                           275
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS


Chris Carter writes and teaches about politics, media and professional groups. He works at the University of Edinburgh, UK.

Laura Claus is Assistant Professor of Strategy & Entrepreneurship at University College London, School of Management, UK. Her research uses qualitative methods to study different organizational approaches to introducing change in the Global South. In so doing, she explores how organization can design and structure ‘solutions’ for deep-rooted social problems and support marginalized groups who lack the opportunity/voice to speak for themselves (e.g., child brides in Indonesia and rural villagers in Tanzania).

Joep Cornelissen is Professor of Corporate Communication and Management at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, The Netherlands. The main focus of his research involves studies of the role of corporate and managerial communication in the context of innovation, entrepreneurship and change, and of social evaluations of the legitimacy and reputation of start-up and established firms. In addition, he also has an interest in questions of scientific reasoning and theory development in management and organization theory.

Fedor Dokshin is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, Canada. His research interests are in political sociology, organizations and social networks. He also has an interest in computational approaches to analysing data from novel sources including digital trace data, large-scale text data and administrative datasets.

Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist holds a position as Professor in Organization Theory and Management at the Gothenburg Research Institute (GRI), School of Business, Economics, and Law, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Since 2012 she is the director of GRI. Her research interests concern organizing, especially technology, governance in professional organizations and diversity.

Maurizio Floris is Director of Leadership Programs at the John Grill Centre for Project Leadership, University of Sydney, Australia. His research focuses on leadership, team dynamics, stakeholder engagement, particularly in the context of complex projects. He is particularly interested in discourse, knowledge and practice, how these shape our social and organizational reality, and how this can
be used to deliver practical outcomes and social impact. Prior to his academic career, Maurizio was in industry for nearly 20 years, contributing to or leading strategy reviews, reorganizations, ICT projects and engineering projects. Being Dutch-Italian by birth, he still loves a mean pasta and a good windmill.

**Vern L. Glaser** is Assistant Professor at the Alberta School of Business, University of Alberta, Canada. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. His research investigates how organizations strategically change practices and culture.

**David Grant** is Pro-Vice Chancellor at the Griffith Business School, Australia. His research focuses on how language and other symbolic media influence the practice of leadership and organization-wide, group and individual level change. He has published in a range of peer-reviewed journals and co-edited several books including the Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse (2004, with Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda Putnam) and Discourse and Organization (1998, with Cliff Oswick and Tom Keenoy). He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia in 2008 and is an elected member of the National Training Laboratory. A lifelong Arsenal supporter, he has come to understand the true meaning of resilience.

**Barbara Gray** studies conflict, collaboration, power and institutional processes. She has published widely in management journals and co-authored *Collaborating for Our Future* (Oxford University Press, 2018). She received two life-time achievement awards. She is a mediator, consults to public, private and non-governmental organizations worldwide and a Lay Zen teacher.

**Gregory Jackson** is Professor of Management at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. His research examines how corporate governance and corporate social responsibility is influenced by diverse organizational and institutional contexts. His work draws on actor-centered institutional perspectives from organizational theory, economic sociology, and comparative political economy. His research has been published widely in leading journals, including *Academy of Management Review*, *Organization Science*, and *Journal of International Business Studies*. He is an Editor of *British Journal of Industrial Relations* and currently serves as Chief Editor of the *Socio-Economic Review*.

**Bill Harley** is Professor of Management in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Bill is best known for his research on employee experiences of management practices, with a focus on questions of power and control.

**Jennifer Howard-Grenville** is the Diageo Professor of Organisation Studies at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, UK. She contributes to organization theory through in-depth, qualitative studies of how people work from within to change organizations, communities, and occupations.

**Anja Kirsch** is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Management, School of Business and Economics, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany.
Her current research focuses on the changing role of boards of directors, and in particular on the determinants and effects of increasing diversity in board composition. She has published her findings in *The Leadership Quarterly* and in the edited collection Seierstad, C., Gabaldon, P., & Mensi-Klarbach, H. (Eds.). (2017). *Gender Diversity in the Boardroom: The Use of Different Quota Regulations*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Ann Langley** is Professor of Management at HEC Montréal and holder of the Chair in Strategic Management in Pluralistic Settings, Canada. Her research focuses on organizational change, leadership and strategic processes and practices in pluralistic settings, with an emphasis on qualitative research approaches. She is Co-Editor of the Journal *Strategic Organization*, and Visiting Professor at the University of Gothenburg and Adjunct Professor at the Université de Montréal.

**Jan Lodge** is a Ph.D. candidate in Organisational Theory at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, UK. His research uses qualitative data and analysis to explore how organizations and individuals manage contested social evaluations with a particular focus on fighting stigmatization.

**Markus Helfen** is Professor of Human Resource Management & Employment Relations in the Department of Organisation and Learning in the Faculty of Business & Management, University of Innsbruck, Austria. Markus does research in the fields of HRM, employment relations, and organization theory. Current topics and projects include global labor standards, inter-organizational HRM and employment relations as well as sustainability studies. Markus has published in leading management and industrial relations journals like *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations*, and the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.

**Pedro Monteiro** is Research Fellow at Warwick Business School, UK, in the IKON research unit joining EMLyon (Fall 2018) as a post-doctoral fellow. He is an Ethnographer of work and organizations with an interest in classic themes in organization theory, especially bureaucracy. He co-founded the Talking About Organizations Podcast.

**Nora Lohmeyer** is a Post-doctoral Researcher at the Department of Management, School of Business and Economics, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, where she is part of the Garment Supply Chain Governance Project (www.garmentgov.de). Her main research interests revolve around the politics of corporate social responsibility – studied mainly from a historical and discursive perspective – as well as the governance of labor standards in global garment supply chains.

**Cliff Oswick** is Professor of Organization Theory at Cass Business School, City University of London, UK (and previously served as Deputy Dean between 2011 and 2016). His research interests focus on the study of organizing processes and organizational change. He has published over 140 academic articles and contributions to edited volumes. He has previously served as an Associate Editor for *Journal of Change Management* and *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. He is a Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and
Development, an Elected Member of the National Training Laboratory, Chair of the board of trustees for the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, and Chair-Elect of the Organization Development and Change Division of the Academy of Management. More generally, he has recently become a grandparent and he is a lifelong QPR supporter.

**Rami Kaplan** is a Political and Organizational Sociologist positioned as a post-doctoral fellow at the School of Business and Economics, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. His research explores the historical emergence, evolution, and globalization of corporate social responsibility practices and ideologies, across such countries as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Venezuela, and the Philippines as well as on the transnational level. He has published in *Socio-Economic Review, Business & Society*, and the Oxford Handbook for Corporate Social Responsibility.

**Davide Ravasi** is Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the UCL School of Management, UK, and Visiting Professor at the Aalto School of Business, Helsinki, Finland. His research examines interrelations between organizational identity, culture and strategy in times of change, and socio-cognitive processes shaping entrepreneurship, design, and innovation.

**Trish Reay** is Professor in the Department of Strategic Management and Organization at the University of Alberta School of Business in Edmonton, Canada. She currently serves as Editor-in-Chief at Organization Studies. Her research interests include qualitative research methods, organizational and institutional change, professions and professional identity.

**Mark de Rond** is Professor of Organizational Ethnography at Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, UK. A recurring feature in his work is the variety of human experience in all-absorbing environments. His fieldwork has involved a Boat Race rowing crew, doctors and nurses in a war hospital, peace activists walking from Berlin to Aleppo, and an attempt to scull the navigable length of the river Amazon.

**Wolfgang Seibel** is a Full Professor of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Konstanz, Germany, and an Adjunct Professor of Public Administration at the Hertie School of Governance, Berlin, Germany. His recent work focuses on the theory of public administration, including variants of administrative failure and disasters, and on international bureaucracies in various forms ranging from occupation regimes during World War II and its impact on the Holocaust to humanitarian intervention and complex UN peacekeeping missions and phenomena of rare but drastic failure in public administration. His recent books include “Persecution and Rescue. The Politics of the ‘Final Solution’ in France, 1940–1944” (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2016), “The Management of UN Peacekeeping. Coordination, Learning & Leadership in Peace Operations”, Lynne Rienner Publ. 2017 (Ed., with Julian Junk, Francesco Mancini, Till Blume); “Verwaltungsdesaster” [Public Administration Disasters], Campus Publ. 2017 (with Kevin Klamann and Hannah Treis); “Verwaltung

**Crawford Spence**'s research is principally focused on the sociology of expert groups, looking at how various financial actors (accountants, financial analysts, tax advisors, fund managers) in terms of how they negotiate social, cultural, political and economic pressures.

**David Strang** is Professor of Sociology at Cornell University, USA. His research focuses on the spread of practices in the business, political, and scientific worlds. He has developed statistical methods for the study of diffusion within an event history framework and agent-based models for the simulation of booms and busts in management fashion.

**Trin Thananusak** is Lecturer at the College of Management, Mahidol University, Thailand. He obtained Ph.D. from Cambridge Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, UK in 2016. A paper from his Ph.D. thesis won the Best Paper Award in Strategic Management at the 16th European Academy of Management Annual Meeting in June 2016.

**April L. Wright** is Associate Professor in Strategy at the UQ Business School at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her research on institutional maintenance and change and professional values has been published in leading international journals including the *Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Business Venturing, Organizational Research Methods*, and the *British Journal of Management*.

**Carla Wright** is looking forward to resuming her studies as an undergraduate student at the University of Queensland, Australia.

**Asma Zafar** is a doctoral student at the Alberta School of Business, University of Alberta, Canada. Asma's dissertation explores organizational responses to geographical disruptions through the use of ethnographic techniques. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* and has been presented at several management conferences.
ABOUT THE EDITORS

Tammar B. Zilber is Associate Professor of Organization Theory at the Jerusalem Business School, Hebrew University, Israel. She studies how people, organizations, and fields create, maintain, and change shared understandings, and the interrelations between these shared experiences and larger societal and cultural systems.

John M. Amis is Professor of Strategic Management and Organisation and Co-Director of the Centre for Strategic Leadership at the University of Edinburgh Business School, UK. His research examines large-scale organizational, institutional, and social change. He is past Chair of the Academy of Management’s Organization Development & Change Division.

Johanna Mair is Professor of Organization, Strategy and Leadership at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, Germany, and co-directs the Global Innovation for Impact Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, USA. Her research addresses the nexus of societal challenges, institutions, and organizations.
This page intentionally left blank
INTRODUCTION

DISMANTLING THE MASTER’S HOUSE USING THE MASTER’S TOOLS¹: ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Tammar B. Zilber, John M. Amis and Johanna Mair

ABSTRACT

In this introduction, the authors 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, the authors 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 the studies of organizing the authors prioritize the third approach, that is knowledge produced based on systematic empirical research, in examining our own work the authors tend to privilege the other two types, reflective articles and surveys. In what follows the authors 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: Sociology of knowledge; production of knowledge; organization and management theory; reflexivity research methods; research practice

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 endeavors, “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 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 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 twentieth 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; Collins, 1983; Shapin, 1982).

The two versions of a sociology of knowledge—the macro-analytic Strong Program (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; 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—it’s 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 problematic of the peer review process (Abu-Saad, 2008; Bedeian, 2004; Burgess & Shaw, 2010; Siler & Strang, 2017; Strang & Siller, 2015, 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, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 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; Bartunek, 2006; Clegg, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Mangham, 2005; Schein, 2006; Scott, 2006; Starbuck, 2004; Weick, 2004; Whitley, 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, p. 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 artifacts 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, they suggest that the increase in coauthorship in management reflects not only quality considerations 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.

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 & 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 1,000 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, & 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, & 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, pp. 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.