

Challenging Organisations and Society

reflective hybrids®

Elaborating the Theory – Practice Space: Professional Competence in Science, Therapy, Consulting and Education

Editors: Ilse Schritteser & Maria Spindler

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Journal “Challenging Organisations and Society . reflective hybrids® (COS)”

COS is the first journal to be dedicated to the rapidly growing requirements of reflective hybrids in our complex 21st-century organisations and society. Its international and multidisciplinary approaches balance theory and practice and show a wide range of perspectives in and between organisations and society. Being global and diverse in thinking and acting outside the box are the targets for its authors and readers in management, consulting and science.

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email: m.spindler@cos-journal.com

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Ilse Schrittmesser and Maria Spindler

Editorial

Between and Beyond Theory and Practice

The question of how individuals and collectives learn and develop competences for professional growth and success in a wide range of professions has become a key topic of debate in recent years. The notion that successful professional practice is achieved only by learning relevant theoretical knowledge ignores the crucial action component, while learning focused solely on practice leaves out the important theory component. Therefore, while some call for a theoretical orientation, and others suggest that “practice makes perfect”, we argue that sound theory tested in practice, and practical decisions examined on the basis of research-based theory, create “actionable knowledge”. In this way, professionals combine and integrate theory and practice to develop practical solutions to real world problems. Professionals nowadays work in conditions of uncertainty where success is determined by assessment of the situation and customization of actions, rather than by the application of routine or technical solutions. Accordingly, professionals are expected to be flexible, capable and immediately able to respond effectively to situations that are of high importance to individuals and society. They are expected to develop a type of hybrid expertise in their field, which allows them both to base their decisions on solid academic knowledge and to respond effectively to critical situations. The present issue of COS presents a variety of approaches to this topic from a range of different professional fields such as consulting, business and teaching.

Ilse Schrittmesser’s article starts off with a general discussion on what the theory-practice space may offer to professionals when viewed as a prolific resource of innovation and knowledge creation. She examines the recent trend in which a focus on theory seems to be becoming more and more obsolete in professional fields and a philosophy of “what works” appears instead to be assuming prominence. According to Schrittmesser, the reasons for this change of mind might be that the complexities and challenges of

a fast-changing world are shattering the belief in the traditional research-to-practice model and that there is a desire for quick, short-term effects as opposed to long-term theoretical visions. However, practice as applied theory, it is argued, is indeed an over-simplification of the relation between theory and practice, and the same goes for the “what works” approach. Practice theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens have offered a way out of the dilemma by translating the objectivist-subjectivist dichotomy into a dialectical pattern in which theoretical concepts and practical findings should inspire one another. A fruitful relationship between theory and practice is particularly crucial in the professions, and Schritteser argues and proposes a case-orientated approach both in professional education and in professional work. In this approach, theory represents the conceptual foundation which helps to test and justify professional interventions, while the practical case and its specific characteristics feed theory with new knowledge and help to validate its reliability.

Ruth Lerchster and Gary Wagenheim present a pilot project that aims at examining business succession in family business systems by introducing a research-practice interdisciplinary partnership in family business systems. The “elephants in the room” addressed in the title of their article are the taboo topics – the “undiscussables” – that represent crucial issues in the course of a business handover from the older to the younger generation. Theory is used as a source for meta-reflection. As practitioners become co-producers of knowledge, collective theories are created, taking both research-based knowledge and practical wisdom into account. Cooperative reflection, in this way, brings assumptions (the above mentioned “undiscussables” or “elephants”) to the surface where they can be openly dealt with. Seen from this perspective, theory is offered to practice as a way of making the elephants visible and rendering taboos accessible, with the aim of creating new, actionable knowledge and helping the actors to move forward. The authors conclude, for example, that the story-telling interview method represents an intervention through which new data is created whose analysis will trigger off a learning loop for the members of the system.

Tom Brown's article addresses the observation that business school graduates seem to be very capable of working with the abstract knowledge in texts, charts, diagrams or mathematical symbols but are not well prepared when confronted with ill-defined, ambiguous real-world problems. As the latter are more likely to be encountered in modern-day economic practice, Brown has developed a concept for his business ethics classes based on Boisot's I-Space model, a concept that helps students to deal with the messiness of practice in a "zone of overlap" between formalised theory and practical wisdom. The model represents an organisational learning cycle by distinguishing different types of knowledge that affect business decisions and, through this, aims at a detailed analysis and evaluation of information flows in an enterprise. Brown concentrates his discussion on the so-called E-Space – the epistemological dimension of knowledge – and demonstrates how he tries to sensitise his students to the gap between intuition and formal knowledge and their respective influence on information flows.

Matthijs Koopmans discusses the rationale and benefits of large-scale experimental studies in education, an approach which has been widely used for policy decisions in the United States in the last ten to fifteen years. Both practitioners and policy-makers alike were supposed to profit from these developments by being offered sound instruments for their decisions on effective interventions. Koopmans argues that while large-scale experimental studies do offer some benefits for the advancement of the education system, they also pose some challenges. The complexity of educational interventions, which seems to be reduced to simple causal relationships by large-scale studies, is one such challenge. Accordingly, the relationship between intervention and outcomes is not one-dimensional, as randomised control designs would seem to imply. Empirical studies which focus on the processes of transformation rather than solely on outcomes are therefore necessary since the specificity of classroom processes challenges the regularity of cause and effect insinuated by large-scale experiments. For this reason, the field would benefit from a more extensive use of single-case designs which study in detail such aspects as individual learning trajectories or the interactive processes

in a classroom over a given period of time or which document the implementation of an intervention in all its complexity. Koopmans concludes that while large-scale studies can provide an evidence-based general overview of what works in education, a repository of single-case studies might enhance our qualitative knowledge of the complex dynamics of particular interventions and provide detailed descriptions that add to the granularity of what we understand by evidence-based knowledge.

In Erna Nairz-Wirth's and Klaus Feldmann's paper, the necessity of a further professionalization of teaching is discussed on the basis of empirical findings obtained from a study of teachers, head teachers and school drop-outs in Austria. A new concept of teacher professionalism seems to emerge which underlines the role of teachers as change agents in their work with pupils, parents and other stakeholders in the school system. International studies show, however, that a culture of trust in teachers and teacher training is being increasingly replaced by control measures in several countries, e.g. England, Australia or Sweden. According to Nairz-Wirth, reforms in the Austrian school system seem to be following a similar path. Indeed, several studies indicate that, in response to these developments, many teachers now distrust proposals for reform and are hesitant in their response to any change. Nairz-Wirth argues that Bourdieu's field theory may offer an explanation for these phenomena. In Bourdieu's critical assessment of the educational field and its contribution to the reproduction of social inequalities, the fields of professions are characterised as following their own unquestioned perspective and reproducing the pertaining habitus, tradition and custom. Against this background, the findings of a long-term qualitative empirical study are presented. An interesting finding of this study is the observation that a "double field structure" seems to exist in one and the same school – a double field structure in which the field of traditional teaching approaches competes with that of more professional concepts of teaching with differing success. However, the findings of this study also show that the prevailing traditional fields are still more powerful than the emerging new professionalism. Therefore, Nairz-Wirth concludes, further and possibly different initiatives on the

part of education policy are necessary to support and stabilise new professionalism and innovation.

An artistic interpretation of the theory-practice space by the experimental artists Ruth Anderwald + Leonhard Grond rounds off the volume and directs our attention to the creative dimensions that will open up when theory and practice come together to mutually inspire and initialise innovation.

Maria Spindler concludes this issue with the contribution „Being a Unique Misfit. My Life Viewed Through the Reflective Hybrid Lens“ by telling her story as a reflective hybrid and invites other reflective hybrids to share their stories with us.

We wish you with this COS Issue 4.2. inspiring spaces, loops and solutions between and beyond theory and practice.

About the Authors

Ruth Anderwald + Leonhard Grond live and work in Vienna as an artist duo. Since 2014 their main focus has been on the artistic research project *Dizziness—A Resource*. Since 2012 they have been curating *HASENHERZ*, a screening and discussion series inspired by Arnold Schönberg's *Society for Private Musical Performances*. From 2013-2014 they worked with the writer and essayist Anna Kim on a wallpaper project. From 2003-2007 they worked on the artist book *Notizen zu einer Küste* (Notes on a Coast), combining their eponymous photo series and the first anthology of contemporary Hebrew lyric poetry ever translated into German. Their numerous exhibitions and screenings include: *What Would Seeing be Without Us?* mumok cinema - Museum of Modern Art, Foundation Ludwig, Vienna (2014); *Trees are Companions*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); *Camera Solaris*, Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv (2011) and Museum for Applied Arts, Vienna (2008); *Construction Site As Far As The Eye Can See*, Institute for Art in Public Space Styria, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz (2011); *Shattered Horizon*, Himalayas Art Museum, Shanghai (2010); *Film Centre Pompidou*, Paris (2009); *Paradise Now! — French Essential Avant-Garde Cinema (1890-2008)* Tate Modern, London (2008), *Notes on a Coast*, Herzlyia Museum of Contemporary Art (2005).

For further information and contact: www.on-dizziness.org

Tom Brown holds an MBA and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Simon Fraser University. He has an academic and practical background in communications, program development and instructional design. His research interests are located at the intersection of university teaching and business ethics with a particular interest in online education. Since 1998 he has held a variety of senior administrative positions in the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University. Currently he serves as Academic Director of the online Graduate Diploma in Business Administration and the Part-Time MBA programs and teaches business ethics at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Contact: tomb@sfu.ca

Klaus Feldmann is researcher at the Education Sciences Group at the Vienna University of Business and Economics. He was professor of sociology at the University of Hannover from 1980-2004. Since then he has designed and published qualitative studies on habitus, professionalisation and school-dropouts together with Erna Nairz-Wirth.

Matthijs Koopmans joined the faculty at Mercy College in 2011. His areas of interest are cause and effect relationships, complexity theory and quantitative single case designs. He has published papers in numerous refereed journals, and is one of the editors of *Chaos and Complexity in Psychology: The Theory of Nonlinear Dynamical Systems*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2009. His most recent research is on daily high school attendance patterns and the dynamics of school reform. He earned his doctorate at Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1988.

Ruth Erika Lerchster studies Psychology/Group Dynamics and holds a doctorate degree in Intervention Research; she is a lecturer at various universities and has been qualified to train group dynamics for the ÖGGO; she links research and science with her work as organisational consultant. Her consulting topics are leadership culture, team and organisation development and organisational learning. She works as Senior Scientist and Deputy at the Institute of Intervention Research and Cultural Sustainability. Her publications deal with intervention research, consulting, handover of family business and the reflexive use of information and communication technologies in enterprises.

For further information and contact: www.uni-klu.ac.at/iff/ikn/ and Ruth.Lerchster@aau.at

Erna Nairz-Wirth is head of the Education Sciences Group at Vienna University for Economics and Business. She earned the rank of associate professor in 2007 in the course of her habilitation (*venia docendi*) in the field of education sciences and pedagogics. She has published numerous articles in the field of sociology of education. Erna Nairz-Wirth has designed and conducted numerous qualitative and quantitative studies on inequality in

education, habitus, professionalisation and school-dropouts. She was Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge in 2013.

Ilse Schrittemser is Professor of School Research and Teacher Education at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her main fields of interest are professionalism research and teaching and learning research. She has authored numerous articles in the field of education and professionalism research. Presently, she leads a collaborative research group interested in the intersection between theory and research on the one hand and practice and policy on the other. She is executive editor of the Austrian-German-Swiss Journal of Teacher Education.

For further information and contact: homepage.univie.ac.at/ilse.schrittemser/

Maria Spindler has been an international organizational consultant for more than twenty years in economics (banking and production) and at NGOs (universities and foundations) and lectures at universities in Europe and the US. Her topics are creating future, inventing and transforming organizations, structures and leadership cultures. Maria is qualified to train the trainer for the Austrian Association for Group Dynamics & Organization Consulting and serves on their education board. Her books deal with transformation, creating future for leadership and organizations, group dynamics, organizational consulting and research. Maria founded the COS Journal in 2011 and is its chief editor.

For further information and contact: www.maria-spindler.at.

Gary Wagenheim is adjunct management professor at the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University and Aalto University – Executive Education and former professor of organizational leadership at the School of Technology at Purdue University. His research and teaching interests are reflective practice, individual and organizational change, and organizational behavior. He owns and operates Wagenheim Advisory Group that provides corporate training, coaching and organizational development programs. Dr. Wagenheim received a Ph.D. and a M.A. in Human

and Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University, a M.B.A. in Organizational Behavior/Organizational Change and Development from Syracuse University.

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“Flow beyond Systems” is understood as the creative force of new realities for organisations and society through each of us. The lively nexus between the worlds of organised systems and individual worlds is our main focus: Individual development faces challenges and in return poses challenges to organisations and society. Growing together, step by step, requires facilitating the interplay between individuals and existing organisations and new organisational realities that are waiting to be created.

The way we lead and organise ourselves in collectives is reflected by what organisations, larger social structures and ourselves as parts thereof have become. Freedom and structure do not pre-exist in organised communities but are relationally constructed in the common space to which its (more or less) equal members bring their uniqueness and create something of (more or less) lasting value such as an organisation or larger organised structures. Leadership is momentous for supporting development and meaningful creations beyond known forms.

Reaching beyond is neither a result of will power nor sheer mental excellence, nor can it be made to happen. Such attempts tend to result in forms of mind-body splits, bringing forth unwelcome symptoms or rigid, “more-of-the-same” patterns in the relation of the body and its organised, interactional environment becoming powerful limiting patterns. Changing these realities largely depends on our ability to intentionally bring somatic intelligence to the creation of new larger structures.

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The future is an unknown garment that invites us to weave our lives into it. How these garments will fit, cover, colour, connect and suit us lies in our (collective) hands. Many garments from the past have become too tight, too grey, too something...and the call for new shapes and textures is acknowledged by many. Yet changing clothes leaves one naked, half dressed in between. Let's connect in this creative, vulnerable space and cut, weave and stitch together.

Our target group is reflective hybrids – leaders, scientists, consultants, and researchers from all over the world who dare to be and act complex. Multi-layered topics require multidimensional approaches that are, on the one hand, interdisciplinary and, on the other hand, linked to theory and practice, making the various truths and perspectives mutually useful.

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Challenging Organisations and Society . reflective hybrids®

Volume 5, Issue 1

**Title: Change in Flow: How critical incidents
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Editors: Nancy Wallis & Maria Spindler

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