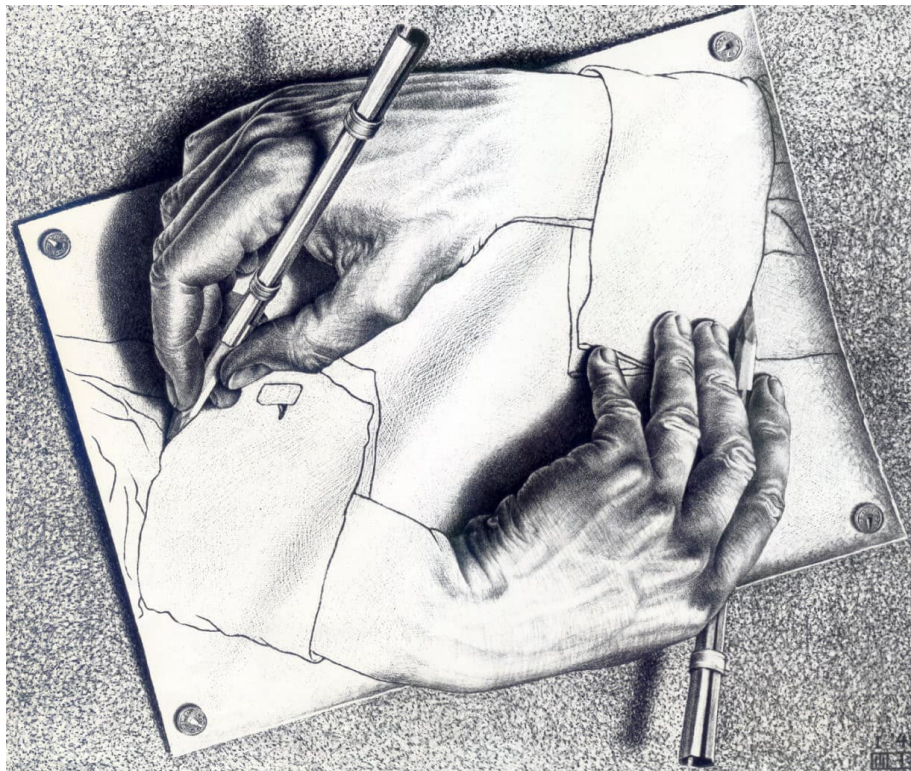


'Wright-Handed'

Or

A textual analysis of the use of scripts and tropes in building the theory of organizational ambidexterity



Drawing Hands, by M. C. Escher (lithograph, 1948)

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Introduction

Theories of organizations and management appear to come and go with varying levels of 'success' and duration, and the difference between seminal or short-lived seems illusory (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999). Some even claim that since the 70's and 80's no real new theory has emerged, and that the subsequent recycling of established 'classics' causes the field to "sometimes appear like a living museum of the 1970's" (G. F. Davis, 2010, p. 691). Arguably though, if not full-fledged theories, schools of thought appear to come and go with some regularity. Research and ensuing debates on this "ebb and flow of management ideas" (van Grinsven, Heusinkveld, & Cornelissen, 2016, p. 1) form a recurring subject of interest within the field of organization and management theory (OMT), culminating in a vast repository of meta-theories on what good theories look like and how they are built. Of course, the assessment of 'goodness' of a theory, in large part informs the approach on how to build such a theory, causing rich discourses and academic debates on theory building to fill the empirical and theoretical journals. One of the less contended points in these debates throughout the last fifty years, is fact that theories of organization and management struggle to keep up with the pace in which their objects of affection develop. It is this assessment of the continuing chasm between theory and practice – whether conceived as threat to OMT's very *raison d'être* or accepted as a mere fact of academic life – that forms the continuing impetus for new theories and approaches on how to build proper theories.

The development of theories on theory building to a large extent mirrors the paradigmatic development of the field of OMT at large, only with some delay. This platform of meta theories is like a government's senate that serves as a somewhat conservative *chambre de reflection*. Not only actively reflecting on how theories are built, but also a passive reflection of how theories are built and in what wider societal context, the domain of theories on theory building will prove very insightful, as I will discuss later.

Without claiming to present here an exact description of success or goodness of a theory, it is my position that theories - or for that matter distinct theoretical concepts or even proprietary metaphors - that dominate the top-tier academic publishing outlets for a certain period, can be considered good or successful. One example of such a theory is organizational ambidexterity, which recently has become one of the most publicized theories in management and organizational studies.

Organizational ambidexterity is "the ability to simultaneously pursue both incremental and discontinuous innovation ... from hosting multiple contradictory structures, processes, and cultures within the same firm" (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996, p. 24). As an organizational capability to manage paradoxical tensions, it positively impacts firm's performance. First publications about ambidexterity or ambidextrous organizations stem from the end of the

last millennium and was followed by a serious upsurge in academic and practitioners-oriented publications to date (García-Lillo, Úbeda-García, & Marco-Lajara, 2016; Nosella, Cantarello, & Filippini, 2012; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

The obvious question I am building up to, is of course whether the success of the theory of organizational ambidexterity is a case in point of the aggregated research on theory building. In other words, does it play by the rules described in the research on theory building? As I will explain in the following chapters, most of those rules stipulate that a theory must, above all, appear interesting to its audience. In this case, the audience is made up of peers, journals' editors selecting and accepting papers, or other academics adopting and extending a presented theory in other papers. This entails that – although all very academic surely – creating a successful theory means getting noticed and influencing other people by means of mostly written language. The extant literature on theory building provides some tools and scripts to this end, one of which is the apt use of tropes like metaphors (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011) and paradox (Morgan, 1983; Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002).

The use of metaphors in OMT is as ubiquitous as it is debated. Whether conceived as mere literary embellishments (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982) or essential to our understanding of complex concepts like organizations (Morgan, 2006; Weick, 1989), the fact is that they permeate our everyday life, perceptions and communication (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). So, there must be little surprise in considering that, even by its name, organizational ambidexterity is a combination of arguably more than one metaphor, of which ambidexterity is probably the most provocative. Undoubtedly, there was a time when people considered organization to be a new and provocative metaphor when thinking and speaking about the intended phenomenon. And without having a clear description or definition, the trope (metaphor or metonym) organization helps us in thinking, writing and talking about it. So, in this view, every new theory is built, conceived and presented by using other metaphors as building blocks. Approached from a constructivist standpoint, these building blocks or metaphors create and give meaning to the world we live and work in. And in order to have certain theories successfully resonate with the academic audiences, it is important to choose the right building blocks; not too familiar (uninteresting) and not too unfamiliar (unbelievable). Reversely, if we take a successful theory like organizational ambidexterity, it is interesting to analyze in what way the underlying metaphors play a part in its success.

The second important trope is that of paradox. If we focus on the case of organizational ambidexterity, based on literature, we can expect the concept of paradox to play an important part in building this theory. Publications on organizational ambidexterity describe the tensions - and ways of harnessing of those tensions - between an organization's seemingly contradictory simultaneous focus on exploitation and exploration. According to Oswick et al. (2002), describing the balancing or even transcendence of such tensions are the realm of paradox. In theory building, paradoxes provide "a means of collapsing false binary oppositions by revealing common patterns between, and mutually implicated aspects

within, supposedly diametrically opposed domains” (Oswick et al., 2002, p. 296). A second reason for focusing on the use of paradox in theory building in general is its potential to stir up interest in presenting a theory to its various audiences. As I will discuss in the literature review on theory building, interestingness is put forth as arguably one of the most important, and elusive, factors in a theory’s success. A comprehensive description of paradox is given by Putnam et al: “contradictions that persist over time, impose and reflect back on each other, and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations because their continuity creates situations in which options appear mutually exclusive, making choices among them difficult” (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016, p. 72). The use of this construct to describe theories in management and organizational literature in general, appears to receive a growing interest and popularity (Bednarek, Paroutis, & Sillince, 2016; Lewis, 2000; Putnam et al., 2016). Indeed, snipingly described by Handy in Lewis (Lewis, 2000, p. 760) as “the management cliché of our time – overused and underspecified”. So, important concepts like paradox are constructed or conceived in the eyes of their beholders, and can be “talked into being” by for instance organizational actors making sense of their choices in the workplace. To quote Karl Weick: “how can I know what I think until I see what I say” (Weick, 1979). Thus, placing great importance on discourse (“what I say”) as a necessary vehicle for paradoxes (Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2016). Given these tenets of paradoxes, it is interesting to see in what way paradoxes are being “written into being” by theorists who quite sovereignly qualify certain organizational constructs as tensional and paradoxical, and subsequently create interest.

Recent bibliographic meta-studies on ambidexterity created insights into its intellectual structure by exposing certain themes (Nosella et al., 2012), and “cross-boundary perspectives” (García-Lillo et al., 2016, p. 1023) developed in the ambidexterity literature. Other meta-studies revealed the use of rhetoric scripts by theorists when textually constructing their (institutionalized) contribution to theory as being unique (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). No meta-research into the booming literature on organizational ambidexterity however appears to be on rhetorical techniques aimed at creating interest, thus providing a unique opportunity to do so in this thesis. Thus, the research question of this paper is as follows:

To what extent do the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity comply with the rhetorical and epistemic scripts, as hypothesized in the literature on theory building?

In answering this question, I will follow up on Boxenbaum and Rouleau’s research and apply their model regarding the use of epistemic scripts on metaphors during the conception phase and the presentation phase, on the theory of organizational ambidexterity. In addition to Boxenbaum and Rouleau’s research, I will take a temporal effect in consideration, proposing different scripts during different phases in a theory’s lifecycle. Although hinted at in the literature, no empirical research into this effect exists to date. Finally, I will also

develop a deeper understanding of the use of rhetorical practices in presenting theories, specifically regarding the trope of paradox in theory building, as proposed by Davis (M. S. Davis, 1971). Recent publications have discussed the increasing mentioning of the concept of paradox in OMT (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016), however there appears to be little (linguistic) research into how theorists actually construct paradoxes through rhetorical, textual acts. A part of my analysis of sampled texts of organizational ambidexterity will address this gap. In doing so, I will integrate parts of Davis' lexicon into the framework offered by Boxenbaum and Rouleau, and offer a critique and an extension to their initial model.

Taken together, these contributions will help reflexive theorists in acknowledging his or her preferences when interpreting, reading, writing, and thinking about seemingly universal concepts in OMT. Moreover, it creates awareness of the potential and limitations of specific figures of speech when describing these organizational phenomena. In addition, it supports the growing view that scientific language is all but value-free, even when aspiring to be as literal as possible.

In this thesis, I will first evaluate the state of the art of the scientific literature on theory building, and more specifically rhetorical techniques like the use of metaphors and the construction of paradox. I will then describe the method used to define, scope and analyze the literature on organizational ambidexterity. Next, I will present and discuss the results and analyses, reflecting on the limitations of those analyses and possibilities for further research.

Literature Review

Organizational and management theory

A relatively new kid on the block, organization and management theory (OMT) established itself as a distinct field of social science after the first half of the twentieth century. After World War II, American capitalism had triumphed over fascism and increasingly dominated and eventually ousted communism in the western hemisphere. As capitalism firmly nestled itself as the prevalent economic paradigm, firms or companies became the dominant – and often synonymous - form of organization. As such, these types of organization were seen as driving economic progress or 'business', which in turn merited focused practical attention and scientific inquiry. Progress in computer technology, statistics and physics spurred by World War II, quickly gained dominance in managerial discourse. Operations Research and later Management by Objective signified an engineer's influence on managerial practice, reviving Taylorism and exhorting a rational ideology (Barley & Kunda, 1992a).

Not surprisingly, a great number of scientific business journals was founded since then to publish this growing amount of research and stimulate theory development. As a former president of the Academy of Management put it: "[...] whether we live in a society of organizations or a society defined by markets, [...] it is clear that business rivals the church and the state as a central aspect of modern life" (Walsh, 2011, p. 215). Since its earliest days, OMT is supposed to inform (American) managers on how to effectively lead those business organizations. As put by Pinder and Bourgeois, OMT has "the ultimate goal of providing applied assistance to the enlightened management of organizations" (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982, p. 649). Practitioners like consultants and - more importantly - business schools would be responsible for the dissemination of the state-of-the-art theories and their practical applications, as new tools to a mechanic. Due to various reasons (of which discussion is beyond the scope of this writing) both theory and practice proliferated, but somewhat independently of each other. In attempting to close the gap, more and more theories - or schools of thought – of OMT emerged fighting for attention and dominance. This however did not bring any progress of the field, in the eyes of many observers (e.g. Pfeffer, Koontz, Hambrick). In the ontological debates that ensued over the years, the need for this 'progress of the field' and the ways in which the scientific worth of a theory is to be measured, were ardently debated.

Some researchers argue that organizational and management studies are still clinging to their "colonial roots" and haven't produced a real new theory in almost fifty years. (Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). Indeed, OMT appears to be dominated by 'classics' from the seventies and eighties, like agency theory, transaction cost economics, contingency theory and new institutional theory. It is argued that this is due to the fact that conceptual ambiguity

prevents those classics from falsifiability, causing some paradigms “to be encased in amber” (G. F. Davis, 2010, p. 692). Although most authors agree on the field’s stagnation and the problems this presents, most of them agree, contrary to Davis, that OMT’s inherently conceptual ambiguity is helpful in building new theories. Then again, whether such proliferation of ‘middle range theories’ is helping the development of this pre-paradigmatic field (enough) is an ongoing debate. This is somewhat problematic, because the development and importance of organizations is ever growing, creating “a chasm” between stagnating theory and accelerating praxis (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 237), perhaps causing a more existential debate about the necessity of OMT.

In sum, social structures and power relations influence the struggle of theories and theorists for acclaim (Pfeffer, 1993). Thus, a good theory matters, especially in somewhat underdeveloped field like management studies where fragmentation and parochial interests can create – mostly social – barriers for new theories. Note, the use of words like “struggle” by authors like Weick (1995), Gabriel (Gabriel, 2010) and Pfeffer (1993) regarding the development of new theories, is telling of a social constructivist approach regarding theory building. This signals that whatever building blocks make a good theory, is probably less rational than one might expect *prima facie*. Chiefly, a good theory must deal with the social and political elements. And a good theory on theory building will address this. After all, there is nothing so practical as a good theory, even to aspiring theorists.

Theory building in organizational and management studies

In a reflexive effort to deal with this stagnation, the theories on building theories became a significant stream of research and publication, particularly since the seventies of the previous decade. Journals like the *Administrative Science Quarterly* (est. 1956), the *Academy of Management Journal* (est. 1958), and the *Academy of Management Review* (est. 1976) even periodically dedicate special issues of their journal to assess the state of affairs regarding theory building. An all-encompassing review is beyond the scope of this writing, suggesting some limitations in both subject and timeframe. In following some of the authors from those outlets, I will consider theory building as a “linguistic practice” (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 16) of theorizing, publishing, and acceptance of OMT. The ‘linguistic’ refers to important role of language in the field, as is explained by Astley and Zammuto. In following Wittgenstein, they argue that “our knowledge and comprehension of the world is the product of these linguistic conventions rather than the direct product of empirical observation, since we perceive nothing except through the language structures in which perception is embedded” (Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 444). The “practice” description entails that the process of theory building is embedded in an institutional field, governed by socially constructed rules that govern that field. These rules not only give meaning to the conceptual terminology used by theorists, but also determine a theory’s legitimacy, which is

“the coin of the academic realm” (Elsbach, Sutton, & Whetten, 1999, p. 628). For example, and I will discuss this later more extensively, one of the ‘rules of the game’ for a theory to be found interesting by the scientific community, is the extent in which its language and lexicon resonates with what is previously accepted. Here, both the ‘resonance’ itself and the governing rule can only be interpreted linguistically. This exemplifies the fundamental relation, *sine qua non*, between language and practice (Searle, 2005), maybe rendering Czarniawska’s concept of “linguistic practice” somewhat pleonastic.

Regarding the timeframe, the abovementioned view of a linguistic practice merits a discussion of literature and research that is mostly post ‘linguistic turn’, so from the 1970’s onward. This linguistic turn is described by Van Maanen as follows:

“this language first switch produces a culturally relative version of reality and suggests that perception is a much a product of our imagination as imagination is a product of perception. Reality thus emerges from the interplay of imaginative perception and perceptive imagination. Language (and text) provide the symbolic representations required for both the construction and communication of conceptions of reality and thus make the notions of thought and culture inseparable” (Van Maanen, 1995b, p. 140).

This is not to say that since the 1970’s all literature on theory building, or OMT in a broader sense has embraced this viewpoint. Quite the contrary, as I will discuss later, the linguistic turn and its impact on theory building only slowly trickled into extant literature.

Theories and their development are a – sometimes lagging - reflection of their time, influenced by wider developments like cultural, societal and political considerations (McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999). Theoretical discourse can be said to follow the cultural oscillation - rather than progression - between a normative and a rational ideology. These antinomic ideologies contain a certain amount of contradiction that will be highlighted through social tensions caused by economic cycles of expansion and contraction. Referring to a larger context in which theories are built, “one might postulate that culture has set the substantive and structural boundaries within which managerial discourse has developed but that economic forces have determined when new surges of theorizing occurred” (Barley & Kunda, 1992a, p. 392). This external influence applies similarly to the reception of theories. As DiMaggio puts it: “the reception of a theory resonates with the cultural presuppositions of the time and of the scientific audience that consumes it” (DiMaggio, 1995, p. 394). I will thus present a chronological overview here, because it is my point that the view on theory building is best informed when taken into account some of those overarching, broader developments.¹ If painted with broad strokes, these developments are the linguistic turn, followed by a fragmentation of social sciences, and a growing influence of postmodern

¹ Given my personal location in space and time, a balanced review – although of noble consideration – will always prove inadequate as claiming to be more than a personal account. As much as possible, I will make my personal values and presuppositions explicit and leave judgement to the reader.

elements (Fournier & Grey, 2000). Although I do not wish to present such history in an ostensibly linear fashion, for sake of convenience I chose a chronological format mostly based on demarcating publications like those of AMR's special topic forums.

Moreover, I regard the extant literature as a discourse, in which theorists and editors respond to each other, more or less like a group correspondence. They react – expand, criticize or juxtapose – to each other's publications, effectively creating a discourse on emergent theory. This discourse is a political process, governed by institutions, in which language plays an important role (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Calás & Smircich, 1999; Searle, 2005). The premier journals proved productive outlets of a dense discourse full of finger pointing and name calling, eloquence and entrenchment, *j'accuse* and *se rapproche*. In OMT, few theories will surface undebated, and arguably none will take center stage without being heavily criticized. So, to create a thorough understanding of the current state of affairs on theory building, I deemed it necessary to reconstruct some of those dialectical processes, without disqualifying or marginalizing certain ontological or paradigmatic point of view. This approach also merits a mostly chronologically clustered discussion in which the alternating opinions can be viewed in their context. Obviously, some developments defy the periodical demarcation and if much so, these will be discussed separately. Admittedly, given some of my personal (and thus this thesis') biases towards the lingual and the socially constructedness of knowledge, a well-balanced review is at risk of being skewed by my personal preferences. As a way of mitigating this risk, I stage both protagonists and antagonists before ending each section with an epilogue. In these conclusions, stripped of some these nuances, I will summarize the elements that logically build up to the research questions and their context.

The 1970's and 1980's – A Linguistic Turn and Paradigm Wars

During these years, a gradual ideological and economic shift in the US influenced the (mostly US based) discourse on theory building. American industry was quickly losing ground to West German and mostly Japanese competition. Together with a growing undercurrent of assertiveness of both blue and white-collar workforce, this created a context in which more and more attention in OMT was given to human relations, workforce dedication and an organizational culture aimed at an intrinsic dedication to quality and flexibility. These two factors arguably opened the door for anthropological influences, most notably social constructivism, to supply alternative paradigms for organizational analyses (Barley & Kunda, 1992a). Related developments were spurred by the subsequent rise of postmodernism, which I will discuss later, making OMT and research on theory building a theatre for all kinds of performances by widely ranging actors.

Following an editorial call for papers, Van de Ven (1989) in his introductory paper to a AMR's special topic forum², reiterates Lewin's statement - "there is nothing as practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1945, p. 129) -, about the two goals of OMT research. A good theory is practical because it "advances knowledge" and "enlightens the profession of management" (van de Ven, 1989, p. 486). According to Beyer in ASQ's special topic editorial introduction, consensus in the field is that theories and research should be of practical use to life in organizations, but are failing to deliver on this promise (Beyer, 1982). Van de Ven addresses themes like building new theories and improving current theories, and mentions the current state of affairs in which there are many competing theories for any given phenomenon. This causes entrenched proponents of a certain competing theory to sharpen their respective theories at the expense of limiting their scope, leading to "impeccable micrologic creating macro nonsense" (van de Ven, 1989, p. 487). This differentiation and proliferation was mostly considered as telling of a benign growth spurt of a preparadigmatic field in which theory and practice had become too 'loosely coupled'. In doing so, some theories had gone astray, and this divergence ought to be corrected for OMT in order to "bring coalescence of the various approaches and result in a more unified and useful theory of management" (Koontz, 1980, p. 175). Contrastingly, to preclude this negative effect of competition among theories, Poole and Van de Ven frame this problem as a paradox that can be dealt with in a productive and inclusive manner. According to them, theorists should "search for and work with inconsistencies, contradictions, and tensions in their theories [...]" (Poole & van de Ven, 1989, p. 575). Paradoxes, thus, are inevitable between concurring theories and should be embraced in order to develop better theories.

² Note that one of the papers submitted was Eisenhardt's much cited 'Building Theories from Case Study Research'. Interestingly, few case studies were published by the theory oriented AMR since then.

Although I will discuss the concept of paradox and its use in OMT further on in this review, it is interesting to note a somewhat post-modern and constructivist stance of the authors. In the pluralistic field of OMT, to them, “theories are not statements of some ultimate “truth” but rather are alternative cuts of a multifaceted reality”³. A similar view is presented in an earlier article co-written by Van de Ven, in which it is argued that some theoretical pluralism has the positive effect of creating novel insights, but too much differentiation will cause overzealous theoretical compartmentalization (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983). In suggesting a ‘dialectical relief’ for the debates between four central perspectives of OMT, ostensibly some of the groundwork is laid for developing a multilevel view on paradox; paradoxes not only exist in the object of OMT, but also within its subject, OMT itself. Or, as stated in the article, “[t]he existence of this paradox produces not only contradictions in the practice of everyday organizational life, but also, as we have seen, a dialectical tension in theorizing” (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983, p. 264).

Astley, in another article of ASQ, also firmly puts the axe to the root of the conventional view (or ‘grand narrative’) on “scientific progress as a cumulative discovery of objective truth” (Astley, 1985, p. 497). He argues that no objective truth exists, and that all empirical observations are made through a theorist’s biased personal lens. According to him, these observations are then presented in a storytelling manner, imputing meaning and significance, to a scrutinizing audience. This scrutinizing leads to a “socially negotiated consensus” on the story’s claim to truth and knowledge. Underlying this process, is the important role of language. Astley continues with asserting that such theorizing language is mostly ambiguous, leaving room for various interpretations, and serving as “umbrella concepts to which a multiplicity of more explicit hypotheses can be attached” (Astley, 1985, p. 501). Moreover, he discusses how the use metaphors, typologies and iconoclasm will make a theory more interesting and thus more likely to create impact. With these arguments, as I will show later, Astley cast an undoubtedly long shadow in the discussions on theory building.

Regarding the use of metaphors in theory building, it is worth mentioning that some publications in ASQ, predating Astley’s argument, specifically addressed this topic (Morgan, 1980; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982; Morgan, 1983), with many others to follow (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008; Cornelissen, Kafouros, & Lock, 2005; Tsoukas, 1989, 1993). I will discuss this subject separately further on in my review because of two reasons. First, the debate on use of metaphors spans much more than a confinement to this periodical section of 20 years would imply. As such, the debates on the specific use of metaphors, unlike the abovementioned conception of its importance, can be seen as continual reflection of all timeframes instead of one specific decade. Second, the importance of the use of metaphors

³ In my opinion, their deliberate use of the words ‘alternative cuts of a multifaceted world’ subtly echoes Kuhn’s quote “languages cut the world up in different ways”, revealing a postmodernist stance.

in a linguistic and constructionist approach to theory building merits a separate and more detailed discussion.

In AMR's special topic mentioned earlier, Bacharach, in an integrationalist view, calls for a common set of ground rules and vocabulary for theorists, to be able to accumulate an integrative and consistent body of knowledge regarding OMT. He suggests the definition of theory as "a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints" (Bacharach, 1989, p. 496). One of those boundaries created by assumptions, proposedly is based on the values of the theorist. These personal values, he states, remain too often unspoken in a theory, leaving ontological differences implicit, and condemning the proponents of oppositional theories to Babylonian confusion. Although Bacharach would probably deny his paper contains 'a theory' by and in its own right, he does appear to step into the trap of leaving his own values somewhat hidden. There are some pointers though, as to why Bacharach and, let's say Poole & Van de Ven would probably be at risk of a Babylonian confusion themselves, although published in the same special topic with the very purpose of strengthening theory-development. Telling is Bacharach's positivistic view in stating that "the idealistic goal of science is the pursuit of universal truth". In order to reach this goal, "a cumulative body of more-or-less universally accepted theories" must be constructed (p. 511). And to cumulate, one must be able to commensurate, hence this set of criteria.⁴ This leaves his argument vulnerable to the criticism that it merely presents means to an end, without acknowledging the debate surrounding that end. If we are not all travelling to Rome, what's the use in discussing which road is best. Although he recognizes that concepts as "universals" such as proposed by Bacharach, are extremely unlikely arguments, Osigweh in his paper is much more explicit about his own 'values' and ontological positivistic stance: "[...] believing that organizational concepts may well identify entities that exist in nature quite apart from each individual's construing" (Chimezie A. B. Osigweh, 1989). He argues that, in building theories, precise description of those concepts creates more generalizable theories without losing accuracy, or being 'stretched'. This allows for universal concepts to 'travel' and to be tested in different situations, thus benefiting the lagging development of the field of OMT. Interestingly, in discussing the approach on how to adequately describe organizational concepts, Osigweh taps into same philosophical source from which Poole & Van de Ven's paradox springs; Hegel's dialectical concept of thesis and antithesis. According to Osigweh, universal concepts need to be defined by (also) stating what is not, embracing the notion of *omnis determinatio est negatio*⁵. The important difference between the authors is that one uses Hegel's concept to create tensions, to antithese between concepts, whereas the others use the concept to dissolve tensions, to synthesize between theories.

⁴ Another clue somewhat hinting of 'physics-envy' is left by Bacharach by kicking off his paper with a quote by famous physicist Stephen Hawking about how discussing the nature of the universe needs clear theories.

⁵ Hegel borrowed the line from Spinoza and used it in support of his dialectical philosophy.

A last contribution that is worth mentioning here is that of Weick, who shares much of his argumentation with Astley.⁶ Weick ascribes the current state of theory building – “often trivial” - to a too rigid adherence to methodological validation or verification (Weick, 1989). He considers valid knowledge fundamentally unattainable in social science. In breaking with the mechanistic orthodoxy governing theory construction, he suggests theory building as an evolutionary process and places the theorist at the top of the food chain. As sovereign in their ‘disciplined imagination’, theorists are responsible for the problem statement and subsequent thought trials or conjectures. Astley speaks of ‘scientific imagination’ in which empirical data functions “to embellish rather than validate the theory” (Astley, 1985, p. 510). In building theory, the theorists decide which of those conjectures is most plausible or interesting, as a substitute of empirical validation: “the process of theory testing by an experimental test is mimicked by the process of conjecture testing by an assumption test. In both cases, interesting outcomes are retained, while absurd, irrelevant, or obvious outcomes are dropped” (Weick, 1989, p. 525).⁷

As part of this special topic forum, this paper by Weick is noteworthy because it does two things. First, by not only denying OMT a positivistic ontology, as is bon ton amongst postmodernists, he also replaces it with a fitting alternative: “the contribution of social science does not lie in validated knowledge, but rather in the suggestion of relationships and connections that had previously not been suspected, relationships that change actions and perspectives” (Weick, 1989, p. 524, emphasis added). Second, Weick – in lockstep with Astley - takes a strong social constructivist viewpoint in his article, effectively challenging the dominant dyad of truth-validation, and replacing it with impact-imagination. In an analysis triggered by Lewin’s famous quote that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1945, p. 129), Miner drew a similar conclusion. He surveyed leading organizational theorists to conclude that there was no evidence for a relation between the estimated validity – or ‘goodness’ - of an organizational theory, its importance, and its usefulness (Miner, 1984).⁸ Empirical validity is no longer the necessary prerequisite of a good theory. And good theories do not bring us closer to the objective truth about organizations. Theories are social constructs, created in discourse. As Daft puts it, “stories are theories”, crafted by poetic scientists with a firm grounding in common sense (Daft, 1983). For Weick and Astley, this opens up discussions about the role of (written) language and personal interests that govern the process of theory building: “much as theorists may resist the notion, most theory construction depends on conjectures, preserved in well-crafted sentences, that are tested in

⁶ Considering the level of similarity between both articles, the fact that Weick only refers to Astley’s article once is remarkable.

⁷ I will discuss what constitutes ‘interesting’ according to Weick, Astley and Davis further on in my review.

⁸ In my opinion, Miner stretched the application of Lewis’ quote a bit. In fact, Lewis was trying to make a point of connecting the social scientist’s theory to the practical interests of the practitioner of social management at a societal level, not an organizational one. This stretching probably signifies the growing importance of organizations over society as the dominant object of OMT.

substitute environments by people who have a stake in the outcome of the test and may be tempted to bias that outcome” (Weick, 1989, p. 529).

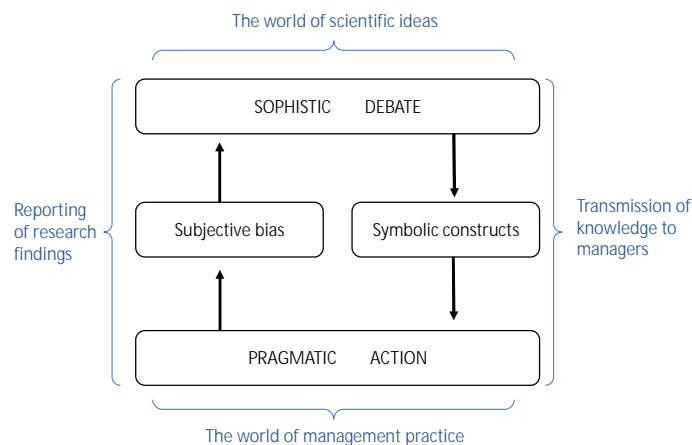
Living up to my statement that I view the knowledge on theory building as a product of scientific discourse, I feel I must address not only those that challenge the status quo, but also those who defend it. The status quo in the 1980's being the dominance of the quantitative, natural science model with a positivistic ontology and an (implicit) expectation that cumulative knowledge will bring us closer to knowing the 'truth'. One of the defenders⁹ of the then dominant paradigm was Donaldson, famous for his work on the contingency theory, and a passionate positivist. By the end of the decade, the critics to the status quo, as Donaldson had singled out in his defenses, appeared to have had little impact on the field. One of the conclusions of a research based on the citation counts, revealed “the critics whom Donaldson feared were undermining ‘Organizations Theory’ have certainly not scaled the mountain of major organization journals.” (Aldrich, 1988, p. 23). At least, not yet. So, Donaldson appeared to be fighting windmills, providing his critics more platform than they prima facie deserved. Mounting this platform, in defense of those critics, Marsden (Marsden, 1993) however, later questioned the extent to which this citation count really invalidates their criticism. It is my point though, that Aldrich's method of citation count in leading journals does convey insights to the extent in which criticism is accepted and legitimized. An argument I will develop elsewhere is indeed that social consensus or acceptance drives impact, not validity. The matter of fact remains, that by the end of the 1980's, although many alternative paradigms challenged the status quo, none of them had enough 'gravitas' to really overthrow the dominant modernistic, positivistic approach.

Back to the original problem that gave way to all these debates on theory building, the 'chasm' between practice and theory and the extent in which good theories should inform practice. In his article, Sandelands questions such a notion in which theories lead to better practices (Sandelands, 1990). He argues that practice and theory are inherently and irreconcilably different, although interdependent concepts. A viewpoint he shares i.a. with Astley (Astley, 1984, 1985), and Shrivastava and Mitroff (Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1984). They argue that theorists and managers have fundamentally different frames of reference along the lines of analytical versus intuitive, objective versus experiential, technical jargon versus metaphors used for personal sense-making. As they put it, “in their attempt to structure objectively and to simplify the complex organizational phenomenon, most organizational theories obscure the richness and complexity of the set of assumptions that managers must make in order to operate successfully in a rapidly changing complex environment” (Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1984, p. 18).

⁹ He published at least two articles and a book containing “in defence of ..” in their title.

As such, theories like all knowledge, presuppose context or practice. Without a preexisting skillset or experience as a personal frame of reference, theory will only point a manager in a general direction, leaving the inevitable haphazard dynamic details unspecified. Theory alone ('explanation', episteme, or knowing how) will always insufficiently instruct managerial practice ('understanding', technè, or knowing that). As he puts it, "rather than leading the parade and showing the way to understanding, explanation follows behind, sweeping up the refuse into neat piles which make for easy pick-up, but in their very organization, leave a misleading trail of what went before" (Sandelands, 1990, p. 243). He views this hermeneutic circle as one in which the exchange between subject and object, between theory and practice, is imperfect. Moreover, the dominant direction is that theory follows practice, and not the other way around. Somewhat reluctantly, Sandelands admits that a certain practical need for theories must exist, if only to explain the commonsensical popularity of Lewin's epigram. Indeed, he claims, theories can enter into practice for a manager pondering a course of action, in serving as an aide-mémoire, providing easy access to prior experience or provide confidence in a new chain of actions, inscribing a self-fulfilling characteristic in theories. Sandelands thus proposes a restatement of Lewin's epigram into "there is nothing so practical about theory (but it may be good to have around)" (Sandelands, 1990, p. 259). Astley proposes a similar view, wherein the field of OMT is governed by subjective and biased methods and by knowledge that is the product of dialectical and political processes of which the products inform managerial practice by means of mostly symbolic constructs (Astley, 1984).

Management science and management practice as partially uncoupled domains



Astley, 1984

If this (hermeneutic) circle or vortex would be like a whirligig, it would never end up in the place it started. Ephemeral personal preferences of theorists and managers like a tiny grain of sand would alter its course each time it was spun. As DiMaggio puts it, a "theory's reception is helter-skelter: a process of appropriation driven more by resonance than by reason [...]" (DiMaggio, 1995, p. 394). This prompts the question if it is possible to identify

some 'chords' that are in line with the 'frequencies' that are in vogue. In other word, what can theorists do to enhance their theory's chances of a positive reception?

In summarizing, an integrated review of this special topic of AMR from the end of the 1980s, and publications in other journals like ASQ and AMR, reveals a couple of insights. First, one of the few things the contributors agreed upon is that the field of OMT was not yet past its fledgling years, and saw more stymieing debate than progressing theories. In an effort to break through this stagnation, however, the shifted focus toward theory building proved just another battleground of the so-called paradigm wars. Even the peace seeking attempts towards a truce carry in them some of the same fundamental (ontological) differences in approach as the various theories. One suggests a common ground towards an integrative field, others propose or more multifaceted or even multi-paradigm approach. Whether OMT should diverge, converge or cumulate remains unanswered. Second, a distinct view in which theories are not cumulative instruments to bring us closer to the truth, but more products of an imaginative craft reflecting the socially embedded position of the researcher, gains foothold. This, in turn, introduces language and concepts like Hegelian dialectics and paradox that will come to play an important role in theory building literature. Also, the proposition that such linguistic constructs can be usefully appropriated in the practical world of management, tentatively enters the debates. Finally, and more discernibly, growing attention is paid to role of the theorist and his or her personal values, heralding a growing concern with reflexivity. Note that standpoints like those of Astley, Van Maanen, Weick and Sandelands still presented a minority in the field, although their influence was growing.

An Intermezzo: Peace for our Postmodern time?

According to Calás and Smircich, spanning these decades, “conversations about which paradigm was the most truthful or most legitimate transformed into a more reflective concern” (Calás & Smircich, 1999, p. 651). This reflection, described by Cooper and Burrell as a one of human sciences’ “periodic bouts of self-analysis and self-doubt” and questions “certain traditionally prized shibboleths of liberal academic discourse such as ‘reason’ and ‘progress’ [...]” (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 92). With it, a ‘postmodern’ sway is introduced to discussions on theorizing in OMT. A brief description of this term is therefore warranted here.

Postmodernism, as a theoretical perspective¹⁰, is not an easily described concept. As noted by Featherstone, “the term [postmodernism] is at once fashionable yet irritatingly elusive to define” (Featherstone, 1988, p. 195). Even an obvious definition by negation (“not modernism”) fits it with a certain amount of unease. By definition, it eludes an unambiguous definition, *ecce paradox*. Admittedly, postmodernism is often explained in relation to its predecessor modernism, but only to illustrate how it breaks with some, but certainly not all of its features. In so doing, Hassard for example presents a number of key epistemological elements mostly derived from writers like Lyotard and Derrida (Hassard, 1994). One of the most important is the previously discussed reflexivity. In this reflexivity, unlike modernism, postmodernism does not accept one axiomatic grand metanarrative of progress that legitimizes one dominant form of theory building. As he puts it in following Derrida: “we should not subscribe to the seriousness of the progress narrative, for its assumptions of unitary and linear progression only serve to suppress the possibility of a multitude of alternative voices” (Hassard, 1994, p. 314). Lyotard (in Featherstone, 1988, p. 209) gives us “there is no reason, only reasons”, pointing out that the diversity of societal revolutions post World War II refutes one grand natural teleology. Moreover, each claim to ‘truth’ gaining legitimacy from this grand narrative, is suspect as being mere human projection, dependent on social context or timeframe. According to Cooper and Burrell “answers are only temporary inversions of questions” (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 101).¹¹ Thus, reflexivity regarding these specific coordinates in time and space entails that the theorist explicitly acknowledges this aspect in his or her subjective relation to the described object, “instead of trying to erase all personal traces of the researcher from the work so as to provide the reader with an illusion of unmediated access to the subject [...] (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997, p. 464). A postmodern perspective on theory building therefore does not rule out any single approach, even a modernistic or positivistic one, but stimulates diversity. So, on the postmodern farm, all animals are indeed equal, insofar they do not claim otherwise.

¹⁰ Postmodernism in social science is good example of how broader societal movements influence science, next to arts, culture and everyday life (Featherstone, 1988).

¹¹ In line with this postmodern standpoint, Kilduff and Mehra ‘end’ their essay with a paragraph headed by “Anti-conclusion”.

Another important focus put forth by a postmodern perspective is on the use of language and writing, or text (Cooper, 1989; Hassard, 1994; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997). In line with Lyotard and Wittgenstein, a postmodern epistemology is a product of language games “in which knowledge is based on nothing more than a number of diverse discourses [...]” (Hassard, 1994, p. 310). These discourses form the playing field for theorists where they play their dialectical games, in which the goal is neither consensus or complete annihilation, and the score is always temporary. The postmodern framing then turns paradigm wars into theoretical struggles or even benign academic banter and sophisms¹².

In conclusion, the postmodern project’s goal – if any - is to disrupt and be provocative. To challenge the ‘normal’, the orthodox, the unitary, and the axiomatic in the field of OMT. It specifically targets the conventional presuppositions of the theorist as objective empirical observer, and the overarching goal of OMT to discover or accumulate a shared body of truth. In its extreme form, there is an inherent cynical or deconstructive side to postmodernism as it only raises questions and even excludes certain answers, which obviously leaves it vulnerable to criticism. There is a critique that such messy theoretical eclecticism without consensus only hampers the much-needed development of the field (e.g. Pfeffer). Also, a gentler critique exists that postmodern analyses only deconstruct, leaving no clues as to how to reconstruct. Indeed, the “so what?” of the postmodern view is often met with different answers, if answered at all (Calás & Smircich, 1999; Hassard, 1994). All in all, the postmodern turn does inject (or deflects) the research and discussions on theory building with some new elements. First, it shifted focus to the creation of knowledge in a lingual, discursive context not necessarily dependent on a connection to ‘the real world’. As Astley and Zammuto argue that “the meaning of scientific propositions cannot be determined by reference to extralinguistic criteria, since language itself is the embodiment of knowledge” (Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 445). In this discursive context, theories struggle for impact which in turn warrants an inspection as to how this struggle is influenced by the theorist himself. As I mentioned earlier, showcasing empirical validity does not give a theorist the (temporary) upper hand. Style of writing on the other hand matters, “aesthetically compelling work achieves impact irrespective of the value of the empirical work it inspires” (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997, p. 465). Second, the postmodern turn created a breathing space for theories to differentiate and co-exist, creating inroads for ambiguous conceptualizing and a tolerance for (and use of) paradoxes.

¹² Sophistry as explained by Astley is involved with arguments “aimed not at seeking the truth, but only at victory in the debate” (Astley, 1984, p. 265).

The 1990's – The Tools of War; Maps, Territories, and Other Metaphors

Ten years later most paradigmatic differences remain however, and the diversity of ideas on theory building is ever growing. In this decade, even more than before, all kinds of aspects of theory building are up for discussion, making it look like this particular stream of research has entered its pubescent years. In addition to the topic of usefulness of theories to organizations and their management, the debates on which paradigm or theory is better have not subsided, but are merely moved to the topic of (desirability of) incommensurability¹³. Lastly, the tenability of the objectiveness of representations of empirical phenomena now consumes large parts of the ubiquitous discussions in theory building. According to the introduction to AMR's second special issue on the topic of theory building, it is still unclear whether this diversity and discussion is helping the development of the field or just causing stagnation (Elsbach et al., 1999; McKinley & Mone, 1998). Pfeffer for instance, argues that all this fragmentation creating an inward gaze causes the paradigmatic development of OMT to fall even further behind that of other, more established sciences (Pfeffer, 1993). According to him, the field of OMT was not meant to "let-a-thousand-flowers-bloom", and is now overgrown with would-be theory weed than needs desperate pruning. This view was the starting point of much heated debate¹⁴, which was understatedly described by the editor of one of the publishing journals as "provocative" and "less restrained than we are used to" (Frost, 1995). The ensuing discourses reveal at least two important stumbling stones in contemporary OMT; the benefits paradigmatic diversity (incommensurability) and the role of language in OMT. Although the two subjects are often discussed in relation to each other, I will mostly discuss the arguments and discourse on the role of language given the focus of my thesis. In this light, the academic debates following Astley and Zammuto's publication regarding the postmodern view of science as 'languages games' (Astley & Zammuto, 1992), and Sutton and Staw's paper on elements of sound theory building (Sutton & Staw, 1995) are also discussed.

One of the most incendiary debates was however started by Pfeffer's paper "Barriers to the Advance of Organizational Science: Paradigm Development as a Dependent Variable" (Pfeffer, 1993) in which he proves to be no supporter of the paradigmatic diversity that co-evolved together with postmodernism and the linguistic turn. In this article, which was the publication of his 'distinguished scholar address' to the Academy of management, Pfeffer points out that a highly developed 'field' – he uses the terms theory and paradigm as somewhat interchangeable - means consensus and technical certainty. Fields with a level of development like physics, mathematics or even economics reward their theorists with

¹³ Defined "as occurring when there are logically or normatively incompatible schools of thought, and no consensually acknowledged reference system exists for deciding between them" (McKinley & Mone, 1998, p. 170).

¹⁴ Debate was called by one of his opponents "an academic blood-sport" (Van Maanen, 1995a).

access to resource and influence. OMT on the other hand, he argues, has a low level of paradigm development due to theoretical and methodological fragmentation (e.g. positivism, structuralism, constructionism), causing stagnation of the development of the field, to the detriment of its influence and acclaim as a science. In a direct response, an essay by Van Maanen (Van Maanen, 1995b) represents something of a cross between a belligerent attack on Pfeffer's research (and agenda) and a undisguised exaltation of the works of Weick. He states that Pfeffer's¹⁵ call for paradigmatic purity is telling of a certain amount of 'physics envy'¹⁶ and in doing so ignores the linguistic turn which is mostly responsible for the current diversity. There appears indeed little 'restraint' in the rhetoric of Van Maanen, to whom Pfeffer's view is "insufferably smug; pious and orthodox; philosophically indefensible; extraordinarily naïve as to how science actually works; theoretically foolish, vain and autocratic [...]" (Van Maanen, 1995b, p. 133).

Contrastingly, and clearly acknowledging and displaying the linguistic turn, Van Maanen – "most certainly a fan" - stages publications by Weick as "certifiable examples of influential organizational theory". He analyzes important rhetorical elements of a discernable Weickian style. First, part of the persuasive power stems from the extent in which the theorist displays doubt by use of words like "perhaps" or "maybe". According to Van Maanen, 'doubting by

¹⁵ Van Maanen interestingly refers to Pfeffer on a first name basis, as Jeffrey. This makes the essay more personal, but leaves the reader wondering if they are personal friends and the initially harsh wording is just a form of good spirited banter. In the subsequent response(s) however, it is made very clear that little love is lost between Van Maanen and Pfeffer. Van Maanen admits being "annoyed" and calls Pfeffer's scholarship "appalling", and even disqualifies some arguments of Pfeffer as "bullshit". Pfeffer refutes Van Maanen's attack by describing it as empty rhetoric ad personam, internally inconsistent, and above all, "an interesting intellectual sideshow" aimed at the wrong problem (Pfeffer, 1995).

¹⁶ Is Pfeffer on to something in wanting the field of OMT to be more like physics? It depends. Physics envy is the derogatory expression (e.g. Ghoshal, Van Maanen) that relates to the ambition by scientists from fields like biology and sociology (of which OMT is an applied sub-genre) to enjoy the same level of consensus and paradigmatic maturity as the 'hard science' of physics. This idea of a hierarchy of sciences stems from almost 200 years ago, and maybe deserves some refinement. As Fanelli points out, there appears to be consensus that although 'the core' research, that which fills students' textbooks, is more developed in physics than in sociology. However similar levels of disagreement exist in all fields regarding new research, or 'the frontier' (Fanelli, 2010). Then again, Fanelli proved that if measured by the relative number of positive outcomes of hypothesis tests, the frontier research of economics and business did indeed score significantly higher than physics, indicating OMT as a softer field. He concludes that a hierarchy of sciences does exist. Possible explanations are the biasing effects of relationship between the subject and object of research (experimenter effect, self-fulfilling prophecies), and the field's maturity and complexity of the studied phenomena. The latter could cause the link between theory, hypothesis and observations to be "more flexible, negotiable and open to interpretation", giving theorists "more freedom in deciding how to collect, analyze and interpret data, which increases the chances that they will produce support of the hypothesis they believe to be true" (Fanelli, 2010, p. 6). So, is Pfeffer right in wanting his field to be more like the 'hard science' of physics? First of all, not physics but space sciences are at the top of the list if measured by negative test result of hypotheses. Second and more importantly, the lower results scored by Economics and Business (as OMT is classified) are measured from a sample of articles that already explicitly applied a hypothetico-deductive method. Insofar Pfeffer wants more research in OMT to follow this method, he is wrong in expecting this would move the field up in the hierarchy. However, Fanelli mentions, the differences between social sciences and other sciences are not big enough to support the claim "that they are qualitatively different from the natural sciences and that a scientific method based on objectivity cannot be applied to them" (Fanelli, 2010, p. 5).

example' leads the reader to be critical of any objective claim by the theorist. I personally argue doubt constitutes an insight in the theorist's reflexive processes and as such may also create some mental leniency on behalf of its readers towards novel or previously unaccepted concepts. As I will discuss later, it is important for theorists to strike the right balance between novelty and continuity in new theories. For, on the one hand, a theory must be novel enough to be interesting to others theorists and stand out in the myriad of new theories struggling for attention, and on the other hand it must be recognizable as linking to familiar extant frameworks (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; McKinley et al., 1999). A second element Van Maanen discerns is what he calls dialectic reconstruction; the use of paradox and proving two logically irreconcilable opposites can be true at the same time. Paradoxes represent the organizational world as Van Maanen and Weick see it, in a continual flux. This is in contrast to the conventional academic writing, but, as Van Maanen notes, "in a world full of seemingly unsurmountable dilemma's, awards should be handed out to those who try to get past the tired either/or oppositions characteristic of formal logic" (Van Maanen, 1995b, p. 138). A last important element I would like to mention that is typical of Weick's work, is construct or conceptual ambiguity; leaving concepts or constructs central to a theory undefined, too broadly defined or defined in multiple but different ways. As such, this practice clearly breaks with the views of Bacharach (1989), Osigweh (1989), McKinley and Mone (1998), and arguably most positivistic theorists who strive for precise definitions.

Conceptual ambiguity, friend or foe?

The element of conceptual ambiguity constitutes yet another of OMT's apples of discord. Simply put, it is either embraced and revered as stimulating creativity, or problematized as championing basically untestable theories. For instance, the broad scope and ambiguity of common constructs like legitimacy or resource allows multiple interpretations, which in turn will provide necessary leeway for innovative theories. Too much conceptual ambiguity however, will cause problems of incommensurability that will eventually cause a field to fall apart (McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999; Pfeffer, 1995), or leave a theory unfalsifiable¹⁷ (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; G. F. Davis, 2010). Whether or not conceptual ambiguity is a good thing, was also debated in Organization Science as part of a more encompassing ontological debate which ensued after Astley and Zammuto's publication of their paper "Organization Science, Managers and Language Games" (Astley & Zammuto, 1992). First, adhering to the linguistic turn and Wittgenstein, they view reality as a phenomenon socially constructed through language, which "determines the epistemological constitution" of facts. This entails

¹⁷ In their article, Kacmar and Whitfield showed that testing and falsifying of previously published theories are only rarely put into practice in top journals. Only 9% (AMR) and 6% (AMJ) of citations made in journals published between 1988 and 1990 were in reference of a theory because it was tested (Kacmar & Whitfield, 2000).

that “scientists acquire knowledge not by uncovering empirical data to reveal the nature of external reality, but by being socialized into the shared paradigms of a scientific community with its shared theoretical traditions and attendant lexicons” (Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 445). Second, much in line with Astley’s earlier work, they argue that OMT and managerial practice are two separate semiautonomous, but related communities. As such they are governed by separate rules governing and constituting different ‘language games’¹⁸. In their view, a certain chasm between practice and theory is inevitable and should lower any expectations of direct application of concrete and precisely defined concepts in organizations. In addition, the distance between these language games require some level of linguistic ambiguity for concepts to be able to traverse this chasm, not as an actionable toolkit for managers, but as a symbolic Swiss army knife for day to day sense making and problem solving.

To illustrate that the linguistic turn and the growing influence of postmodern elements in OMT also created more entrenchment, Donaldson’s eloquent reply (Donaldson, 1992) to Astley and Zammuto’s article, deserves some discussion. In a style that can only be understood as pure British sarcasm, the positivistic Donaldson, like a cathedral rebuilds their ‘language game’ argument, only to have it ransacked and broken down to the ground. He frames Astley and Zammuto’s argument around their idea of social science as a concept of a Wittgensteinian language game. According to Donaldson, this is part of a broader antipositivistic movement that “stresses the empirical world as subjectively perceived and enacted rather than as brute fact, asserts the superiority of qualitative over quantitative methods, reveres paradox in both the content of theory and the formal expressions of theory, holds that scientific creativity is primarily linguistic inventiveness, sees itself as championing creativity, is counter-cultural in the sense of being ever-ready to cock a snook at the establishment and established ideas, and would also claim that practicing managers would be better aided not by plodding positivism but by taking a mind-trip” (Donaldson, 1992, p. 462). Given my previous exposition on the linguistic turn, I cannot argue that that is a bad description *prima facie* of some of the new inroads of theory building. Of course, according to Donaldson underhanded sarcastic intent, its proponents – like Weick – have seriously lost touch with real world, and floating into outer space like “cerebral astronauts in concocting language games or whatever else is their latest flight of fancy”.

Verbal jousting aside, Donaldson in his criticism of Astley and Zammuto’s view, attacks two main implications of the concept of organizational science as language games. In this, he is supported by Beyer. First, the language game approach does not offer any innovative or practical guidance to organizational actors like managers. Or as Beyer puts it, “the occasional trickle of concepts hardly seems a sufficient rationale to sustain the social legitimacy and financial support of all the faculty, Ph.D. programs and research projects in our field” (Beyer,

¹⁸ Wittgenstein’s wording of ‘language game’ or Sprachspiel is not to imply playfulness but indicate that the discourse of a certain community is subject to its specific contextual rules.

1992, p. 471). Second, the decoupling of practice and theory entailed by Astley and Zammuto's approach only provides an easy - or lazy - excuse to decouple theory from its empirical validity. According to Donaldson, Astley and Zammuto argue to "pry loose the connection between theory and data [...], and to open the way for organizational theories to be accepted as metaphors floating free of specific referents to concrete organizational features" (Donaldson, 1992, p. 461). He disparages lingual ambiguity on behalf of theorists for making concepts untestable, and on behalf of managers for making statements that only confuse ("Management by Mumbo Jumbo").

McKinley and Mone argue that construct ambiguity makes conclusive assessment between theories difficult causing incommensurability, which according to them, should be prevented. To do so, they propose a democratic dictionary of constructs¹⁹. Such consensus should counter the conceptual ambiguity as a "marshmallow factor", they state, "that makes conclusive empirical assessment of any theoretical school equivalent to punching a marshmallow" (McKinley & Mone, 1998, p. 176). Moreover, according to Pfeffer (1995) and Osigweh (1989), a lack of clear conceptual definition makes a theory difficult to be taught, extended and replicated, limiting a theory's potential impact²⁰. This is in stark contrast to Davis, who, in analyzing sociology's seminal papers from writers like Marx, Freud, and Weber, venerates ambiguity. According to Davis (M. S. Davis, 1986, p. 296), "an ambiguous theory can appeal to different – even hostile – divisions of its audience, allowing each subgroup to interpret the theory in congenial, if mutually incompatible, ways". Moreover, he considers such ambiguity and subsequent incoherence as a welcome challenge, provoking thoughts of students and teachers. It allows the latter "to fill classroom time by synthesizing [...] scattered and unrelated ideas into a coherent whole".

Clearly, the postmodern introduction of conceiving theory building as language games, revealed similar "tribal" debates and contrasts as previous decades. Subscribing to a language game approach often means a constructionist ontology, a preference for paradigmatic pluralism, favoring relevance over rigor, and using ambiguous concepts that inspire rather than clearly defined hypotheses that can be falsified. This is exemplified by a following excerpt from Mauws and Phillips (Mauws & Phillips, 1995, p. 330):

"To conclude, the concept of "language games" says nothing directly about how organizational researchers should carry out their work; it favors neither positivism nor anti-positivism. [...] It is not contrary to positivism in any direct sense: it simply points to the limitations of the game and to some problems of applying natural science models to social science. It asks organizational researchers to be more sensitive to questions of meaning and,

¹⁹ An idea very similar published by Pinder and Bourgeois (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982) 16 years earlier, to which no reference is made.

²⁰ A point arguably reminiscent of Polanyi's view on knowledge as tacit, not articulated knowledge which is much less easy to transfer than explicit knowledge.

perhaps, to be more humble [sic] about the generalizability of their knowledge. It also demands constant justification for methods of all kinds; it points to the tendency for members of a language game to set the rules of the game and then to understand those rules as natural laws.”

In ASQ’s 1995 special topic forum, Sutton and Staw kick off in somewhat similar reflexive vein²¹ in their essay on theory building called *What Theory is Not* (Sutton & Staw, 1995). So, in keeping with Osigweh’s suggestion to define a construct by describing what it is not, they avoid claiming a positive set – or “magic ideas” - on how to construct a good theory. In a knowingly ironic gesture, they do list five elements that often form building blocks (e.g. references, data, hypotheses) for a good or strong theory when put together, but by themselves – in lieu of - do not make a theory. In addition to the five ingredients, a clear dichotomy is made in that which makes up a publication on OMT; good theory building and sound theory testing. With few exceptions, they argue, theorists are seldom good at both. However, review processes (i.e. the editors and reviewers) of journals like ASQ require both, confronting theorists with “contradictory demands for both strong theory and precise measurement [that] are often satisfied only by hypocritical writing.” (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 381). Moreover, the selection process is skewed towards method and measurement, especially when a theory is at tension with what is previously accepted. Quite the opposite, if a theory is interesting enough, this pertinent imbalance between theory and method should be resolved by loosening journals’ requirements for the latter, they claim. Too much institutionalized emphasis on rigorous testing thwarts the incipience of new theories, causing theorists to succumb to using just one of those five elements in lieu of theory, or shy away from writing down anything gutsy at all. Thus, according to Sutton and Staw, building a good theory is a difficult mixture of art and science, and current practice requires high standards for both.

Reacting to Sutton and Staw, DiMaggio (1995) offers some revisions in support of the main thrust of their essay. First, without mentioning the concept as such, he notes the difficulties of incommensurability. In order to discuss what makes a good approach to theorizing, he states, one needs to take account of different ontological viewpoints of what a theory should be. After describing three views (covering-law, enlightenment, and process approaches), DiMaggio instantaneously sidesteps any ranking or demarcation issues by claiming that the best theories are hybrids and combine the best elements of those views. Unfortunately, no explanation is given as to how or why these hybrids are the best. He continues, “one reason that theory construction is so difficult to teach is that these approaches, as we have seen, are driven by different purposes and embody different values.

²¹ Sutton and Staw’s reflexive approach seems to have certain rules. When they point out some improper practices, they themselves readily admit guilt to those practices. Apparently, sinners can cast stones, but only at themselves. Although this appeals to a noble principle, one might wonder if some practices were omitted in their essay because it felt too much like finger pointing to other colleagues. An inhibition for instance, not felt by Van Maanen.

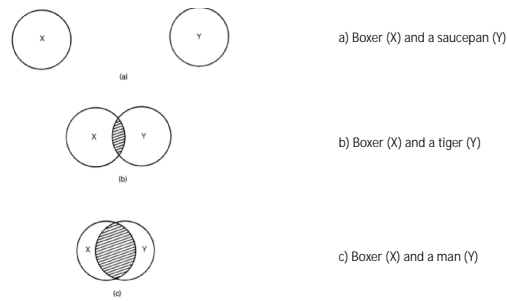
Consequently, the researcher who tries to combine them faces not a list of brightline standards, but a set of vexing choices" (DiMaggio, 1995, p. 392). DiMaggio insightfully discusses several tradeoffs (e.g. focus vs. multidimensionality, comprehensiveness vs. memorability), only to close off with sentences like "the trick is in the balance", "more art than science", and "find the point on the tightrope". Few concrete suggestions can be found by the reader, however. One required magical balance in order to construct the right hybrid theoretical strategy, is using the right amount of paradox to attract, confuse, and enlighten an audience. I will discuss the role of paradox in theory building and its relation to audience's acceptance later on.

Tropes and their band of brothers

Given the growing attention in the literature to constructivism, reflexivity, and language games, focus logically shifted towards the rhetorical and constitutive use of metaphors. The debate on the role of tropes - especially metaphors - in theory building really took off after landmark publications of Morgan on the use of metaphors in OMT (Morgan, 1980, 1983), and spanned at least three decades (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011).

Metaphor is a trope based on similarity and related to analogies, used to for giving meaning and making sense of the (social) world around us. It plays a central role in language and thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). A definition of metaphors used in OMT is given by Cornelissen et al.: "a linguistic utterance in which the combination of words is literally deviant in the sense that terms that have originally or conventionally been employed in relation to a different concept or domain are applied and connected to a target term or concept within organization theory" (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1549). Because our daily lives are so perfused by these tropes, we hardly recognize most of them. In relation to this ubiquitous and unconscious use of most metaphors, Cornelissen et al.'s definition - intentionally - contains a rather ambiguous concept. According to them, once 'convention' catches up with a metaphor, it can lose its explanatory and thought provoking character, making it a 'conventionalized' or 'dead' metaphor. Examples of this are 'organizational structure', 'management' (Cornelissen et al., 2005) or more commonly used verbs like 'comprehend' or 'grasp' (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Lakoff and Johnson (p. 5) give us a more teleological characterization of the essence of metaphor: "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another". This understanding and experiencing works through a cognitive process in which an unknown conceptual domain is mapped on a known conceptual domain (Morgan, 1980), causing a 'semantic leap' (Cornelissen, 2005). See figure 2.

Figure 2
Morgan's depiction of metaphor which requires the right amount of overlap between unknown target domain (X) and a familiar source domain (Y)



Morgan, G. (1980)

Other tropes that are often used in the context created by metaphors are metonymy, synecdoche, and irony or paradox. Metonymy and its step sister synecdoche are figures of speech in which “one entity is used to refer to another that is related to it” (metonymy), or more specifically, when a part stands for whole or vice versa (synecdoche) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 35). Their primary purpose is somewhat like a short-cut, something unknown or possibly complex is replaced by something known and concrete. Most metonyms have become part of our daily life and can be hard to identify as a trope. For instance, a project manager lamenting budget cuts, stating that “the suits from headquarters really gutted me” is using one metonym, a synecdoche, and two metaphors. The metaphors are primarily used to create understanding (being deprived of extra project money feels like being gutted) and triggers the imagination and (implicit) extension of the metaphor in that not receiving more funds must be very painful, very bloody, someone is the butcher, a knife is used, our office is a slaughterhouse, et cetera. The tropes of synecdoche and metonym are much less provocative as they only replace one thing with another, like suits with persons or the project manager with his project (“they gutted me”).

A fourth trope closely related to metaphor is irony or paradox. Paradoxes rely on the use of metaphors and cannot exist in literal language, as I will explain further on. But unlike metaphors, paradoxes primarily ‘work’ based on contrast and focusses on dissimilarities (Oswick et al., 2002) and “make the familiar strange”. In short, as tropes used on OMT literature, metaphors will be helpful in conception and explanation of theories, whereas irony and paradox will be helpful in creating ‘a jolt of interest’. Compare the following metaphor ‘the organization as a democracy’ to the more paradoxical ‘the organization as an anarchy’ (Morgan, 1983). The conflicting dissimilarity between the implicit characteristics of ‘organization’ and ‘anarchy’ create a cognitive stumble that probably makes the reader pause and take interest; a feeling of ‘huh’ or ‘hmmmm’. Given their importance in theory building, I will discuss these two tropes more in detail in the next sections.

From Metaphor to Paradox in Theories

Morgan emphasized metaphors as being more than just a literary trope or a figure of speech, merely for purposes of embellishment. Being much more than that, the (epistemological) use of metaphors “is a basic mode of symbolism, central to the way in which humans forge their experience and knowledge of the world in which they live” (Morgan, 1980, p. 610). As such, our daily lives are filled with metaphors that create understanding and help our communication. Obviously, this also applies to theorizing in that a theorist takes, makes and gives a metaphoric view of the world. The used metaphor is then used by the theorist to develop his or her framework of analysis. Although primarily based on similarity, an important characteristic of a metaphor is “a degree of difference” between the metaphor and the phenomenon it relates to. So, the map, by definition, is not really the territory, but an image similar to the ‘territory’. An image that “provides the basis for detailed scientific research based upon attempts to discover the extent to which features of the metaphor are found in the subject of inquiry”. As such, scientific research in OMT is mostly concerned with operationalizing certain metaphors like ‘the organization as a machine’, ‘the organization as an organism’, or even ‘the organization as multiple language games’. Although Morgan does not mention the extent to which the degree of difference renders a metaphor useful – besides not too much nor too little -, proponents claim it to be essential for its thought provoking and creative power.

On the other hand, opponents to the “unconstrained use of metaphors” take issue with conceptual ambiguity caused by metaphors. When used in hypotheses, metaphors’ inherent interpretativeness cause the hypothesis to be unfalsifiable (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). In response to the critiques by Pinder and Bourgeois, Morgan explains that their proposed purge of metaphors from scientific language is nonsensical (Morgan, 1983). The use of metaphors and other tropes is inevitable, as he makes clear that Pinder and Bourgeois’ argument using concepts like ‘borrowing’ and ‘organization’ is built on metaphorical foundations itself. Maybe somewhat tongue-in-cheek-ish, Morgan mentions irony as a trope related to metaphor, creating insights through contradiction and paradox. On a less superficial level, Pinder and Bourgeois’ objection regarding unfalsifiability and Morgan’s response, probably signifies the unbridgeable epistemological distance between Morgan and empiricists like Pinder and Bourgeois, or for that matter, Bacharach and Osigweh.²² They are all different representatives of knowledge created “within incommensurate paradigms and clustered around paradigmatic metaphorical lines of reasoning” (Tsoukas, 1993, p. 323). It is like food critics judging the aesthetics of a building by tasting its bricks and mortar.

²² In a rejoinder, Bourgeois and Pinder point to this fundamental difference, and explain that Morgan’s initial reaction to their critique was based on a somewhat totalitarian sentiment that there can be only one dominant paradigm. As they put it, “his [Morgan’s] position is as much an artifact of his own philosophical perspective as ours is of our philosophical assumptions” (Bourgeois & Pinder, 1983, p. 608).

Another critique argues that, instead of spurring creativity, metaphors like “language games” or “garbage can” can carry unintended and unwanted baggage²³, possibly causing “misunderstandings and distortions of the author’s intended messages” (Beyer, 1992, p. 469). Theories, especially propositions and hypotheses, should be rigorously described in the most literally sense as possible. This argument, and the opposing notion that theory building should make use of metaphor’s “constructive falsehood as a means of liberating the imagination” (Morgan, 1980, p. 612) constitute two sides of the same coin; a difference between signifier and signified, the explanans and explanandum, or the metaphor’s source domain and its applied target domain. Preferences for either one side of that coin (mostly beneficial / mostly detrimental) depend on a theorist’s personal point of view. Then again, this personal point of view is arguably the result of contextual ideological social processes. As such, “distortions” are sometimes not an unwanted inherent risk of metaphors, but an intended consequence. Even the type of metaphor used in theory building, through socialization processes, reflect a theorist’s context at large, and is typically value-laden (Tsoukas, 1991a). As Tinker (Tinker, 1986, p. 368) states: “the generation of metaphor is not an innocent quest of random discovery, but is a purposeful and continual renewing of part of society’s ideological apparatus”. Again, the assessment of the use of metaphors in theory building is not an easy task of weighing the pros and cons.

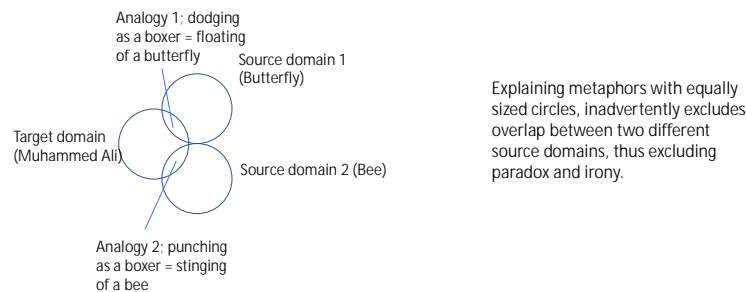
A last and subtler criticism to Morgan’s suggestion for unbridled use of metaphors in theory building appears to come from within his paradigmatic family. Oswick et al. argue that metaphors create effect primarily based on similarity between the source domain and the target domain, thus making the unfamiliar familiar. Because of this relating to what is already familiar, it admittedly enhances understanding and learning, but at the expense of generating other, new ways of thinking. For example, if we like an organization to a psychic prison, no more attributes or meanings than we already know about psychic prisons are mapped on organizations. So, metaphors “tend to promote analytical closure”; well-suited for explanation, less so for creativity (Oswick et al., 2002, p. 298). I tend to agree, but based on different grounds. Morgan uses a Venn-diagram in explaining the use of metaphors (Morgan, 1980, 2006) to indicate the importance of similarity (circles overlapping) and dissimilarity (not overlapping). These circles, in a way, constitute a metaphor themselves; according to Morgan, a metaphor is like two equally sized circles partially overlapping. See Figure 2.

Although simple and elegant, I argue this leaves some room for improvement. First, Morgan does not discuss or present three or more circles, what would provide a possibility to generate insights through the use of two or more source domains that refer to one target domain. Second, Morgan presents two equally sized circles. If we would add a third, equally sized, circle, we would immediately restrict ourselves based on the geometry of circles.

²³ Again, there is some unintended irony in the fact that Beyer makes her case using a somewhat unnecessary metaphor like ‘baggage’.

Consider the following well known example of a boxer who “floats like a butterfly, and stings like a bee”. Two different attributes (dodging and punching) of the boxer (target domain) are implicitly analogously indicated by two different source domains (butterfly and bee). What adds to the interestingness of this poetic description is the fact that the both butterfly and bee are common (and to a certain extent literary) animals, but their salient attributes appear oppositional, thus potentially paradoxical. So, the salient features of the bee and butterfly should not overlap between them, nor within the target domain. But at the same time, because of their oppositional character, the two source domains must partially overlap themselves otherwise sharing attributes (both bee and butterfly share many characteristics as garden-variety animals). This metaphoric structure would not be possible in Venn-diagram of three equally sized circles. See figure 3 in which the two circles representing source domains cannot overlap outside of the target domain, without overlapping within the target domain.

Figure 3
Mohammed Ali, floats like a butterfly, and stings like a bee. Morgan's Venn diagram falls short.

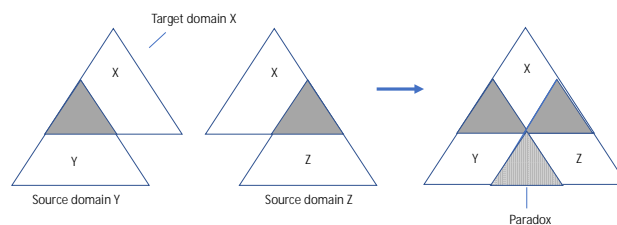


To visualize the inherent paradox – and wittiness - of Mohammed Ali’s ‘epigram’, there must be some overlap between the source domains, situated outside of the target domain; they share a certain number of traits (flying insects found in our backyards, common in our everyday language) besides the most salient (floating and stinging), which they separately share with the target domain (Muhammed Ali). Without a mutual overlap, a combination of two or more source domains render rather uninteresting results. Consider a boxer who states “I dance like ballerina, and hit like a hammer”. Although this metaphorical construct would fit the Venn-diagram, I doubt it would have made headlines. As such, Morgan’s visual metaphor of the metaphor as overlapping circles indeed restricts rather than opens up certain possibilities.

If Morgan would have used equally sized triangles, the possible overlap between two source domains would have been much more distinct. Furthermore, this conceptually locates irony and paradox outside of the target domain, see figure 4. This makes more sense, given that a

boxer who ducks and punches (dark grey areas) is not something paradoxical, but one who is delicate like a butterfly and dangerous like a bee (light gray area) is. A more literal description of the signified or explanandum (in this case, dodging and punching) more or less pushes the location of paradox or irony outside of the target domain, where the figurative is more important than the literal (in this case, delicate and dangerous). This implicates that paradoxes, which I will discuss elsewhere, mostly exist in figurative, non-literal environments where they can thrive in the shades, away from scorching brightness of the literal lights of empirical definitions hunting them. Indeed, paradoxes are a lot easier to see than to observe.

Figure 4
Triangles enable two different source domains to overlap, indicating the locus of paradox is outside the target domain.



Oswick et al. argue that for generation of new knowledge, it is better to rely on tropes similar to metaphor, but that are based on dissimilarity instead of similarity, and operate in the “cognitive discomfort zone”. More than metaphors, the use of irony and paradox for instance better stimulates the generation of new knowledge. Regarding theory building, irony and paradox “provide[s] a means of collapsing false binary oppositions by revealing common patterns between, and mutually implicated aspects within, supposedly diametrically opposed domains” (Oswick et al., 2002, p. 296). Irony and paradox often challenge conventional wisdom by putting the recipients on the wrong foot and confronting them with their own heuristic biases, and sometimes the ease with which they are seduced into accepting what is presented prima facie. This anomaly will create sudden interest and maybe warrant the reader to pause, a reader to look up from his material, and stimulate reflexivity. Oswick et al. note that irony – which they treat similarly to paradox – “implies that you might think that A is like B, but don’t be fooled; once you explore it in more detail, you will find that is more complex than that” (Oswick et al., 2002, p. 299). Here of course, Oswick et al.’s caveat “don’t be fooled” has the most impact after it is too late. A reflexive audience does not know it was fooled, until after it was warned not to be. As such, these tropes are well suited to address common but arguably false dichotomies by “collapsing of such antithetical domains” (Oswick et al., 2002, p. 300). This is also indicated by the light grey triangle in figure 4. Tropes like paradox and irony require metaphors (boxer like a bee, and boxer like a butterfly) that have conceivably overlapping source domains (e.g. flying insects, found in gardens during summer), while this collapsing is unexpected given the

salient features (stinging, floating) that are first juxtaposed in the mapping the target domain.

Metaphors in theories provide an entry and - as is my point – a sine qua non for paradox and irony. I will discuss the use of paradox in theory building more in detail in a different section of my paper. Suffice to state here that theories that converge or integrate previously antithetical schools of thought (either/or), are prone to the synthesizing use of paradox (either/and) in presenting their arguments. Some examples are control vis-à-vis flexibility, integration vis-à-vis differentiation, and of course exploration vis-à-vis exploitation.

In summarizing, by the end of the last century, the field of OMT was in great turmoil. Questioning the field's practical relevance exposed some major fault lines and warring factions. Debates regarding the best way to deal with this disconnect between theory and practice had now spurred (meta-)debates on whether this chasm even posed a problem, or whether debates were helping anyone in moving forward in the first place. By now, authors in the 1990's had increasingly brought a postmodern flavor to the discourse on theory building. In this decade, an "ontological/epistemological leap had happened", and the field of OMT was "experiencing the postmodern condition" (Calás & Smircich, 1999, p. 652). No longer only positivistic theories built around a cause-and-effect relation between independent variables and dependent variables are deemed legitimate. Qualitative, interpretative theories have now successfully challenged their dominance. What constitutes the new postmodern turn however, is how these warring factions co-exist and how they are increasingly concerned with reflexivity (Calás & Smircich, 1999). The way the ontological hatchets are buried means that paradigms are considered incommensurate, and they should not be measured against each other in order to establish which paradigm or approach holds the strongest claim to the 'truth'.

Moreover, a certain level of conceptual ambiguity or openness of theories that serve as 'a big tent' is considered to be beneficial to their impact by most authors (e.g. M.S. Davis, Astley, Ghoshal, Weick, Van Maanen, Daft). The overwhelming and widespread use of unfalsifiable theories seems to support this claim. Many well-known theories or concepts in OMT have this conceptual openness in common: Kuhn's concept of paradigm²⁴, Lawrence and Lorsch's differentiation and integration (Daft, 1983), Weick's work on loosely coupled systems (Astley, 1984), DiMaggio and Powell's New Institutional Theory (G. F. Davis, 2010), or Hannan and Freeman's population ecology in organizations (McKinley & Mone, 1998) to name some. Because these theories are effectively unfalsifiable, it is hard to contend that their success can be attributed purely to scientific rigor or validity. Moreover, the explicit use in those theories of metaphors as open concepts is argued to support their acceptance and

²⁴ The first edition of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was counted to have "not less than twenty-one different senses" in which the concept of paradigm was used (Astley & Zammuto, 1992).

to stimulate new insights, welcoming a growing number of 'tribesmen' under their 'big tent'. More eloquently put by Van Maanen (Van Maanen, 1995b, p. 134):

"Theory is a matter of words, not worlds; of maps, not territories; of representations, not realities. As much as we might like to believe that hard fact and cold logic will support our claims and carry the day, there is no escape from rhetoric: from the informal, hidden arguments carried in texts, to the figures of speech, the metaphors, the tropes and the appeals to good sense or tradition or authority made by writers to support their claims."

Again, the relevance of the postmodern turn to theory building cannot be understated. Whether advocated, opposed or ignored, postmodern seeds of self-doubt have rooted in OMT's discourse on theory building. It is as if "some of us have been tourists in the land of postmodernism and may not wish to settle there permanently, but 'we' have been 'effected' – changed – by the meeting" (Calás & Smircich, 1999, p. 665). Shifting the focus to reflexivity indeed helped conceptualizing theory building as a socially embedded and constitutive process. Special attention needs to be paid to (written) language as materialization of that process. Thus, since the 1989 AMR issue, the idea that theory building also deserves a more linguistic approach appears to have taken a definitive hold and the use of metaphors in particular is attracting serious attention.

The 2000's – Sediments and Unsettled Dust

Again, one of AMR's periodical special topic forum proves as a starting point for reflecting on the recent developments and status quo in theory building. In its introduction, Suddaby et al. (Suddaby et al., 2011) reiterate the continuing 'divorce' between management theories and the complexities of practice. They summarize several reasons for this, extracted from manuscripts submitted after their call for papers on new theories of organization.

One of the reasons is the institutionalized conservatism in OMS. Established theories enjoy protection through the status of a "sacred canon" (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 240), creating a hegemony of the "invisible college" (Marsden, 1993, p. 101). New theories either build on such theories or resist them. Paradoxically, both theorizing approaches of evolution of differentiation reinforce the status of the orthodoxies. In attacking conservatism, theorists "cannot help but give legitimacy and visibility to the object of our critique" (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 240). In addition, Suddaby et al. point to the institutionalized practices related to publishing a theory. The peer-reviewed publication as part of process of theory building has received lots of attention recently, revealing its highly political nature. "In fact, it seems virtually self-evident that, [...] what gets published is one of the most political processes in which most of today's academics will ever become involved" (Gabriel, 2010, p. 261).

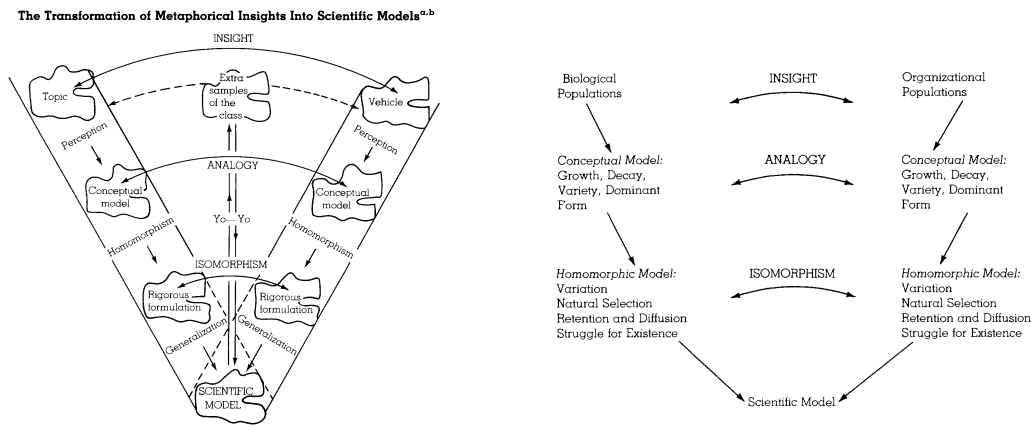
A second reason for the growing chasm is theories' failure "to capture the rich manifestation of organizations" (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 236). More specifically, OMT is in need of more theories addressing management's struggles with organizational tensions, contradictions, and paradox, caused by an ever more dynamic environment. Theories like contingency theory, institutional theory, and organizational ambidexterity theory attempt to do this. Smith and Lewis (Smith & Lewis, 2011) provide an integrated paradox theory merging theories that address organizational complexity of these tensions and paradoxes. I will discuss this later on. In addressing the first reason – the field's inherent conservatism, and especially the process in which theories are conceived through the more creative use of metaphors, but then presented in journals in a more formalized and restrained way - Boxenbaum and Rouleau (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011) introduce the use of epistemic scripts. These scripts, they argue, are applied to a theory's building blocks like metaphors, in conceiving and presenting a theory. In doing so, they build on literature on the use of metaphors, that is still mushrooming after its concept was introduced during the end of the last century. Before discussing papers addressing the two reasons mentioned by Suddaby et al., I will start here with presenting the status quo regarding the use of metaphors in theory building.

Metaphors, unwavering and battle-tested

The first decade after Morgan's work on the use of metaphors mostly saw debate about whether or not such kind of tropes should even play role in theories and theory building²⁵. Ten years later, 'surviving' critique, metaphor's ubiquity and "quintessential role" in OMT gained acceptance, and the debate became focused on underlying processes of appropriation of metaphors – and tropes related to metaphors - by theorists (Cornelissen, 2005). Now, since Morgan's seminal publications, the debates are not about if but about how metaphors help in conceiving and presenting a theory.

One process model is proposed by Tsoukas (Tsoukas, 1991b, 1993) who proposes a 'third way' between Morgan and Pinder and Bourgeois by demonstrating that metaphorical and more literal language can be conceived as governing different stages in a process of theory building. On a more abstract level, metaphors serve to invoke images and insights that are crucially "constitutive of, and prescriptive in relation to, the social phenomena they are connected with", the heuristic phase. In this model, at the deeper level, "literal redescription of social phenomena tend to be [...] more testable, accounting for the mechanisms that are really responsible for any experienced events" (Tsoukas, 1991a, p. 582). These "rigorous formulations" enable the last step in conjoining the target domain and the source domain into a scientific model. See figure 5.

Figure 5
Tsoukas' Transformation model, applied to the Population Ecology Perspective



^a The topic is the object/phenomenon under study of which something is being asserted. The vehicle is the term metaphorically used to throw light on the topic. For example, "organizations (topic) are like organisms (vehicle)."

^b From "The Viable System Model: Its Provenance, Development, Methodology and Pathology by S. Beer, 1984, *Journal of Operational Research Society*, 35(1), p. 9. Copyright 1984 by the *Journal of Operational Research Society*. Adapted by permission.

Tsoukas, 1991b

Cornelissen suggests an alternative view of the use and working of metaphors (Cornelissen,

²⁵ By now, the reader should recognize the metaphorical potential of one of this writing's main character; theory 'building'.

2005, 2006; Cornelissen et al., 2005). His approach breaks with what he calls the 'comparison model' proposed by Osrick et al., and Tsoukas. In his view, metaphors do not just link together prior existing common features of conceptual domains, but they are constitutive of those features. According to Cornelissen, "the identification of shared properties cannot play a primary role in an account of metaphor, since many metaphors require some form of interpretation before any shared qualities can be identified, and other metaphors seem incompletely understood even after the identification of shared qualities" (Cornelissen, 2006, p. 486). As such "metaphor involves the conjunction of whole semantic domains in which a correspondence between terms or concepts is constructed, rather than deciphered, and the resulting image and meaning is creative, with the features of importance being emergent" (Cornelissen, 2005, p. 751). In what he calls the domains-interaction model, metaphors are comprehended in three consecutive stages. This multistep approach hinges on the assumption of a "distinction between 'root' or 'second-order' metaphorical schemata as schools of thought that filter and structure a researcher's perceptions of the subject of study (e.g. 'social phenomena as information processing systems') which then pre-structure and give rise to more specific 'first-order' metaphorical concepts (e.g. 'organizational memory') with the latter serving as more concrete frameworks for scholarship and analysis" (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1548). Thus, in the first stage, such a generic 'root metaphor' or 'second-order' structure is developed by mapping correspondences between the target domain and the source domain. In the second stage, instance-specific information is taken from both domains and blended together ('first-order concepts') and elaborated on. In the third stage, these blends in an interactive process create new meaning "that is not simply a composition of meanings that can be found in either the target or source concepts" (Cornelissen, 2005, p. 758).

The domains-interaction model also triggered some debate. While Cornelissen criticizes the use of metaphors purely based on mapping similarities, Osrick and Jones question the extent in which the first stage of his model – development of a generic structure after a metaphor is encountered – isn't "employing the very same process of comparison of which he is so dismissive?" (Osrick & Jones, 2006, p. 483). Moreover, they challenge the starting point of Cornelissen's process stages, which is when one "encounters" a metaphor. Osrick and Jones disagree that metaphors "just appear", like a *deus ex machina*. To them a metaphor "is selected on the basis of a judgement about the degree of congruence or fit with the target domain" (2006, p.484). Cornelissen's reply appears to be two-fold (Cornelissen, 2006). He parries the first charge by stating that similarity of features between target and source domain can only play a partial role, namely in the first stage of mapping and comparing both structures. Then again, mere similarities, or shared features, in its own cannot form the starting point of a metaphor. How, Cornelissen wonders, can these qualities "be considered common until after the metaphorical work has already been accomplished" (2006, p. 486).

There appears to be an endogeneity discussion between the authors surrounding this argument about “what comes first”. Without wanting to dismiss it as another paradoxical Baron Von Munchhausen’s trick²⁶, this discussion bears some markings of the continual ontological strife, discussed previously. In this case: are the similarities already there, and are they merely ‘uncovered’ by linking two conceptual domains, or does linking the two domains constitute the similarity, which did not exist previously? Is it possible to conceive a metaphor without first mapping some similarities? Or are similarities a precursor and make the metaphor immanent?

Seen in this light, Oswick et al – although fully subscribing the importance of the role of language, related to constructionism - take an objectivist ‘micro-ontological’ stance regarding features or characteristics of conceptual domains. To them, arguably, a conceptual domain’s features are ‘out there’ and known, waiting for a creative theorist to tie them together. Contrastingly, Cornelissen appears to take a more hermeneutic approach, when he states that metaphors require interpretation before features can be identified as common. In line with how most of the raging paradigmatic disputes are settled, Oswick and Jones and Cornelissen then propose a pluralist solution; “we present a case for treating correspondence and comparison approaches as complementary rather than competing” (Oswick & Jones, 2006, p. 483).

The second issue raised by Oswick and Jones is met with a subsequent publication in which that very “basis of judgement” for selection is empirically analyzed (Cornelissen et al., 2005). Taking inventory on second-order root metaphors and first-order or conceptual metaphors used in the top journals of management during a ten-year period (1993-2003)²⁷, Cornelissen et al empirically identify the heuristics, or judgement rules, applied by theorists in assessing a metaphor “as fitting and as potentially revelatory of the organizational subject under investigation” (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1550). These heuristics presumably play a part in the first stage of a theorist conceptualizing a theory, applying to Astley’s and Weick’s ‘imagination’ and thought trials, or Tsoukas’ process of insight and analogy. Two main rules governing the selection of metaphors in theory building are presented by the author. First, relational metaphors are preferred over attributive metaphors, meaning that metaphors that entail a certain action or dynamic are more often used than metaphors that are based on mere appearance commonalities. A second rule states that it is preferred in metaphors to conjoin concepts from perceived distant domains. This rule reiterates the importance of the element of surprise, previously mentioned in different occasions regarding paradox, irony and interestingness in general (M. S. Davis, 1971; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; McKinley et

²⁶ In one of the famous incredible stories, Baron Von Munchhausen pulls himself and his horse out of a swamp by their own hair.

²⁷ The top five of root metaphors consisting – in order of frequency counts - of ‘animate being’, ‘machine’, ‘flow-change’, ‘evolution’, and ‘architecture’.

al., 1999b; Oswick et al., 2002; Van Maanen, 1995b; Weick, 1989). According to Cornelissen et al. a certain shock helps an audience to create new insights, and “this happens as the semantic anomaly which is evident in the tension or surprise that is triggered when distant domains are related needs to be overcome by the organizational researcher and nudges us into noting something that was not there before” (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1567).

Some things can be said about these heuristics. For instance, Cornelissen et al. explicitly place the theorist in a splendidly isolated role of judge and executioner with regard to what metaphor to deploy. Although they consider the importance of a metaphor’s resonance and its subsequent acceptance within the scientific community, they pay little attention to any contextual sociological or political factors, suggesting further research into the possible extent these factors influence or mediate some of the identified heuristics (Barley & Kunda, 1992b; DiMaggio, 1995; Gabriel, 2010).

As to the impact – the extent in which conceptual insights are generated and in which a theory is explained- a certain chosen metaphor may have, the second heuristic rule applied by a theorist in considering a metaphor, does not hold (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008). Their survey amongst OMT scholars revealed two factors of importance; comprehensibility and overlap with a target domain. These were found to correlate positively with a metaphor’s perceived generative and explicatory power. Unlike in selecting metaphors, i.e. the heuristic phase, the perceived distance between target domain and source domain does not improve its impact. Apparently, the element of metaphorical surprise (“the organization as soap bubble”) will not automatically “shock us into a novel perspective” (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008, p. 369).

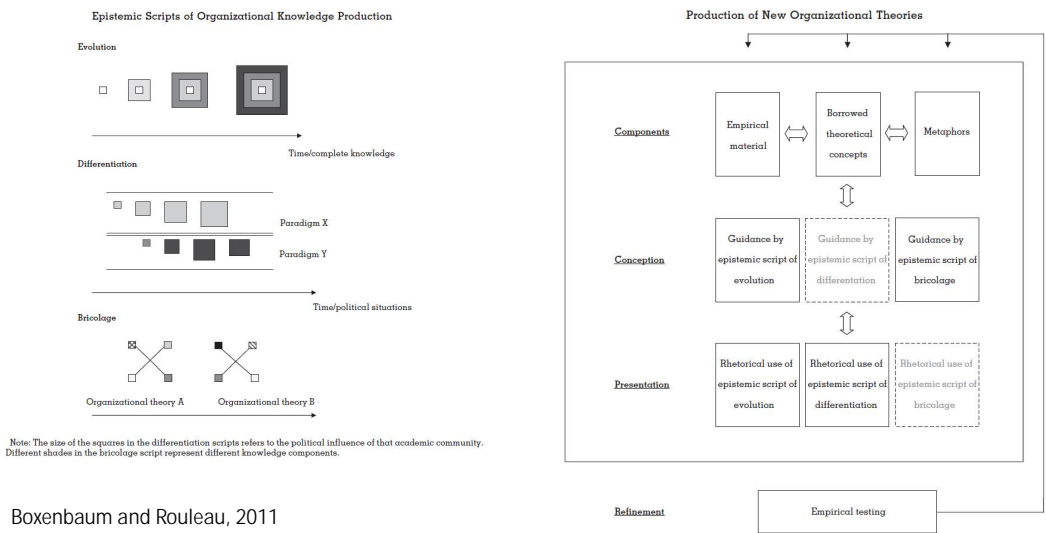
Based on these findings, metaphors can be said to play a subtly different role during different phases of theory building, and play a different role in helping either the theorist or his or her audience. This ‘subtleness’ is represented by a metaphor’s- and for that matter, a theory’s (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; McKinley et al., 1999b; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) - balance between novelty and familiarity. This elusive balance apparently shifts from novelty in the phase of conception – or the heuristic phase – more towards familiarity during the presentation in journals. DiMaggio (1995) already mentioned the importance of striking a good balance earlier (“find the point on the tightrope”), but an explanation for the shift in balance between conception and presentation as purported by Cornelissen and Kafouros, is presented in one of the contributions of AMR’s special topic forum.

[Scripted conservatism of the invisible college](#)

In this contribution, Boxenbaum and Rouleau argue that certain cognitive templates or “epistemic scripts” guide the process of theory building (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011).

These scripts “serve a normative function” representing “the taken for granted assumptions about the nature and emergence of new theories” (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011, p. 273). The discernable scripts are Evolution, Differentiation and Bricolage (figure 6). The evolution script fits best in the still dominant hypothetico-deductive approach with its modernist grand narrative of “advancing the frontier of objective science” (p. 279). This script of trial and error guides theorists to search for incremental improvements of an existing theory, an approach also known as “gap-spotting” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). In presenting a new theory, this script helps in gaining legitimacy by positioning new knowledge as being continuous to existing knowledge, only slightly improved. Differentiation is based more on postmodern premises of incommensurability and pluralism, and entails a more inductive approach. In the conception phase, mainly governed by heuristics and imagination as discussed earlier, this script “encourages theorists to set aside their assumptions” as to enable the “emergence of new knowledge” (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011, p. 280). In presenting new knowledge, this script enables theorists to emphasize its novelty by contrasting it to existing knowledge, and convinces “readers that their new knowledge product cannot be contained within the current stock of organizational knowledge and that therefore it qualifies as a new theory” (p. 280). In the third script described by Boxenbaum and Rouleau, called bricolage, theorists cognitively improvise to create new knowledge, or as a “handyperson who” [...] “repairs or remodels existing theories by combining various theoretical concepts, ideas and observations at his or her immediate disposal” (p. 281).

Figure 6
Epistemic scripts and their role in the production (conception and presentation) of knowledge products



Boxenbaum and Rouleau demonstrate that within the five foundational texts on organizational institutionalism, the script of bricolage was extensively used in creatively

(re)combining different familiar metaphors in the conception phase²⁸. However, during the presentation phase, the theorists exchange creativity for academic legitimacy in order to gain acceptance by the 'invisible college'. The authors argue that "the assembly of metaphors is hidden [...] behind more legitimate scripts of knowledge production, which scholars apply to increase the recognition of their knowledge product as a new organizational theory" (p. 290).

So, while careful examination of the used combinations of metaphors reveals the epistemic script of bricolage, the rhetorical use of the scripts of evolution and differentiation best informs the presentation. As a body of work, but also as individual papers, these five foundational texts display a certain balance in which those two latter scripts help signal continuity or familiarity on the one hand, and novelty, surprise or interestingness on the other. This search for right balance, to have new knowledge widely accepted and also to be noticed within the academic community (or language game), reiterates some arguments from seminal articles from previous decades (McKinley et al., 1999b) Also, some of the earliest papers on interestingness, like the before mentioned sociological work of Davis (M. S. Davis, 1971) and the empirical insights of Miner (Miner, 1984) on what is considered interesting and why, maintained their saliency. I will present a brief discussion how their arguments have carried their weight into the new millennium.

Quite interesting, really...

"It has long been thought that a theorist is considered great because his theories are true, but this is false. A theorist is considered great, not because his theories are true, but because they are interesting." (M. S. Davis, 1971, p. 309).

Davis (M. S. Davis, 1971) long ago asserted that interesting new propositions are always "the negation of an accepted one", and "involves the radical distinction between seeming and being, between the subject of phenomenology and the subject of ontology (p. 313). It requires a textual mixture of elements relating to what the audience think it knows, and provocative injections of narratives denying some of those elements, catching its audience off guard, and replacing previous certainties with new 'truths'. Shepherd and Suddaby describe this as "skillfully weaving together prior knowledge and emerging knowledge" (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016, p. 7). The theorist that falters at this balancing act is at risk of creating a theory that - although maybe valid and plausible – is perceived as either too obvious or too absurd.

²⁸ Regarding metaphors that appeared ten times or more, they counted over 1000 instances in which such metaphors were used, from almost thirty distinct root metaphors, adding up to at least nine different source domains, appearing in less than 90 pages of the five texts combined.

More in detail, Davis (1971) offers a lexicon of different categories of logical propositions that help create interesting dialectical tensions in theory building. Given the nature of the case of this thesis, organizational ambidexterity and its tensions between exploration and exploitation²⁹ - on which I will elaborate further on in this writing - , some of his categories are particularly relevant. First, there is the category he calls Co-existence; what seem to be phenomena which cannot exist together, are in reality phenomena which can exist together. Examples of these can be found in elliptical aphorisms or oxymorons like 'the lonely crowd', 'anarchy as form of organization', 'poverty in the midst of plenty', 'deafening silence', or 'when peace broke out'. Such an unnatural juxtaposition immediately "jolts the interest". A second and somewhat related category is the Opposition. These propositions describe what seem to be opposite phenomena, are in reality similar (nearly identical) phenomena. A thought-provoking 'marriage is legalized prostitution' is more extreme variant. Similar, but less extreme, is Monty Python's *Life of Brian* in which a crowd simultaneously chants 'we are all individuals', or Schumpeter's 'creative destruction'.

Echoing the work of Davis, the AMJ decided to pay more attention to research being interesting, in addition to importance of the research question and validity of the research's conclusions (Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006). According to them, interestingness is important for three reasons. First, it enlarges the influence of a publication or theory on other theorists. Second, interesting research articles "are more likely to induce positive affect and are also more likely to be read, understood, and remembered" (p.10). And third, interesting research helps attract doctoral students. Bartunek et al. surveyed AMJ's editorial board and found that what makes theoretically based research interesting, as purported by Davis, also applies to empirical research like those mostly published in AMJ³⁰. It subsequently revised its mission statement accordingly and recruited additional board members with a track record regarding producing interesting research. One of those new board members was Stephen Barley, whose papers in *ASQ* championed the board's survey on interesting research. In a reply that is modest as it is eloquent, he explicitly refrains from any prescriptive suggestions for other theorists to produce interesting papers: "although a sufficient handful of people apparently think that I have written interesting papers, there is no way I can explain how I might have done what they believe I did, because I don't understand it myself" (Barley, 2006, p. 16). He does mention however what he himself finds interesting; whenever a paper's subject, method or theory is strikingly different, "like scarlet begonias in a sea of grey". Then again, in line with Davis' arguments, Barley remarks that too much difference will cause a theory to be more likely called "flaky or wrongheaded than interesting".

²⁹ Shepherd and Suddaby argue that the core construct, i.e. a theory's 'character' should be aptly named. A completely new term can be made or bricolaged (e.g. Weick's 'sensemaking'). Admittedly, ambidexterity has a much better ring to it than something like 'exploitation'.

³⁰ Another outlet of the Academy, the *Academy of Management Review*, is said to publish mostly theories instead of findings. The former being of apparent less interest to the audience of reporters

Organizational and Management Theories' Paradox, and other Loops around a Spool

As discussed earlier in this paper, metaphors can be the carriers of interest through Davis' dialectical tension par excellence. Textual propositions in the forms of Co-existence or Opposition will often arouse interest when conceived like a paradox, as most of the mentioned examples from Davis' lexicon indicate. These paradoxes are products of communication, discursively constructed (Fairhurst, Cooren, & Cahill, 2002). Moreover, I have argued that metaphors are a necessary condition for paradoxes to be talked or written into being. In a more empirical definition, paradoxes are "contradictions that persist over time, impose and reflect back on each other, and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations because their continuity creates situations in which options appear mutually exclusive, making choices among them difficult" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 72).

The use of paradox in OMT has attracted a lot of research recently and is even described as paradigmatic. Inclusive reviews on the subject are by Putnam et al. (Putnam et al., 2016), and Lewis (Lewis, 2000). Most studies conceive paradox in the organization, or more specifically in the communication of organizational actors like management. An increase in these organizational paradoxes is stated by Suddaby et al. (2011) to be partly responsible for the chasm between OMT's practice and theory. Examples of the practical struggles are the rhetorics used by managers of science organizations required to meet the contradictory objectives of scientific excellence and commercial impact (Bednarek et al., 2016), or organizational incumbents who deal with contradictory effects of downsizing strategies (Fairhurst et al., 2002). Another form of paradox is presented in the literature on organizational ambidexterity. This organizational trait or skill helps in overcoming the "success paradox" of simultaneously pursuing incremental and discontinuous innovation (Tushman & O Reilly, 1996).

Interestingly, paradox is also used in describing an approach to dualities or contradictions in theories on organizations. Apparently, OMT actually does - at least partially - "capture the rich manifestation of organizations" (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 236) and their contradictions, insofar multiple valid but contradictory theories of the same phenomenon co-exist. A rich manifestation of theories of organizations also creates some paradoxical struggles. To reiterate Poole and Van de Ven; paradoxes are inevitable between concurring theories and should be embraced by theorists (Poole & van de Ven, 1989). So, not only organizational actors are confronted with discursively constructed contradictions, but also academic actors in theorizing about those organizational actors.

The concept of paradox appears to travel well between organizational theories and meta-theories on organizational theories. Arguably, this can be explained in part by paradox'

conceptual ambiguity (Putnam et al., 2016). Many definitions, interpretations and perspectives, make it a slow-moving bandwagon, easy to jump on. A bibliographic research into the provenance of the concept of paradox, and whether it travelled from theory to meta-theory or the other way around is beyond the scope of this paper. However, more of these 'strange loops'³¹ between the subject and object of research on theory building can be discerned. If we recall Boxenbaum and Rouleau's three scripts that guide theory building, it is easy to see that metaphors like 'differentiation' and 'evolution' are borrowed from Hannan and Freeman's population ecology, who in turn imported the concepts from biology. The third script is referred to as 'bricolage' (the French word and metaphor for DIY), a much lesser known metaphor.

Boxenbaum and Rouleau appear to be fully aware of this self-referentialism, stating that "our choice of illustrative example is not neutral". Their reflexive discussion implies that in their view, a (meta-) theory is indeed a product of a theorist's imagination, in which he or she reveals the colors of his or her academic tribe. As Boxenbaum and Rouleau acknowledge, their view on "academic knowledge production as an institutionalized activity alludes to our institutionalist inclinations, while our position regarding bricolage [...] reflects our practice-oriented view" (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011, p. 293). As I mentioned earlier, ontological and paradigmatic fault lines between groups of theorists ('tribes') are often transposed onto meta-standpoints. Interestingly, in this case, this transposition also seems to apply to whole theoretical underpinnings (theories) and their related metaphors.

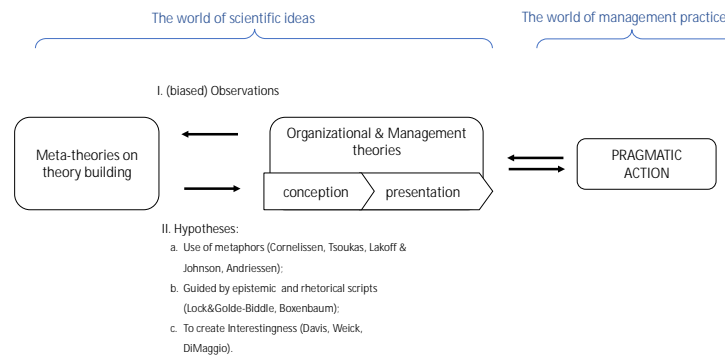
³¹ The notion of 'strange loops' is borrowed from Hofstadter's book similarities between continuous self-referentialism between mathematics (Gödel), art (Escher), and music (Bach) (Hofstadter, 2000).

Conclusion

Where does this leave the current state of affairs regarding theory building? The last decade-and-a-half, the field of OMT underwent debates that proved perennial, it saw debates move to the background, and it witnessed the incipience of some new debates. First of all, the field's existential self-doubt regarding the practical use of its theories continues to fuel the examination of theories and the processes by which they are produced. There appears to be some irony in how this gap between theory and practice still causes proponents of certain schools of thought to stake their claim fervently, creating ever deeper trenches. Although a certain level of pluralism characterizes the field, inherent conservatism creates some institutionalized barriers that need to be addressed by successful theory building, now more than ever. This explicit contextual process approach in which the creative conception of a theory is decoupled from the socialized presentation, seamlessly fits within the language game proposition. Second, the debates on the necessity of metaphors seem to have subsided, in favor of in-depth analyses into their creative and communicative power. These analyses also reveal a rhetorical role of metaphors and related tropes in creating interest through their simultaneous conveyance of familiarity and novelty. Relatively new is the mushrooming research on the use of paradoxes in OMT, which I present as an extension of the debates on metaphors. The concept of paradox, being relatively 'open' or ambiguous (Lewis, 2000; Putnam et al., 2016) also proves an apt and widely used vehicle for creating interest in the presentation phase. The importance of a theory being interesting, now widely acknowledged as the special topic forum of AMJ shows, reiterates much older publications of Davis on interestingness (M. S. Davis, 1971) and ambiguity (M. S. Davis, 1986) as helpful traits in presenting theories that are considered impactful by their academic audiences.

Extensive analysis of the meta-theory on theory building suggests elements like metaphors and paradox and their inherent conceptual ambiguity take a prominent place in the two phases of theory building. Their primary goal in the second phase – presentation – appears to be the creation of interest by signaling both adherence and inconsistency to extant, familiar theoretical knowledge (see figure 7, under II).

Figure 7
The world of scientific ideas and management practice; decomposed, and detailed.



If we look closer at Organizational & Management theories, their publicized texts should reveal the metaphors and the related epistemological scripts that are used. Boxenbaum and Rouleau propose that a decoupling of both phases of theory building reveal the different scripts used during these phases (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). Regarding the presentation phase, two scripts are more or less institutionalized; differentiation and evolution. If the insights provided by Weick and Davis on the aim of grabbing the audience’s attention by simultaneously building on and breaking with preexisting knowledge, an extension to Boxenbaum and Rouleau’s conceptual model can be made. It is my proposition that in the second phase, the trope of irony or paradox plays an important part. Opposite to metaphor, the working of irony or paradox is based on dissimilarity. As such, paradox is inherently fitting to “jolt the interest” by confronting parts of a theory that are familiar with parts that are not. Almost by definition, this trope will be guided by the epistemic script of differentiation. Where Boxenbaum and Rouleau leave open the specific categories of rhetoric practices that support differentiation and paradox, I propose Davis’ Opposition and Co-existence to fill in the blanks. Figure 7A visualizes this more detailed elaboration and shows the essential framework of my argument.

Research questions and hypotheses

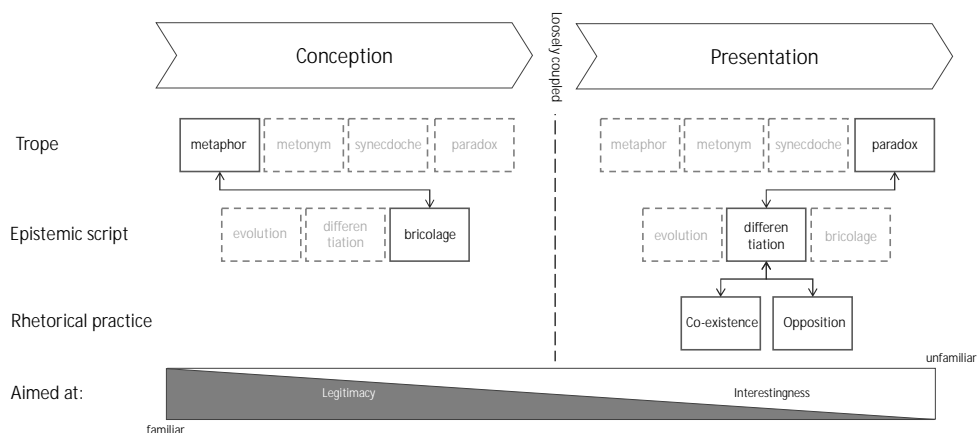
Considering organizational ambidexterity an impactful and successful theory in the field of OMT, a selection of foundational texts that constitute the theory can serve as a case to study the previously described relations. Such an analysis should informatively answer my research question:

To what extent do the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity comply with the rhetorical and epistemic scripts, hypothesized in the literature on theory building?

Entailing three more precise inquiries, the research question above can be divided into sub-questions:

1. Regarding the conception, what can we state about the occurrence of the epistemic script of bricolage based on the metaphors used in the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity? Figure 7A, left-hand side.
2. Regarding the presentation, is there a differentiated occurrence of epistemic scripts used, in that older publications rely more on differentiation, and newer publications on evolution?
- 2a. Regarding the presentation, what can we state about the occurrence of the epistemic script of differentiation constructed through Opposition and Co-existence, with regard to paradox? Figure 7A, right-hand side.

Figure 7A
OMT: an integrative model for theory building in; during two loosely coupled phases different tropes, scripts and practices are used to achieve the right balance



Based on Davis, Weick, Oswick et al., Boxenbaum & Rouleau

By answering these questions, I will follow up on Boxenbaum and Rouleau's research and apply their model regarding the use of epistemic scripts on metaphors and paradox during the conception phase and the presentation phase, on the theory of organizational ambidexterity. In addition to Boxenbaum and Rouleau's research, I will take a temporal effect in consideration, proposing different scripts during different phases in a theory's lifecycle. Finally, I will also develop a deeper understanding of the use of particular rhetorical practices proposed by Davis (M. S. Davis, 1971) and Putnam et al. (Putnam et al., 2016). In doing so, I will integrate parts of Davis' lexicon into the framework offered by Boxenbaum and Rouleau and offer an extension of their model (Figure 7A).

Method

I will present an interpretative and qualitative case study with the identified discourse ('the theory') on organizational ambidexterity as unit of analysis. A case study in which I conceive the theory on organizational ambidexterity as case, constituted by a number of foundational articles (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; García-Lillo et al., 2016; Nosella et al., 2012; van Grinsven et al., 2016) will prove a suitable method for striking a pragmatic balance between induction and deduction (Eisenhardt, 1989), and between rationalism and empiricism (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016). My approach will be a combination of deduction with bottom-up theorizing. Because the theory purported by Boxenbaum and Rouleau does not offer neatly formulated propositions or hypotheses, a purely deductive approach of hypothesis testing is ill suited. Their arguments and case study, combined with the extensive literature review on the other hand present "preconceived notions" that instruct selecting of my case study, the research question, and the a priori description of the constructs, i.e. the use of metaphors, paradoxes and epistemic scripts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011).

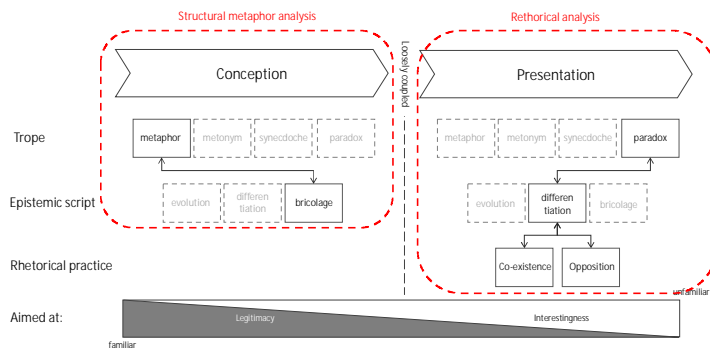
For at least two reasons, a textual or discursive analysis incorporating the developed model, will prove adequate given the social-constructivist ontological position I take in this paper. First, language and rhetoric in the academic discourse is not only used to describe a phenomenon, but also to have impact as a theorist on his or her audiences. Therefore, I will consider language or rhetoric not only representative but also constitutive, and most importantly, laden with ambition. Moreover, the method of discourse analysis is in line with the burgeoning research on the use of tropes like metaphor and paradox in organizational and management studies (Putnam et al., 2016). The methodological similarity between the research on theory-building and the research on the use of certain tropes can be explained by the shared constitutive importance of language and discourse. As put by Putnam et al., we should consider discourse "not as a window to feelings and cognitions, but as a key to how paradox forms and operates" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 77). Second, the underlying system of publications, citations and impact scores can be seen as signifying a struggle among theorists to come up with theories that do well in an environment governed by social pressures. A struggle in which theories are able to "win in the marketplace for ideas, independent of their empirical validity" (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005, p. 7). Conceiving and presenting such a theory helps (ambitious) theorists make a name for themselves, and therefore makes it a pursuable and particular goal. Indeed, as Pfeffer purports, theories, and those in social studies like organizational science in particular, struggle for dominance in order to attract funds and talent (Pfeffer, 1993). So, seen as partly a political phenomenon, theory-building and the research thereof also calls for a reflexive and critical approach (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2016). Alvesson & Wilmott describe a such an approach broadly as "instead of proceeding by examining and striving to perfect the means of organizing work

independently of an articulation and pursuit of certain ends, attention is directed from the outset to the interrogation of ends and their inextricable connectedness to means.” (Willmott & Alvesson, 2003, p. 10). So, if we consider a theorist’s drive to conceive and present a theory as something remarkable and interesting, an analysis of his or her text will reveal how the authors of successful papers on organizational ambidexterity create interest by combining what is known and what is new.

In my view, it is not only the subject - or research question - that ‘selects’ the method of inquiry. A paper or thesis is an extension of its maker, implicitly and explicitly reflecting its worldview. Or, described more in accordance with the rules and jargon of the prevailing language game, reflexivity demands a theorist to acknowledge certain ontological and epistemological preferences, notwithstanding their particular axiomatic nature. By this I mean that articulated preferences can be discussed or debated, but not refuted. Nonetheless, such reflexivity is helpful for readers in interpreting a certain paper. As Morgan puts it “by engaging organizations through subjective frames of reference we confront our own nature and, in effect, ‘meet ourselves’ in an existential dialogue” (cited in Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 446). To some extent, this also applies to this section on methodology, making it a possible third reason as to why a textual analysis fits as a methodology; I have a knack for it and it is therefore my weapon of choice.

A large part of my research question implies testing the proposition stated by Boxenbaum and Rouleau about the use of epistemic scripts by which (in my thesis: mostly) metaphors are used in conceiving and presenting a new theory (see figure 7A). Therefore, I will follow the same methodological approach. This approach consists of two methodological elements which Boxenbaum and Rouleau borrowed – or ‘bricolaged’ - from other research. First, a specific procedure of structural metaphor analysis is used, as developed by Andriessen and Gubbins (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009). Second, in a rhetorical analysis, textual passages regarding “ambidexterity”, “exploitation” and “exploration” will be identified and examined for the rhetorical use of epistemic scripts (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). See figure 7B.

Figure 7B
Two different methods for analysis are used



Based on Davis, Weick, Oswick et al., Boxenbaum & Rouleau

Together, this will uncover a text's metaphors-in-use, and the epistemic scripts that are used regarding those metaphors. Specifically, it will reveal how some metaphors are rhetorically juxtaposed to create interest through the construction of paradox.

Metaphor Analysis

Metaphor analysis will "help identify the different ways a theoretical concept is structured and given meaning, provide insight into the way these different conceptualizations relate to each other, and show how these conceptualizations impact further theorization about the concept" (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009, p. 845). Their procedure entails a six-step approach and starts with selecting the researched topic. The researched topic should be the central concepts in a particular field. In my case, the field of organizational ambidexterity holds several concepts centrally. Most importantly these are the concepts of "ambidexterity" and "exploration and exploitation". The second step is to sample a selection of texts or papers to analyze. I will expound on this specific matter of sampling further on in this chapter. The third and fourth step are to highlight all phrases related to "ambidexterity", "exploration" and "exploitation" and then subsequently identifying the underlying metaphors used in those phrases.

A definition of metaphors used in OMT is given by Cornelissen et al.: "a linguistic utterance in which the combination of words is literally deviant in the sense that terms that have originally or conventionally been employed in relation to a different concept or domain are applied and connected to a target term or concept within organization theory" (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1549). Metaphors that I consider dead or conventionalized are excluded from the analysis. The reason for this is that although words like 'business', 'firm' or 'manage' technically fit within the definition above, they can hardly be seen as indicating an epistemological script like bricolage. If anything, extensive use of such dead metaphors indicates the theorists that use them are part of the academic community of OMT. Such a conclusion will hardly be surprising, let alone interesting.

Grouping together these metaphorical phrases and words that share the same source domain, identifying that domain's metaphorical concept, and categorizing the metaphorical concepts by root metaphors make up the fifth step. Finally, the number of phrases and words belonging to a certain identified metaphorical concept are counted relative to the total number of counted phrases and words. In doing so, the identified frequency of use of certain source domains makes different texts (and their authors) comparable, by which a high frequency of certain metaphorical concepts implies a high importance to and by the author (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009).

The following example of this six-step approach applied to an excerpt from a paper (cfm step 2 and 3) by He and Wong (He & Wong, 2004a, p. 482) may prove insightful;

“Although trade-offs between exploration and exploitation are certainly necessary because they compete for scarce resources, March (1991) also suggested that maintaining an appropriate balance between exploration and exploitation is critical for firm survival and prosperity.”

I have underscored the discernable metaphors which the authors use to describe the concepts of exploration and exploitation (cf step 4). These metaphors could be grouped into metaphorical concepts of a higher order (cf step 5). For instance, ‘trade-offs’ and ‘compete for scarce resources’ can be seen as belonging to the conceptual metaphor of markets, which in turn can be categorized as belonging to the domain of the root metaphor of economics. Next, the metaphorically used word ‘balance’ refers to the conceptual metaphor of movement, and has ‘animate being’ as root metaphor. The use of the word ‘survival’ can be identified as metaphor relating to ecology and its root metaphor ‘evolution’ or ‘biology’. Finally, ‘prosperity’ evokes the root metaphor of ‘society’. Based on only the analysis above, the frequency counts (cf step 6) imply that the (root) metaphorical domain of ‘economics’ is deemed most important by the authors. By doing so, they build their conception and presentation of the target domain on the source domain of ‘economics’; organizational ambidexterity is (like) economics. Thus, the result or product of this six-step analysis is a hierarchical list of root metaphors and their domains used by the authoring theorists.

In the example above, such a list reveals already four different root categories deployed, indicating a high level of adherence to the epistemic script of bricolage. Based on the excerpt, the theorists simultaneously borrow and ‘prime’ possible extensions on those different root metaphors and any subsequent preexisting theories. Such identified analogies for instance, might reveal a theorist’s implicit preference to economics and markets, which in turn could mentally prepare the audience for the introduction into organizational ambidexterity of (elements of) transaction cost economics. Similarly, the previously identified root metaphor of evolution might open the cognitive door to elements of the work of Hannan and Freeman on organizational ecology. Of course, these are informed speculations, and as such they will be presented in the discussion section of this thesis.

There are some limitations to this method. Obviously, other groupings and different metaphorical concepts are thinkable, possibly resulting in different frequencies, making any inference questionable. This inherent subjectivity of this step of the procedure is acknowledged by Andriessen and Gubbins as a potential limitation. They state that “the identification of metaphors behind certain phrases is always a product of the sensemaking and analytical processes chosen and employed by the researcher” (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009, p. 860). Two things can be said about these limitations. If the same heuristic is consistently applied to all texts in the sample, a relative comparison between those texts can

still be valid. Whether the conceptual metaphor (or domain) is named 'biology' or 'animate beings' (or 'dingbats' for that matter), as long as the same (number of) phrases or words are attributed to that category regardless of its name, differences or similarities in frequencies will still be informing. Still, any generalization outside of the sample will be like standing on thin ice. A way to mitigate this risk is to refine the chosen metaphorical concepts, based on lists of root metaphors described in the literature on theory building (Cornelissen et al., 2005), as I have done in the example above.

Moreover, it is worth repeating that two other tropes closely related to metaphors, metonym and synecdoche are also excluded from the analysis. As explained earlier, the distinction between these tropes and metaphors lies largely in their working (substitution versus explanation). This makes them somewhat difficult and arbitrary to distinguish from more or less conventionalized metaphors. Take for instance the following example: "tomorrow's customer wants management to explore". The first non-literal combination of words, "tomorrow's customer" can be interpreted to contain several metonyms and a metaphor at the same time. On the one hand, "tomorrow's" is a metaphor indicating it is not really about the next 24 hours, and also suggesting something that is presently unknown, but will be known with the passing of time. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a metonym in this context, partially revealed by its genitive 's'. A day can hardly be seen as owning something, and in this case, represents something else, probably the company (in a future state). Other metonyms in the example are "customer" and "management". The former refers to 'people who buy or contemplate buying products', and the latter refers to 'those people in a company making managerial decisions'. Note here, I have already referred to the term 'manage' (or management) as being a rather dead metaphor. Meaning that at some point – not recently – the original meaning of 'making actions with hands' was transferred to organizations and conventionalized in that context. The irony or paradox of (the oxymoron) of organizational functions as knowledge management will therefore elude most observers.

The point here is that metaphor and the other related tropes will overlap to some extent. The focus of the first part of the analysis will be on metaphors, in line with similar previous studies (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009; Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; Cornelissen et al., 2005), however the inadvertently inclusion of any metonyms and 'dead' or 'dormant' metaphors will be the result of interpretation. Even the most rigorous methods of structural metaphor analyses address this subjective aspect with some leniency, provided explication and reflection (Group, 2007; Schmitt, 2005).

Rhetorical analysis

The second method of analysis is aimed at discovering the epistemic scripts mentioned by Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011) and the rhetorical techniques proposed by Davis (1971). Boxenbaum and Rouleau's method is in turn based on that of Locke and Golden-Biddle who examined how theorists use language in journal articles to create opportunities for contributions (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). Based on their research of 81 qualitative works published in in AMJ and ASQ, they propose six distinct rhetorical strategies that make up two basic processes by which authors construct the contribution of their work, as required by both journals. The first process sets the scene by which coherence with existing knowledge is constructed. The three rhetorical strategies used to do this are synthesized coherence, progressive coherence, and noncoherence. In the second process the authors call into question parts of the existing knowledge, thereby problematizing the situation. This is done by three other rhetorical strategies; incompleteness, inadequacy, and incommensurability. Boxenbaum and Rouleau explicitly equal these processes with Evolution and Differentiation (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). This provides the heuristics to help categorize the rhetorical strategies from the sampled publication as either Evolution or Differentiation. See Table 1.

Table 1 – Rhetorical strategies categorized

B&R:	Evolution			Differentiation		
L&G-B:	Constructing Coherence			Problematizing		
	Synthesized coherence	Progressive coherence	Non-coherence	Incompleteness	Inadequacy	Incommensurability
Textual acts:	Formulate general ideas; Construct congruent relationships; Demonstrate latent consensus	Construct cumulative progress; Construct consensus among researchers	Construct discord among researchers	Specify gaps	Illuminate oversights	Advocate for alternative thesis

Based on Locke & Golden-Biddle (1997)

I will also apply a rhetorical analysis to analyze both the occurrence of epistemic scripts and how theorists construct paradox by using techniques proposed by Davis (1971). For assessing each article's adherence to either one of the mentioned scripts, the parts of the publication in which its contribution is discussed will be analyzed. Following the approach by Locke and Golden-Biddle, this means the analysis focused mostly on the introduction section of the publications. If no such section existed, the analyses was extended to the whole text, with exception of the empirical section (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997).

Regarding the rhetorical techniques, these entail that interestingness can be constructed by either positioning together simultaneously phenomena or metaphors that are thought not

to co-exist (Co-existence), or by describing how supposedly oppositional phenomena are in reality very similar (Opposition). A rhetoric acts in this regard must be identified as “an honest argument intended for an audience” helping “scientists frame ideas for presentation” (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997, p. 1026). My approach will use the same first three steps of the metaphor analyses procedure in selecting texts that discuss the phenomena of “exploration” and “exploitation”. Arguments that are employed by the theorist to frame these phenomena as paradoxical, I will code as being either Co-existence or Opposition. One example is taken from Tushman and O’Reilly:

“The real test of leadership, then, is to be able to compete successfully by both increasing the alignment or fit among strategy, structure, culture, and processes, while simultaneously preparing for the inevitable revolutions required by discontinuous environmental change. This requires organizational and management skills to compete in a mature market (where cost, efficiency, and incremental innovation are key) and to develop new products and services (where radical innovation, speed, and flexibility are critical). A focus on either one of these skill sets is conceptually easy. Unfortunately, focusing on only one guarantees short-term success but long-term failure. Managers need to be able to do both at the same time, that is, they need to be ambidextrous. Juggling provides a metaphor. A juggler who is very good at manipulating a single ball is not interesting. It is only when the juggler can handle multiple balls at one time that his or her skill is respected” (Tushman & O Reilly, 1996, p. 12)

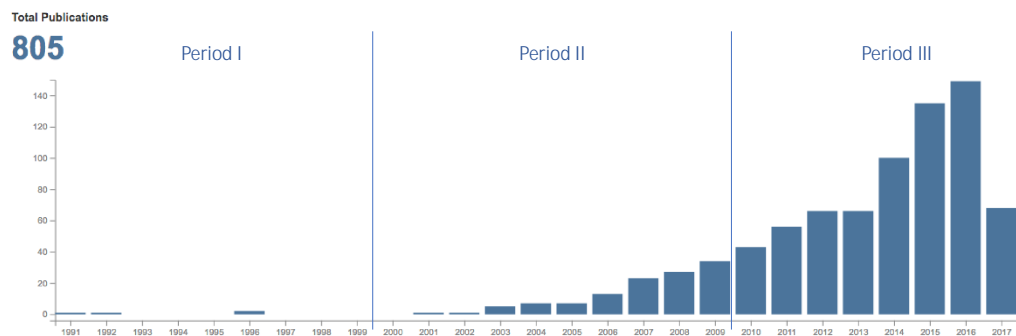
I have underscored parts of the text that are key in deconstruction the authors’ rhetoric. First, both skills are framed – juxtaposed - as being different and therefore very difficult to deploy simultaneously. Note here, that the word ‘and’ is put in cursives in the original, to make sure the audience does not consider this simultaneous task lightly. This ordeal is then solved by the metaphor of the juggler, implying that both skills are actually the comparable in a way (“balls”), and “real leadership” consists of being able to keep an eye (and hand) on both skills.³² Effectively implying that, given a certain contingency, both phenomena are not mutually exclusive, which is the dominant line of reasoning in the existing research. According to Tushman and O’Reilly there is no trade-off, suggesting that what seem to be phenomena which cannot exist together, are in reality phenomena which can exist together. This rhetorical technique, Co-existence, helps framing the exploration and exploitation phenomena as paradoxical, requiring a solution like ‘ambidexterity’.

³² The authors leave the critical reader wondering how interesting it is to see a juggler manipulating just two balls.

Sample

A full scope of publications on organizational ambidexterity is created by searching the Web of Science database in the management and/or business categories for articles indexed with topics like “organizational ambidexterity”³³, “ambidextrous”, “ambidexterity”, or “exploration and exploitation”. This yielded a total of 805 articles, of which more than half was published in the last 3 years (see figure 8). A stratified sample of eight academic publications on organizational ambidexterity will provide the texts of my analyses. Based on citation scores, the most cited articles are selected in each of the three equally sized timeframes between the publication of the seminal work of March (March, 1991) and current day.

Figure 8
Number of annual published articles related to organizational ambidexterity, distributed over 3 periods



Web of Science, retrieved July 2017

By selecting from three different timeframes, analyses take a longitudinal character for two reasons. First, management theories are known to have a certain lifecycle in which they gain popularity, starting in academic literature and then being adopted, extended, and disseminated in more practitioner-oriented journals, and finally in MBA curricula (Abrahamson, 1996). The fashion-like characteristics of the rise and decline of popularity of, for instance, Quality Circles (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999), Total Quality Management or Management by Objectives have been researched in the past (Carson, Lanier, Carson, & Guidry, 2000). If measured by number of publications in print media during a certain period of time, these fashions do not take the form of a bell-shaped swing, unlike popular belief. Research on discourse on Quality Circles, for instance, suggests that these patterns are

³³ The alternate spelling in British English of ‘organisational’ using –s instead of –z does not impact the results of the search query.

asymmetrical in which the decline in publications on the subject is more gradual than their rise (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999). Management theories can be seen as maturing into either the 'sacred canon' (or oblivion) in certain phases. Previous research on institutional theory suggests that during these phases, different epistemic scripts are favored (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). Early texts during the dormancy phase arguably pave the way by explicitly breaking with preexisting knowledge, rhetorically employing scripts of differentiation. Whereas later publications will jump the bandwagon, using the script of evolution more.

Second, as previously discussed in the review of literature on theory building, contextual factors influence theorists. As context changes over time (and space), shifts in conception and presentation can be expected based on theorists seeking legitimacy in gradually changing institutionalized academic 'language games'. This is especially salient regarding the metaphors used by theorist. As put by Danziger (cited in Schmitt, 2005, p. 362):
".. the analysis of metaphor becomes historically interesting, for we can use it to improve our understanding of patterns of psychological thought that were characteristic of a period, or a culture, or a particular intellectual community. [...] Such metaphors are used pervasively over relatively long periods, and typically their users do not seem to regard them as 'mere' metaphors but as expressing some kind of literal truth".

Exclusions

Careful reading of the articles' abstract was used to weed out highly cited articles that only partially discussed organizational ambidexterity, or mentioned it as a distinct subject of a meta-theory. For example, Smith and Lewis's *Toward a Theory of Paradox: a dynamic Theory of Organizing* (Smith & Lewis, 2011) is excluded from the sample. Although its average annual citation score made their article the most cited in the period between 2010 – 2017, closer reading of their research reveals their publication entails a meta-study of management theories like organizational ambidexterity. As such, the authoring theorists cannot be identified as being part of this specific 'academic tribe' or language game, and their article should not be analyzed together with the other texts. Moreover, meta-studies that are specifically aimed at organizational ambidexterity (e.g. (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010), often explicitly depict a wide range of (sometimes conflicting) approaches, possibly burying the authors' personal viewpoint and intentions regarding the subject. I decided to one exception of this exclusion – thus an inclusion – of the meta-study by O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), because this possibly offers an opportunity to compare two authoritative theorists and their texts from different timeframes.

Stratified Sample

Regarding the first period, besides the seminal work of March that forms the starting point in time of the sample and the publication by Tushman and O'Reilly, no further relevant work was published until the beginning of the next decade, resulting in only two articles from that period. Roughly following the distribution of publication shown in figure 8, three articles from period II (2000-2009) will be selected, and three articles from period III (2010-2017).

Table 2 – Examined articles

Title	Author(s)	Journal	Publication year	Avg citations p/y ³⁴
Period I (1991 – 1999)				
Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning	March	Organization Science	1991	196
Ambidextrous Organizations: Managing Evolutionary and Revolutionary Change	Tushman & O'Reilly	California Management Review	1996	42
Period II (2000 - 2009)				
The Antecedents, Consequences, and Mediating Role of Organizational Ambidexterity	Gibson & Birkinshaw	AMJ	2004	59
Exploration vs. Exploitation: An Empirical Test of the Ambidexterity Hypothesis	He & Wong	Organization Science	2004	58
Exploratory Innovation, Exploitative Innovation, and Performance: Effects of Organizational Antecedents and Environmental Moderators	Jansen, Van den Bosch, Volberda	Management Science	2006	49
Period III (2010 - 2017)				
Microfoundations of Performance: Balancing Efficiency and Flexibility in Dynamic Environments	Eisenhardt, Furr, Bingham	Organization Science	2010	16
Balancing Exploration and Exploitation Through Structural Design: The Isolation of Subgroups and Organizational Learning	Fang, Lee, Schilling	Organization Science	2010	12
Organizational ambidexterity: past, present and future	O'Reilly & Tushman	Academy of Management Perspectives	2013	25

³⁴ Annual citation scores are preferred to total citation scores because they do not bias older publications over younger ones.

Results and analysis

Birth of an Idea

“An idea is born not clear and distinct but surrounded by a penumbra of spreading implications of fading clarity” (M. S. Davis, 1999, p. 261)

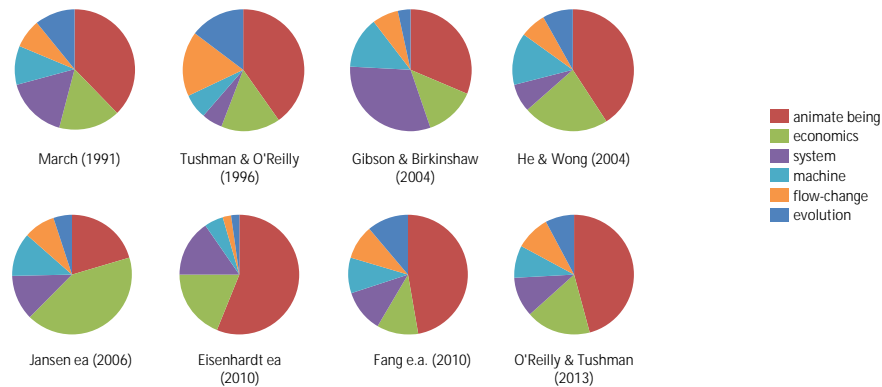
The publications on organizational ambidexterity are indeed booming as figure 8 shows. Extrapolation of the number of publications of the first half of 2017 indicates the number of new publications may be reaching its zenith, and a subsequent steady decline can be expected according to Abrahamson and Fairchild. Between March's foundational publication in 1991 and present day, seven more highly cited papers part of this analysis have contributed to this apparent success of this 'theory'. The parentheses are deliberate. Maybe just like any other idea, the exact time and place of the birth of the theory on organizational ambidexterity is hard to assess. Almost all the articles in my sample point (and cite) in the same direction. Interestingly enough, March however never mentions ambidexterity in his article (more than 5000 citations) that is chiefly about exploration and exploitation. And the other shoulder of the proverbial giant – although somewhat less broad -, Tushman and O'Reilly's publication in 1996 (almost 1000 citations), does provide center stage to ambidexterity, but fails to mention exploration or exploitation. Based on my sample alone, it is not until Gibson and Birkinshaw's (2004) article that organizational ambidexterity is proposed as a solution for tensions (“predicament”) between exploration and exploitation. Maybe it is not surprising then, that this 'idea' is referred to by the authors from the sample by a myriad of synonyms; it has been called a 'theme', 'construct', 'notion', 'hypothesis', 'model', and even 'phenomenon'. As is discussed in the literature review, many well-known theories are characterized by a similar 'conceptual openness'. The more recent (meta) studies on organizational ambidexterity and its companion, the exploration/exploitation paradox, address this issue (Lavie et al., 2010; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Given the overlap in authors, this can be seen as a somewhat belated reflexive effort. Notwithstanding these integrative efforts, the conceptual openness can be ascribed in large part to the use of metaphors. In the following first part of the analysis, I will provide insights into the occurrence of the epistemic script of bricolage based on the metaphors used in the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity. By doing so, I hope to shed some light on the 'penumbra' surrounding organizational ambidexterity.

The use of epistemic scripts in conceiving Organizational Ambidexterity through metaphors

For the following metaphor analysis, I used a combined list developed by Cornelissen et al (Cornelissen et al., 2005) and Boxenbaum and Rouleau (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011), to which I made two post hoc alterations. I added a root metaphorical category named Constructions to accommodate metaphorical concepts used to describe ambidexterity or exploration and exploitation that are part of the 'x as a building' metaphor. This category was found to be relatively dominant in the founding articles on Institutional Theory (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). Indeed, many metaphors in the current sample of articles on organizational ambidexterity can be categorized as part of the 'organization as a building' metaphor, although this category is not part of the top six. See figure 9. Second, I added and categorized individual metaphors not mentioned in the lists of Cornelissen et al. or Boxenbaum and Rouleau, see table 3.

The analysis reveals that the structural metaphor of an animate being was used by all of the authors, and is the predominant metaphor all but one of the articles. The relative dominance of the conceptual grounding of 'an exploring and exploiting organization is like an animate being' appears to be larger in the more recent articles. See figure 9. In general, this is in line with previous research. Cornelissen et al. (2005) found that animate being is the most used root metaphorical domain in OMT, followed by machine and flow-change. Notably, the 'seminal' publication by March contains no particular secondary dominant root metaphor, unlike some later publications. Out of the eight articles in the sample, it appears to be the most evenly balanced in its use of the six most common root categories. Note that the publication by Jansen et al. on the other hand, is the only one with economics as dominant root metaphor. This can be attributed to their focus on innovation, and an absence of metaphors like balance.

Figure 9
Frequency distribution of 6 most used root metaphorical categories per publication



Regarding the animate being metaphor, its ubiquity, even in daily life, is arguably a result of the fact that in essence, all metaphors are grounded in our physical or 'sensoric' experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Schmitt, 2005). Conceiving abstract things in terms of our human experiences ("the company is moving forward", "the results are up", or "ambidexterity is like balancing") probably comes 'naturally'. Conversely, if drilled down deep enough into the (etymological) core of any conventional metaphor, literal meaning equals physical meaning. For this reason, the important metaphor of balance is categorized as animate being. Moreover, the relatively new use of the metaphor 'ambidexterity' – not counted in the analysis as portrayed by table 3 and figure 9 – to explain organizational exploration and exploitation was not introduced by March (1991), but by Tushman & O'Reilly (1994). As a conceptual metaphor, ambidexterity can be categorized as part of the root metaphorical domain of animate being, arguably triggering the use of more metaphors within the same domain. For instance, ambidextrous ("right-handed on both sides") organization can be conceived as training both hands, or with one hand knowing what the other hand is doing. In the sample, salient examples of such possible extension are found in Eisenhardt et al. (2010) who significantly build on the metaphor of flexibility. Similarly, O'Reilly & Tushman (2013) use (cap)ability a pivotal metaphor in conceiving organizational exploration and exploitation. The introduction of metaphors fundamental to the theory of organizational ambidexterity, exploration, exploitation and ambidexterity, and their root category (animate being), are likely to have influenced the metaphors that are used in publications that followed. From this follows that metaphors not only form bridges to preexisting theories, but also pre-structure any extensions of a theory. One can speculate about the development of the same theory if it was conceived as "bi-modality" or "gearing" in which the organization needs to separate its "tinkering" activities from its "testing" activities. Arguably, this would have entailed more metaphoric reliance on the Machine category, or even Cybernetics.

Table 3 – Frequency of conceptual metaphors per root metaphorical category

	March (1991)	Tushman & O'Reilly (1996)	Gibson & Birkinshaw (2004)	He & Wong (2004)	Jansen ea (2006)	Eisenhardt ea (2010)	Fang e.a. (2010)	O'Reilly & Tushman (2013)
Economics	18	16	26	38	131	24	15	31
Innovation	1	6	2	10	80		1	8
Efficiency	1	1	4	5	3	24	3	5
Competition	3	4	3	3	13			7
Market		4		8	9			5
Product	1	1	1	7	10		3	2
Trade-off *	4		7	2			2	1
Coordination *			3		13			
Costs *	2		6	1	2		1	3
Returns *	6			2	1		5	
Animate being	19	25	30	41	35	52	51	41
Balance *	7	2	3	6		13	4	2
Learning	8	2		4	2		15	
Flexibility *	1	1	3	1		24		1
Capabilities *			1	11			1	18
Knowledge	3			1	17		8	
Success		12	2	5	2			7
Solutions *		1	2		3	3	16	
Ability		6	3	1	5		5	2
Tensions *		1	3	4		7		6
Achieve *			10	4		3	1	2
Need *			3	4	6	2	1	3
System	21	5	60	11	23	17	12	16
Environment	3	1	7	2	17	9	1	2
Adaptation	10		17	1			7	3
Dynamic *			1	6	5	8		3
Alignment *		3	15					4
Context*	3		14		1		1	2
System	5	1	6	2			3	2
Machine	10	3	8	19	30	6	12	9
Performance	2		1	6	13	4	6	1
Processes *	6	2	5	7	4	1	5	2
Mechanism *		1	2	2	9	1	1	1
Resources	2			4	4			5
flow-change	10	9	12	6	21		11	13
Develop	2	1	7	1	15		3	4
Change	3	8	5	2	2		2	8
Improvement *	5			3	4		6	1
Time	9	13	21	7	2	1	10	15
Time	9	10	14	3			9	10
Simultaneously *		3	7	4	2	1	1	5
Building		4	19	6	4	4	5	5
Structure		4	19	6	4	4	5	5
Evolution	6	11	1	8	12		4	5
Increase *	2	1		2	9		3	4
Variation	4	3		5	1			
Incremental *		7	1	1	2		1	1
Space	9		11			6	6	2
Separation *			11			3	3	2
Space	9					3	3	
institutionalized norms					21			
(in)formal *					21			

Note: conceptual metaphors with 11 counts or less are not displayed.

* Added to original lists of Cornelissen et al (2005) and Boxenbaum & Rouleau (2011)

Bricolage in the articles on Organizational Ambidexterity

Between all eight publications, a wide range of different root categories is used by their authors, although differences exist in the type and frequency of supporting metaphors. Using a wide range of different metaphors helps these theorists because “more verbs come available [...] to discuss interdependencies, causal mechanisms, control and manipulation” (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009, p. 857). Moreover, these different categories form ‘bridges’ or extensions to preexisting theories. The root metaphor machine links to – and possibly feeds off the legitimacy of – the work of Weber and Taylor (Cornelissen et al., 2005). And similarly, the systems category relates to previous work on organizational ecology by Hannan and Freeman (Morgan, 2006). This overall image is very similar to the results of Boxenbaum and Rouleau’s research on the foundational publications on organizational institutionalism. Extensive combining of metaphors from different root categories reveal the theorists’ borrowing and reassembly of building blocks from familiar theories. Indeed, the epistemic script of bricolage plays an important part in the conception of organizational ambidexterity.

The analysis not only revealed extensive borrowing and recombining of metaphors suggesting a high level of bricolage at the article level, but the same eclecticism can be found within one sentence.

“These processes and systems are important because they provide an alternative way of developing the capacities that architectures or structures are intended to create” (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004, p. 209; emphasis added).

Taken out of its context, these metaphors used by Gibson and Birkinshaw will sound extremely abstract to the non-informed, screaming for further explanation. To the academic audience on the other hand, this description of ambidexterity bricolaged from at least four different categories, will not be bewildering. Moreover, it provides a certain level of legitimacy signaling that the theorists speak the same language as the reader, and know their ‘business’.

Another example of a sentence packed with salient metaphors from different metaphoric root categories, resonating with many preexisting theories of OMT, provides more than just an inkling to the well-informed academic reader:

“In this sense, formalization does not simply produce inertial forces and a focus toward exploitation (e.g. Cardinal 2001), although its effect is contingent on its design and its ability to produce an enabling rather than a coercive bureaucracy” (Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006, p. 1670; emphasis added).

Sometimes, arguably less subtle, a wide array of metaphors and their corresponding sub-fields or theories of OMT are literally enumerated in one breath:

“Exploration implies firm behaviors characterized by search, discovery, experimentation, risk taking and innovation, while exploitation implies firm behaviors characterized by refinement, implementation, efficiency, production and selection” (He & Wong, 2004b, p. 481; emphasis added).

Judging by the use of root metaphorical categories in the last part of the sentence above, the authors imply that the exploiting organization is like an animate being (person), with machine-like traits, that are appropriated based on economic principles, within a (ecological) system. Aimed at an audience consisting of management academics, there must be something for everyone.

Tushman and O'Reilly revisited

Regarding the texts of O'Reilly and Tushman, based on the analysis of metaphors used, an interesting comparison can be made between their two articles, separated by almost 20 years. In their 2013 article, O'Reilly and Tushman take stock of the research on organizational ambidexterity since the publication of March (1991). They conclude – using some very colorful tropes – that the “term “ambidexterity” becomes a management Rorschach test in which one sees whatever one wants [...]” (p. 331), and is at risk of being “[...] applied to a smorgasbord of organizational topics” (p. 334). In an effort resonating some of the unitary or objectivist argument discussed earlier, they urge further research to remain “focused on the problem March identified” (p. 334). Which in their view means that “exploration and exploitation is about survival” (p. 333), and the appropriate “lens” through which this construct must be viewed, “remains that of dynamic capabilities” (p. 332).

Undoubtedly, March in his seminal article on organizational learning pitched a big tent, as is shown by the frequency distribution of the root metaphors used in his article (see figure 9). Note however, that besides animate being not one of the other categories can be seen as really dominant. But what is more interesting is that the specific metaphors O'Reilly and Tushman refer to when calling on the academic community, are sparsely used by March. The metaphor survival is mentioned only twice, and the animate being metaphors like capability or ability are not even used by March in his texts describing exploration and exploitation. Even more interesting perhaps is the frequency count of those specific metaphors in their own earlier work. I counted zero instances of the metaphor dynamic capability in their publication in 1996.³⁵ And although evolution and adaptation take center stage in their

³⁵ In their publication, there is one account of the word ‘capabilities’ (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996, p. 20), but this is not used in a section of the text selected for analysis.

article, the selected texts (excerpts) conceiving and explaining ambidexterity or exploration and exploitation do not actually build on metaphors like survival. This makes O'Reilly and Tushman's appeal to future researchers a bit confusing. Instead of remaining closer to March's theory as they claim, they actually propose to stay closer to their own reading of March's theory, which in turn is not the same as it was twenty years earlier. This suggests that not only interpretations - and accompanying metaphors - within an academic tribe (or language game) vary, but also those of the same theorists in different timeframes.

Presenting Organizational Ambidexterity, epistemic scripts and rhetorical techniques

Following from the literature review and the concluding integrative model, Differentiation is expected to be dominant epistemic script in presenting organizational ambidexterity as a new 'knowledge product'. The first reason for this is that a new idea or theory can be expected to be presented as 'breaking away' from preexisting theories. After the *débutante* is on the academic dancefloor however, the scripted 'dance of Differentiation' will become more balanced in favor of the Evolution script (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). A second reason why the Differentiation script is expected, is because it harnesses interestingness, the key to a good theory. According to Davis, authoring theorists catch the interest of its audience mainly through the techniques of Co-existence and Opposition. With Co-existence meaning a rhetoric technique proposing what seem to be phenomena which cannot exist together, are in reality phenomena which can exist together, and Opposition meaning a description of what seem to be opposite phenomena, are in reality similar (nearly identical) phenomena. These two techniques serve as rhetoric vehicles for the trope of paradox, an important (implicit) underpinning of organizational ambidexterity (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The first part of the analysis focused mainly on the occurrence of either the epistemic script of Differentiation or Evolution.

Epistemic script of Differentiation and Evolution in the foundational articles

The result of this analysis show that, as predicted, the authors of the later publications relied more on the Evolution script than those of the earlier publications. See Table 4. The observations deserve some comments though. First, not all the articles in the sample are as straightforward and scripted in the way the concepts of organizational ambidexterity or exploration and exploitation relate to existing knowledge. The publications by March (1991), Tushman and O'Reilly (1996), Fang et al (2010), and O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) do not explicate their contribution and relation to existing research in way that is easy to discern. A reason for this may be the different editorial regimes of the publishing journals; *Organization Science* and *California Management Review*. As discussed earlier, these regimes play an important part in legitimizing – and 'illegitimizing' – certain textual practices, thereby arguably enforcing certain templates in which the theorists are expected to describe their

contribution (Gabriel, 2010; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). The reason regarding this lack of an easy discernable scripted contribution and conceptual positioning by O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) is probably the fact that their article is a meta-study, taking stock and looking ahead, and as such is not really aimed at communicating a new knowledge product. This is the same reason why, contrary to Rouleau and Boxenbaum and the integrative model I presented, neither the epistemological scripts of Differentiation nor Evolution was found in their publication. The way they relate their insights to the existing knowledge is almost opposite to Evolution, as they suggest more rigorous confirmation to the concepts described by March (1991). Thus, the script of Regression is introduced, aimed at convergence and 'pruning a field's would-be theories'.

Second, regarding March's presumed 'arch-publication' on organizational ambidexterity, the use of the script of Evolution is notable. Contrary to the findings by Boxenbaum and Rouleau regarding the foundational articles on organizational institutionalism, the earliest and most cited publication regarding organizational ambidexterity does not use the script of Differentiation. Apparently, in positioning the new knowledge product – or theory – March did not intend to break away from existing knowledge. This role is played by the sample's publication that comes second (in time and citations). In their article, Tushman and O'Reilly are the only theorists solely relying on the Differentiation script. In a remarkably plump manner, they dismiss existing knowledge regarding organizational exploration and exploitation.

Third, the epistemic scripts used by Gibson and Birkinshaw display the largest diversity. Besides the scripts of Evolution, Differentiation, and a strategy that can be described as scripted Bricolage can be discerned in the presentation. This is contrary to the integrated model and its underlying propositions by Boxenbaum and Rouleau who argue that the Bricolage script may not carry enough legitimacy in presenting a theory.

Table 4 – Epistemic scripts used in the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity

Article	Text (emphasis added)	Epistemic script used to relate new knowledge to existing knowledge
March (1991)	"A central concern of studies of adaptive processes is the relation between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties." [...] "This paper considers some aspects of such problems in the context of organizations." P. 71	Evolution; knowledge on exploration and exploitation is applied in a new context
	"These observations do not overturn the renaissance. Knowledge, learning, and education remain as profoundly important instruments of human well-being. At best, the models presented here suggest some of the considerations involved in thinking about choices between exploration and exploitation [...]. "It may be instructive to reconfirm some elements of folk wisdom asserting that [...]. P. 85	Evolution; existing knowledge is – humbly – reconfirmed
Tushman & O'Reilly (1996)	"Across industries there is a pattern in which success often precedes failure. But industry-level studies aren't very helpful for illustrating what actually went wrong. Why are managers sometimes ineffective in making the transition from strength to strength?" P. 8	Differentiation; head-on challenge of previous studies in a provocative and dismissive manner
	"The sobering fact is that the cliché about the increasing pace of change seems to be true. Sooner or later, discontinuities upset the congruence that has been a part of the organization's success. [...] The underlying cause of this pattern can be found in an unlikely place: evolutionary biology." [...] "But this perspective missed a crucial question: What happened if the environment was characterized, not by gradual change, but periodic discontinuities?" [...] "Instead of slow change, discontinuities required a different version of Darwinian theory – that of punctuated equilibria in which long periods of gradual change were interrupted periodically by massive discontinuities." P. 12.	Differentiation; traditional Darwinian evolutionary theory holds a misguided perspective* and an alternative thesis should be developed

	<p>"Managers, as architects of their organizations, are responsible for designing their units in ways that best fit their strategic challenges. Internal congruence among strategy, structure, culture, and people drives short-term performance. Between 1915 and 1960, General Radio had a strategy [...]. All these things worked together to provide a highly congruent system and, in turn, a highly successful organization. However, the strategy and organizational congruence that made General Radio a success for 50 years became [...] a recipe for failure in the 1960's." p. 18</p>	Differentiation; traditional (strategy) theory holds a misguided perspective and an alternative thesis should be developed*
Gibson & Birkinshaw (2004)	<p>"A recurring theme in a variety of organizational literatures is that successful organizations in a dynamic environment are ambidextrous [...]. [...] Authors have typically viewed ambidexterity in structural terms." [...] "Increasingly, however, organizational scholars have recognized the importance of simultaneously balancing seemingly contradictory tensions and have begun to shift their focus from trade-off (either/or) to paradoxical (both/and) thinking." [...] Further, there is a growing recognition of the role of the processes and systems present in a given context [...]. "Combining these insights, we develop the concept of contextual ambidexterity [...]" P. 209</p>	Bricolage; a new knowledge product is assembled from existing knowledge
	<p>"The concept of contextual ambidexterity differs markedly from the traditional concept [...]" P. 210</p>	Differentiation; a new knowledge product cannot be contained within existing theories
	<p>"Further, rigorous systematic evidence documenting the success of ambidextrous organizations is lacking [...]": "Thus the purpose of this study was to empirically investigate [...]" P. 210</p>	Evolution; empirical gap is spotted and filled
	<p>"Thus, to date, scholars have focused on [...]. In this article, we develop a somewhat different perspective [...]. We concur with previous authors on the idea that [...], but we suggest that [...]" P. 211</p>	Differentiation; an oversight is illuminated*
	<p>"Although this is the first study to develop the concept of contextual ambidexterity, the logic used here is consistent with that of several earlier studies" P. 211</p>	Evolution; coherence between new and existing knowledge is asserted*
He & Wong (2004)	<p>"While the conceptual distinction between exploration and exploitation and their implications for strategy and structure have been intensely studied, there has been surprisingly little empirical investigation of the interaction effect of the two." [...]</p>	Evolution; empirical gap is spotted and filled
	<p>"This paper seeks to test the ambidexterity hypothesis in the specific context of firms' approach to technological innovation" P. 481</p>	Evolution; existing knowledge is extended into new context
	<p>"While various typologies of technological innovation strategy have been used in the existing innovation management literature, none has been explicitly grounded in the exploration versus exploitation construct" [...] "In this paper, we extend the exploration versus exploitation construct to define a new typology of technological innovation strategy [...]" P. 483</p>	Evolution; existing knowledge is extended into new context
Jansen et al (2006)	<p>"While the importance of pursuing both types of innovation has often been highlighted, much remains to be understood [...]. First, there is little systematic evidence on [...]" [...] "Thus, it appears that the central tenet [...] remains unproven" P. 1661</p>	Evolution; empirical gap is spotted and filled
	<p>"[...] previous studies [...] ignoring the fact that ambidextrous organizations might differentiate coordination mechanisms at the level of the organizational unit. [...] prior research [...] ignoring the increasing importance of informal social relations [...]" P. 1661</p>	Differentiation; an oversight is illuminated*
	<p>"Prior studies have found that [...]. Less well documented is [...]. Currently, there is little empirical evidence on the nature of this moderating effect [...]" P. 1662</p>	Evolution; empirical gap is spotted and filled
Fang et al (2010)	<p>"In the organization literature, scholars have independently made symmetric claims about organization or industry structure emphasizing the benefits of some degree of structural isolation" [...] "On the other hand, management scholars usually do not believe that any one organization structure is universally beneficial" [...] "Thus, we might expect that the semi-isolated sub-group structure only provides benefits under a particular set of conditions [...]"</p>	Evolution; coherence within a common research program, but linked by disagreement*
	<p>As noted previously, prior research has found that organizations tend to emphasize exploitation at the expense of exploration, and that organization structure may help to attenuate this problem. Our study provides additional insight into this stream of research by demonstrating [...]" P. 636</p>	Evolution; new knowledge is presented as a next step in existing knowledge
Eisenhardt et al (2010)	<p>"Several views examine how leaders resolve the tension between efficiency and flexibility. One view emphasizes ambidexterity. [...] "In contrast, a second view emphasizes semi-structures. Unlike the ambidexterity perspective, which highlights separation, semi-structures emphasize simultaneity by embracing both efficiency and flexibility" [...] "But while some authors argue that the ambidexterity and semi-structures perspectives are distinct, our view is that they actually converge on three core theoretical arguments [...]" P. 1264</p>	Evolution; coherence of new knowledge is asserted by reinterpreting existing knowledge and discovering underlying consensus*
	<p>"Overall, although we argue that balancing efficiency and flexibility is at the core of the micro foundations of performance in dynamic environments, we note that a lack of precision about structure, environment, and cognition provides an opportunity to elaborate how (emphasis in original) leaders achieve this balance." P. 1265</p>	Differentiation; three oversights are illuminated*
O'Reilly & Tushman (2013)	<p>"This outpouring of interest has broadened and deepened our understanding of the topic but has also brought with it some confusion about the construct itself and raised issues about what we know and don't know. The purpose of this paper is to review and summarize the evolution of this research, identify what it is that we know with some certainty, highlight areas of confusion, and suggest where future research is needed" P. 324</p>	Regression; a meta-analysis assesses certain knowledge at risk of non-coherence with the common program

* Based on typologies of rhetoric acts from Locke & Golden-Biddle (1997)

Close reading of some of the scripts described in Table 3 trigger further reflection, revealing more than just the use of certain scripts. Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) for instance, use a similar rhetorical strategy repeatedly by which they differentiate a new knowledge product from existing knowledge. Their strategy entails that they 'seduce' the reader to follow them in what seems to be plausible reasoning based on existing knowledge, right up to a point where they hit us around the ears with a surprising twist. Almost like a classical sonnet, the audience is confronted with a volta or chute³⁶, jolting the interest. This is in line with Locke and Golden-Biddle, who found that regarding theorists' construction of their work's academic contribution "manuscripts must in a sense turn on themselves, subverting or problematizing the very literatures that provide locations and raisons d'être for the present efforts" (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997, p. 1029). Consider the following excerpt from Tushman and O'Reilly (1996):

"For many years, biological evolutionary theory proposed that the process of adaptation occurred gradually over long periods of time. The process was assumed to be one of variation, selection, and retention. [...] In this way, variation led to adaption and fitness, which was subsequently retained across generations. In this early view, the environment changed gradually and species adapted slowly to these changes. There is ample evidence that this view has validity." P. 12, emphasis added.

They begin with asserting what we already know, the Darwinian evolutionary theory, already introduced in organizational theory some twenty years before. However, tentative wording like 'assumed' and the use of demonstrative pronouns in 'this view' or 'this way' already foreshadows the following turn in their line of argument:

[...] "But this perspective missed a crucial question: What happened if the environment was characterized, not by gradual change, but periodic discontinuities?"
[...] "Instead of slow change, discontinuities required a different version of Darwinian theory – that of punctuated equilibria in which long periods of gradual change were interrupted periodically by massive discontinuities."

Note that in this particular example, Tushman and O'Reilly turn on existing knowledge that is way outside of their area of expertise. They are not discussing evolutionary biology in its applied or translated form, i.e. organizational ecology, but attack the 'original' theory from a whole different field for being misguided. Without referencing to any authoritative source, this makes some thin ice for them to be standing on. Before I address whether their doubts about the validity and adequacy of this "early view of Darwinism" are justified per se, I will discuss this excerpt as the scripted use of a metaphor. As such, the discussion of the development ("first it was this, later it became that") of a biological theory serves an

³⁶ Maybe not surprisingly, the word 'trope' stems from the Greek word 'tropein', also meaning 'to turn'.

important goal. Their target domain (lifecycles in organizational environment) is explained by the source domain of Darwinian evolution theory. But for twenty years before, this is not new knowledge. What is new knowledge, is that there is an increasing rate in which the successful companies of today are at risk of becoming the failures of tomorrow, which requires ambidexterity. To map this new target domain, the source domain needs to be stretched accordingly. And, even better, if the stretching of the source domain entails an improvement (i.e. punctuated equilibria instead of gradual evolution), then its mapping to a new target domain (ambidexterity instead of congruence and alignment) signals the presence of new knowledge. To conclude, Tushman and O'Reilly first claim a theoretical improvement in the source domain and appropriate its boosted legitimacy by using it as a new metaphor.

Does the ice hold? Is the old version of the Darwinian theory really inadequate? And is the punctuated equilibrium theory an improvement according to the experts? In my opinion, not as much as Tushman and O'Reilly want us to believe. The punctuated equilibrium theory was developed by Gould and Eldredge, who contrasted their theory of discontinuous evolution to a theory proposing continuous, gradual evolution, called phyletic gradualism. Famous evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins argued that this gradual version of evolutionary biology is unfairly ascribed to Darwin, and used mainly by Gould and Eldredge to juxtapose their work, thus without discarding Darwin's original theory. Indeed, Gould has been criticized by his some of his peers for popularizing his theory with the general public, using very colorful ("lithe, apt and often funny prose") but less accurate rhetorics and metaphors, causing other fields – and popular opinion - to adopt a rather liberal view of their theory. Thus, put by Scott who linguistically analyzed Gould's writings and their effect on popularization of his scientific work: "Gould's critics, many of them evolutionary biologists, claim that this virtuosity of style lends unwonted credence to the content of his writing, most particularly, to his theory of punctuated equilibrium" (Scott, 2007, p. 121). Maybe, the texts by non-specialists Tushman and O'Reilly are proof of this.

A second excerpt that is revealing at closer inspection is from the publication of Eisenhardt et al (2010).

"Several views examine how leaders resolve the tension between efficiency and flexibility. One view emphasizes ambidexterity. [...] "In contrast, a second view emphasizes semi-structures. Unlike the ambidexterity perspective, which highlights separation, semi-structures emphasize simultaneity by embracing both efficiency and flexibility" [...] "But while some authors argue that the ambidexterity and semi-structures perspectives are distinct, our view is that they actually converge on three core theoretical arguments [...]" P. 1264

The Evolution script that is used, revolves around creating coherence between the knowledge product at hand and existing knowledge (research), that first needs to be reinterpreted. The reinterpretation follows after two existing theoretical perspectives are first dichotomized (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). This dichotomy, signaled by the words "one view", "in contrast", and "second view" creates a picture of discord or a "confused body of research and group of researchers" (p. 1038). Obviously, for which the new insights of Eisenhardt et al will provide a solution. The solution hinges on a rejoinder solving the created dichotomy, based on the commonality of the concepts of "efficiency and flexibility", which are explicitly ascribed to both views. As I will discuss next, it is my view that both the dichotomy and the rejoinder are based on rather liberal interpretations of previous literature on organizational ambidexterity, specifically of the publication by Tushman and O'Reilly (1996).

First, Eisenhardt et al. base the dichotomy on the proposed solutions for organizational tensions by the two different streams of research;

"In contrast, a second view emphasizes semi-structures. Unlike the ambidexterity perspective, which highlights separation, semi-structures emphasize simultaneity by embracing both efficiency and flexibility" P. 1264, emphasis in original text.

In presenting this "ambidexterity perspective", Eisenhardt et al. cite Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) twice. Interestingly, table 3 reveals Tushman and O'Reilly never use the metaphor 'separation', whereas they do use the metaphor 'simultaneous'. Recall their extensive description of the metaphor of juggling. This leaves us wondering if Eisenhardt et al.'s claim about what the ambidexterity perspective emphasizes is accurate.³⁷ In their later publication, O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) discuss the confusion caused by the conceptual stretching of organizational ambidexterity, pointing in the same direction: "although the original concept of organizational ambidexterity was used to characterize the tensions associated with exploration and exploitation, others (e.g. Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004) have redefined it to include more general concepts [...] (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013, p. 331).

Regarding the second step in their rhetorical strategy, the rejoinder, Eisenhardt et al. claim the concepts of "efficiency and flexibility" are central themes in both streams of research, supported by citing Tushman and O'Reilly (1996). Again, this is not supported by the analysis of as presented in table 3. The metaphors 'efficiency' and 'flexibility' are used only twice, even less than 'simultaneous', indicating this is not a central theme in their publication. This makes the insights on which Eisenhardt et al. build the contribution of their new knowledge product seem a bit construed, both the set-up and the knock-down.

³⁷ More publications on ambidexterity are cited by Eisenhardt et al. in this section describing the ambidexterity perspective, but none of them are also in my sample as they received not as much citations as Tushman and O'Reilly (1996).

Rhetorical techniques of Opposition and Co-existence with regard to paradox

If paradox plays no significant part in the scripted construction of the contribution of the field, does it play a role in the scripted creation of interest in the concept of organizational ambidexterity in general? In other words, are the rhetorical techniques as proposed by Davis present in the sampled texts when conveying paradox? The textual analysis shows that not all publications appropriate the trope of paradox, constructed through either Opposition or Co-existence. See table 5. Also, some articles use the word paradox when citing earlier studies, without really (re)constructing those paradoxes (e.g. O'Reilly and Tushman, p 325, 332). Those are left out of the selection.

Table 5 – Interest created by paradox through rhetorical techniques like Opposition or Co-existence

Article	Text	Opposition or Co-existence
March (1991)	-	-
Tushman & O'Reilly (1996)	"The real test of leadership, then, is to be able to compete successfully by both increasing the alignment or fit among strategy, structure, culture, and processes, while simultaneously preparing for the inevitable revolutions required by discontinuous environmental change. This requires organizational and management skills to compete in a mature market (where cost, efficiency, and incremental innovation are key) and to develop new products and services (where radical innovation, speed, and flexibility are critical). A focus on either one of these skill sets is conceptually easy. Unfortunately, focusing on only one guarantees short-term success but long-term failure. Managers need to be able to do both at the same time, that is, they need to be ambidextrous. Juggling provides a metaphor. A juggler who is very good at manipulating a single ball is not interesting. It is only when the juggler can handle multiple balls at one time that his or her skill is respected" P. 12.	Co-existence: what seem to be phenomena (exploration and exploitation) which cannot exist together (trade-off), are in reality phenomena which can exist together (ambidexterity)
	"When done effectively, evolutionary change of this sort is a crucial part of short-term success. But there is a dark side to this success. [...] Older, larger firms develop structural and cultural inertia [...] the paradox of success". P. 18	Opposition; supposedly oppositional phenomena (a culture that is key to success and a culture that causes failure) are in reality very similar
	"[...] organizational culture is a key to both short-term success and, unless managed correctly, long-term failure" P. 23	Opposition; supposedly oppositional phenomena (learning and getting killed) are in reality very similar
Gibson & Birkinshaw (2004)	"The bottom-line is that ambidextrous organizations learn by the same mechanism that some kills successful firms: variation, selection, and retention" p. 27	Opposition; supposedly oppositional phenomena (learning and getting killed) are in reality very similar
	"The simple idea behind the value of ambidexterity is that the demands on an organization in its task environment are always to some degree in conflict [...] so there are always trade-offs to be made. Although these trade-offs can never be entirely eliminated, the most successful organizations reconcile them to a large degree." [...] "Increasingly, however, organizational scholars have recognized the importance of simultaneously balancing seemingly contradictory tensions and have begun to shift their focus from trade-off (either/or) to paradoxical (both/and) thinking." P. 209	Co-existence: what seem to be phenomena (exploration and exploitation) which cannot exist together (trade-off), are in reality phenomena which can exist together (reconciled through paradoxical thinking)
	"Solutions to this predicament may include acceptance of the dual tensions or confrontation of the tensions, yet several authors have argued that the most powerful approach involves transcendence: the perception of opposites as instead complementary and interwoven" P. 212	Co-existence: what seem to be phenomena (exploration and exploitation) which cannot exist together (trade-off), are in reality phenomena which can exist together (reconciled through paradoxical thinking)
	"First, there does not seem to be a trade-off between alignment and adaptability, whereby one is sacrificed for the other" [...] "In general, this supports the recent focus on a paradoxical approach to management, as opposed to an "either/or" focus. P. 221	Co-existence: what seem to be phenomena (exploration and exploitation) which cannot exist together (trade-off), are in reality phenomena which can exist together (reconciled through paradoxical thinking)

He & Wong (2004)	"In sum, exploration and exploitation are fundamentally different logics that create tensions. They compete for firms' scarce resources, resulting in the need for firms to manage the trade-offs between the two. However, there may be a synergistic effect between the two as well, and hence there is a need for firms to manage the balance between the two." P. 482	Co-existence: what seem to be phenomena (exploration and exploitation) which cannot exist together (fundamentally different, trade-off), are in reality phenomena which can exist together (synergistic effect as well)
Jansen et al (2006)	-	-
Fang et al (2010)	-	-
Eisenhardt et al (2010)	"First, we describe how leaders achieve balance between efficiency and flexibility by unbalancing (emphasis in original) to counter the tendency of organizations to become more structured as they age and grow." P. 1265	Opposition; supposedly oppositional phenomena (balance and unbalancing) are in reality very similar (balance is achieved by unbalance)
O'Reilly & Tushman (2013)	-	-

Although the excerpts differ substantially from those in Table 4, a similar pattern emerges. First, March's publication does not specifically trigger the interest of its audience through the use of paradox. Indeed, he describes exploration and exploitation as organizational concepts that, although they can create tensions, are both beneficial, and subsequently, the inherent trade-off needs to be balanced. But nowhere in his texts, March presents a line of reasoning that first leads the reader to believe one argument, only to be put on the wrong foot when confronted with the simultaneous validity of a conflicting argument. In the same contrast regarding the used scripts (Table 4), Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) are much less restrained than March in constructing paradox. Moreover, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) not only construct paradox, they also explicate the constructs as being "paradoxical" or "both/and thinking". In doing so, they propose their theory to go beyond ("transcend") the notion of merely balancing the trade-off. A possible explanation for this, is the influential article by Lewis who describes a framework clarifying organizational tensions and their paradoxical appearance (Lewis, 2000). Gibson and Birkinshaw actively integrate this theory of paradox into the developing stream of research on organizational ambidexterity. Perhaps, their construction of paradox is slightly different from that of Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) with regards to its purpose. Gibson and Birkinshaw integrate, legitimize and validate a new, more transcending approach to the tensions and trade-off between exploration and exploitation, whereas Tushman and O'Reilly use paradox – through Opposition and Co-existence – more as a rhetorical technique to catch the audience's interest. Eisenhardt et al (2010) also give us an example of such a technique; they state organizational ambidexterity is about "balancing by unbalancing", thus inviting the readers to focus their attention to what comes next. Or re-reading the previous sections, if they do not understand why they did not see this 'turn' coming.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

Answering the first research question, the structural metaphor analysis shows that conceptions of ambidexterity or exploration and exploitation are 'bricolaged' and made of different root metaphorical categories. Moreover, the composition (e.g. more systems, less machines) varies between different theorists, making the diversified use of metaphors conducive to conceptual ambiguity ("a management Rorschach test"). As is discussed in the literature review on theory building, this conceptual ambiguity entails a risk of non-falsifiability. The other side of this coin is that theories based on 'bricolaged' metaphors are possibly endowed with a certain adaptive quality, because of these possible extensions. In turn, this will – to stay within the root metaphorical category – enhance the longevity of the theory of organizational ambidexterity. In addition to what is known about the role of metaphors creating conceptual ambiguity, it is my point here that a high level of bricolage of constituting metaphors adds to the lifespan of a theory, not just creating legitimacy at the moment of publication (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011).

In answering the second research question, I conclude that the foundational publications on organizational ambidexterity show a differentiated occurrence of epistemic scripts. Use the script of Evolution by which mainly coherence is structured between existing knowledge and new knowledge becomes more slightly more dominant as the publications are of later date. This confirms the expected differentiation, based in the literature review. However, three important exceptions to this general pattern are revealed. First, the meta-study of O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) uses scripts different from Evolution, Differentiation or Bricolage. I suggest that this is caused by epistemological difference inherent to meta-studies. Second, is the use of the Evolution script in the oldest, most cited article in the sample. Contrary to what was expected from the literature, specifically the research of Locke and Golden-Biddle, the presumed forefather of the literature on organizational ambidexterity did not use the script of Differentiation. The use of the Bricolage script in presenting a new knowledge product and its contribution is the third exception to the general pattern. Boxenbaum and Rouleau argued that such explicit use of Bricolage (unlike the implicit use revealed by re-assembled metaphors), at the time of the first publications on organizational institutionalism did not carry enough legitimacy in the eyes of the journal's editors and audiences (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). Moreover, irrespective of the epistemological script used, in some instances the underlying rhetorical techniques or strategies reveal the stretching characteristics of (root) metaphors due to their conceptual openness, and how they can be stretched into being of rhetoric use as part of a certain script. As a last remark, it is worth mentioning that the trope of paradox appears to play no significant part in the epistemic

scripts that are used to relate to or juxtapose with the new knowledge product to existing knowledge.

Regarding the third research question, the analysis shows that only few articles from the sample contain paradoxes constructed by rhetorical techniques proposed by Davis, like Opposition or Co-existence (Table 5). Moreover, where these techniques are used, they appear not to be part of the Differentiation script regarding the presentation of the theory as a new knowledge product. However, some similar patterns emerge between the use of these scripts on the one hand (table 4) and the use of the rhetorical techniques on the other (table 5). In both analyses, two articles appear to stand out. First, March's article – contrary to what was expected based on previous literature – does not use the script of Differentiation, nor does it create interest specifically through the use of paradox. Contrastingly, Tushman and O'Reilly's publication does use the script of Differentiation, whereby breaking away from existing knowledge, and does use paradox as a technique, harnessing interest from its audience. Indeed, the style and form of their article appears more unorthodox compared to the other articles in the sample.

In conclusion, the theory of organizational ambidexterity builds on a variety of metaphorical concepts borrowed from other theories, in turn borrowed from other fields. Although March's publication has laid important groundwork, the publication by Tushman and O'Reilly some years later actually created a distinct stream of research by breaking away from existing theories. In general, different mixes of metaphorical categories reveal the predisposition of the authors. And although the eclectic bricolage script appears to be helpful in creating legitimacy, it also induces conceptual openness of key elements. Thus, possibly leading to an idiosyncratic panacea for a disparate array of organizational challenges, detrimental to its legitimacy. Undoubtedly a successful and interesting theory, the analyzed publications on organizational ambidexterity use paradox to gain interest only to a limited extent. Again, Tushman and O'Reilly's early publication prove the exception to this general rule. Regarding the used scripts during different periods in the existence of the theory, the analysis indicates that as the theory on organizational ambidexterity matures, the Differentiation scripts is less frequently used.

As such, the contribution to the existing literature on theory building is threefold. First, the proposition made by Boxenbaum and Rouleau about the conceptual bricolage is confirmed based in the publications on organizational ambidexterity. Second, a similar proposition about the differentiated use of scripts during the lifecycle of a theory is also confirmed. Third, the intuitively expected widespread use of rhetorical techniques specifically aimed at constructing paradox cannot be supported conclusively by the textual evidence found in the articles.

Moreover, in the review of the literature, I provided some insights into the discursive dialectics of the field of OMT and suggested an alternative to Morgan's current textbook version of visual metaphor for metaphors. In the discussion of the analyses, I shed some extra light on the risks of borrowing metaphorical concepts from other fields or conceptual stretching.

Regarding the extant knowledge on organizational ambidexterity, the contributions are humble. Comparable to the contribution of Andriessen and Gubbins to the theoretical domain of social capital, my contribution possibly helps creating a better understanding of the recent debates about the lack of conceptual clarity of the core concepts of exploration, exploitation and ambidexterity (Lavie et al., 2010; Nosella et al., 2012; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). The structural metaphor analysis shows the differences in conceiving these core concepts, but also reveals the underlying personal preferences of the theorists, making a plea for more literal definitions questionable. According to Andriessen and Gubbins, "the debate about the nature and definition of the [...] concept is in part about finding the most appropriate and complete metaphors [...]". The debate, they continue, "should not be about what definition of a theoretical concept best reflects reality, but which metaphors are more apt than others, given the purpose of the theorizing". As I hope to have shown, these 'purposes' are more often particular and personal, than general and objective.

This thesis never claimed to try to find the silver bullet for creating successful theories or resonating publications. It did aim to contribute to understanding why certain theories and their foundational articles are built in the way that they are built. In this, I examined, combined, and tested some of the ephemeral generalities that exist in the meta-literature on theory building. Better put by Barley:

"I know of no scholars who can will themselves to write interesting papers. I also doubt that anyone can tell us how to write a paper that others will find interesting, although many scholars can teach us to write well. The most any scholar can do is describe the broad attributes of the papers that he or she has found interesting and then provide examples." (Barley, 2006, p. 16)

Implications for the literature on theory building

A major concern of these "broad attributes" put forth in this paper, are the scripts and techniques used by theorists to be the same-but-different compared to other theorists flooding the field of OMT with competing theories. In general, my analysis of the foundational articles on organizational ambidexterity and its underlying concepts of exploration and exploitation, is in line with apparently time-honored views regarding

conceptual ambiguity, metaphors, and the need to be interesting. More than 30 years ago, Astley already stipulated that “ambiguous language allows researchers to “talk past one another” (Frost and Morgan, 1983: 220) and yet talk to each other.” (Astley, 1985, p. 501). And that a certain level of differentiation with existing knowledge is helpful in creating impact: “nothing captivates interest more than iconoclasm” (p. 503).

If we consider citations to be a proxy for impact and interestingness, March’s publication stands out from the rest of the publications in the sample. The most ‘iconoclastic’ publication however, is the ‘citational runner up’ in the sample, the publication by Tushman and O’Reilly (1996). The scripts and rhetorical techniques applied to metaphors and paradox indeed position their article as iconoclastic, criticizing and breaking away from existing knowledge. However, citations scores of March’s publication’s show that – given the validity of the citations proxy – iconoclastic scripts and techniques are not the only ways to create interest and impact. A somewhat similar conclusion was reached by Locke and Golden-Biddle when they matched their findings with the propositions made by Davis (M. S. Davis, 1971) regarding the techniques creating interest. They also found that only a part of the articles that reached publication by ASQ or AMJ used techniques as proposed by Davis, and wondered if all the other publication then were uninteresting and unimportant (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997).

I suggest three possible explanations for this. First, unlike the *communis opinio*, a theory’s interestingness is an important but not necessary condition for its impact and success. Perhaps, several important theories were not baptized by fire, but gently evolved into distinct schools of thought. Second, it may take only one publication to break away from existing knowledge, creating enough interest in a new theory for all subsequent publications on that theory who then feed off of. This explanation would fit my analysis of the publications on organizational ambidexterity. A third explanation is that the citation score does not provide a good measure for interestingness. Maybe, socializing processes like ‘ceremonial citation’ play a more important role than cognitive processes (that’s interesting!) in citations. Or maybe, finding a theory or publication interesting, does not automatically call for approving citations. Consider Barley’s analogy between theories and music;

“There is a second similarity between academic papers and rock and roll bands. One might think that finding a band’s music interesting would be synonymous with liking it, but we all know better. For me, at least, King Crimson, Nirvana, and Primus are quite interesting, and I appreciate what they are (or were) trying to do. But I do not like them! I own one CD by each band; I’ve listened to each CD just once; and I have no intention of acquiring more music by any of them. On the other hand, I possess hundreds of recordings of Grateful Dead concerts as well as every album and CD the Dead ever cut (in some cases, multiple copies). [...] Yet I

never think of the Dead as being interesting. The Dead and I are way beyond that! So it is with academics." (Barley, 2006, p. 501)

Implications regarding the use of epistemological scripts and rhetorical techniques

During my analysis of the epistemic scripts of Differentiation and Evolution, highlighting and categorizing certain acts, some possible misinterpretations of the framework of Locke and Golden-Biddle by Boxenbaum and Rouleau became apparent. Boxenbaum and Rouleau first equal the Evolution and Differentiation scripts with the respective processes of Constructing Coherence and Problematizing, as purported by Locke and Golden-Biddle. Then they argue, that regarding a specific phase, theorizing authors implicitly choose one script; "Since the scripts of evolution and differentiation carry a higher academic legitimacy in organizational theory than does the script of bricolage, scholars are likely to spontaneously choose one of the two former scripts" (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011, p. 288 emphasis added). Although their findings of the use of scripts in the articles on organizational institutionalism are somewhat mixed, the scripts of Evolution and Differentiation are framed as alternatives; "The early texts are dominated by a differentiation scripts, whereas the later texts favor the script of evolution." (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011, p. 286). But this is not the thrust of the work of Locke and Golden-Biddle, who state that their "first process" of Constructing Coherence and the "second process" of Problematizing are always found is a combination of the two, without one being more 'dominant' than the other. All articles are mapped on a 3X3 matrix, explicating the inherent interdependency of the two processes.³⁸ In conclusion, it is my point that Boxenbaum and Rouleau were misguided in equaling the scripts of Evolution and Differentiation to both processes of Locke and Golden-Biddle. A combination of both frameworks is insightful, however a different mapping would be more accurate. I propose Evolution and Differentiation are both extremes on a continuum in what is described by Locke and Golden-Biddle as the problematizing process, Table 6, upper row.

³⁸ Noteworthy maybe the categorization of two articles by Barley, whose work was considered most interesting by the board of ASQ. Both articles by him in the sample of Locke and Golden-Biddle problematized existing research as being incommensurable. Although not enough to base any conclusions on, it is consistent with the notion portrayed by Table 6 that this specific rhetoric act, part of a differentiation script, creates interest.

Table 6 – Rhetorical strategies re-categorized

B&R:	Evolution			Evolution <-----> Differentiation		
L&G-B:	Constructing Coherence			Problematizing		
Textual acts:	Synthesized coherence	Progressive coherence	Non-coherence	Incompleteness	Inadequacy	Incommensurability
	Formulate general ideas; Construct congruent relationships; Demonstrate latent consensus	Construct cumulative progress; Construct consensus among researchers	Construct discord among researchers	Specify gaps	Illuminate oversights	Advocate for alternative thesis

Based on Locke & Golden-Biddle (1997)

Implications for method

As mentioned before, I tried to replicate the method used by Boxenbaum and Rouleau as much as possible. The studies on which they base their methodological approach (Locke & Golden-Biddle, and Andriessen & Gubbins) provide much more insight and detail in how the researchers actually arrived at certain qualifications or categorizations of metaphors, for instance. Although the highly interpretative character of this type of analysis is widely recognized, it is mainly with respect to the assessment of non-literal term A is part of root-metaphor B. With regard to the steps prior to this assessment, the selection of relevant excerpts and the subsequent identification of the actual metaphors, the literature is less clear. This makes comparisons between the outcomes of their research on the foundational articles of organizational institutionalism, and the present articles on organizational ambidexterity tentative. The construction of a lexicon of (root) metaphors, although helpful in standardizing part of the analytical method, would defy the epistemological context of the structural metaphor analysis. Indeed, metaphors are all about interpretation. And although these interpretations appear to be shared to some extent among incumbents of a common 'language game', in essence they are purely an individual act of sensemaking. My suggestion here would be to provide as much reflection and articulation of the cognitive processes and predispositions of the researcher.

Limitations

The interpretative, hermeneutic character of my analysis - although it might fit the subject and its researcher - has some certain important limitations. First, interpretations are dependent of a location in space and time. Thus, the analysis is the result of my personal interpretations at a particular moment. Other interpretative linguistic studies have partially

mitigated this limitation by letting the analysis be a result of at least two interpreters. My analysis is the product of a priori lists and frameworks combined with a posteriori extensions to those lists and frameworks. This cautions any absolute inference because “rather than leading the parade and showing the way to understanding, explanation follows behind, sweeping up the refuse into neat piles which make for easy pick-up, but in their very organization, leave a misleading trail of what went before” (Sandelands, 1990, p. 243).

Some experience in a particular ‘language game’ is even considered beneficial. As Schmitt puts with regard to structural metaphor analysis, it “cannot work without previous socialization in the language and environment in general and, in particular, without field experience gained prior to or during the course of research. The “Vermögen” (“fund of knowledge”) the researcher has is a vital part of the process” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 383). Thus, although adhering to current methods and standards, the results obviously reflect – at least in part – my personal views and accumulated experience and educational background.

Regarding the sample, other limitations emerge. Conclusions regarding the theory of organizational ambidexterity are based on a sample of eight publications. In order to create a stratified sample, only the two or three publications with the highest citation scores per period were selected.³⁹ This excludes some highly-cited articles that would have been included without the periodic stratification. Conclusions regarding management theories in general are to be viewed with some caution as well, as my analysis is based on one case. Although some parts of the analysis confirm propositions based on other case studies, certain explanations require further research.

Further Research

There are many topics that call for further research on theory building, of which I will discuss some. First, addressing one of the suggested explanations regarding the variation between scripts and paradox used by the two highest cited articles in the sample, the proposition that each distinct school of knowledge has one seminal, trailblazing article. Does such a publication, like that of Tushman and O’Reilly’s, deploy a similar combination of Differentiation scripts and rhetorical constructed paradox? And is bifurcation or dichotomizing of an existing theory an antecedent of such a publication? A second topic is the interaction between a publication’s legitimacy and interestingness. In the integrative model presented at the end of the literature review, I visualized legitimacy and interestingness as two mutually exclusive concepts. This presupposes that very legitimate articles are not interesting, and vice versa. But if interestingness is becoming a legitimate aim of a publication, as is suggested by the literature review, their dichotomy may be false.

³⁹ Structural metaphor research by Boxenbaum & Rouleau and Andriessen & Gubbins is based on a sample of 5 and 3 publications respectively.

This interaction between literature on institutionalism (and institutional change) and cognitive linguistics may prove an interesting subject of inquiry.

Similarities between organizational ambidexterity and theory building

A last subject for further research, requiring separate discussion, I refer to as a 'strange loop' between theories of OMT and the meta-theory on theory building. It combines insights from the literature review, the analysis, and the methodological limitations, but as such is too speculative to appear as a conclusion.

Regarding the aspect of interpretative, linguistic research constituting theories on theory building, the hermeneutic circle, or 'loop' is discussed by Cornelissen et al.:

"The primary limitation is one shared by most linguistic research, namely, the problem of making conclusions about phenomena based on the analysts' own motivated explanations. Psychologists have often argued that there is some circularity in how cognitive linguists argue for the psychological reality of conceptual metaphors (Murphy, 1996, 1997). Thus, trying to infer aspects of conceptual knowledge from an analysis of systematic patterns of linguistic structure results in theories that seem post hoc." (Cornelissen et al., 2005, p. 1572)

I argue that this circle or loop is not only manifest in linguistic research, but in other reflexive forms of research on theory building as well. As I mentioned before, in several instances the researcher of theory building imposes or imports a framework developed in the subject into the meta-subject. For example, Boxenbaum and Rouleau discuss the legitimacy (meta-subject) of a theory about legitimacy (subject). In a similar circular fashion, March applied his exploration and exploitation framework (March, 1991) in a later research on the organizations research community (March, 2005). So, in a way it makes sense that ducks will see a duck, rabbits will see a rabbit⁴⁰, and a hand will draw a hand⁴¹.

When analyzing publications on organizational ambidexterity required by (paradoxical) tensions between exploration and innovation, between improving what is known and exploring the unknown, this becomes a humming mantra in the back of one's mind. This knowledge about organizational ambidexterity then imposes itself when reading and thinking about theory building. Consider the following excerpts from articles that were discussed in the literature review on theory building:

"As McKinley, Mone and Moon (1999) proposed, theories should demonstrate both novelty and continuity; they must differ from and at the same time be connected to

⁴⁰ This refers to the famous drawing of what can be seen simultaneously as either a duck or a rabbit

⁴¹ This refers to the picture covering this thesis, also discussed by Hofstadter.

the established literature in order to be seen as meaningful (Alvesson & Sandberg). But in making the connection, can we also be truly novel?" (Suddaby et al., 2011, p. 240)

Or, almost mirroring the differentiation of structural ambidexterity from contextual ambidexterity, Elsbach et al. (Elsbach et al., 1999) wonder if a multi-paradigm approach is easier obtained by single theorists specially trained in combining opposing paradigms, or if teams of researchers should be staffed heterogeneously, each member bringing a different paradigm;

"is it harder to [...] training scholars in dualistic, paradoxical thinking strategies or by enhancing their skills in transforming destructive theoretical diatribes [...] into constructive theoretical discourse?" (Elsbach et al., 1999, p. 629).

In a comparable way, Sutton and Staw describe a successful theorist as someone who can simultaneously achieve high standards of theory and empirical research. These, they claim, are 'tradeoffs' and their "contradictory requirements can only be captured by phrases such as "disciplined imagination" (Weick, 1989)" (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 379). This leaves the goal of combining an interesting theory with rigorous research a paradoxical or "quixotic adventure" for most theorists. Again, akin to organizational ambidexterity, a solution to this puzzle proposed by Sutton and Staw is creating research teams with complementary skills, breaking the tradeoff.

In sum, this last suggestion for further research is to try to map the insights from the concept of organizational ambidexterity on the concept of theory building, and vice versa, thus creating a 'strange loop'. For instance, can the research on contextual ambidexterity successfully inform the context of budding theorists? Conversely, can an institutionalized script approach inform the routines of explorative and exploitative innovation?

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