

Developing Theory and Theoretical Contributions

Session 2 – The State of the Field

Prof. dr. Joep Cornelissen

Topics for today

1. The location of business and management research within the social sciences; or, when does research qualify as business and management research?
2. How can we develop novel, progressive and interesting theory?

...next session: focus on blending...

1. Recap: Theoretical Contribution

- Theoretical contribution
 - Clear audience and important gap
 - Interesting and compelling story
 - Novel falsifiable hypotheses or constructive propositions
- Theoretical development is (often) the key criterion for publication
 - Building new theory – new constructs and relationships
 - Extending existing theory – new antecedents, outcomes and contexts (not simply testing or application)

2. Recap: Framing a Contribution

What's the research gap and why important to fill?

- The gap is that specific piece of missing knowledge
- The question determines the contribution—so asking the right question is a critical first step
 - Answering the question becomes the purpose of the study.

Basics of Framing

- What is the problem?
- What does current theory tells us that may help us to solve this problem? (What do we know?)
- What does current theory not tell us? (What don't we know?)
- How will the current study attempt to fill this theory gap?

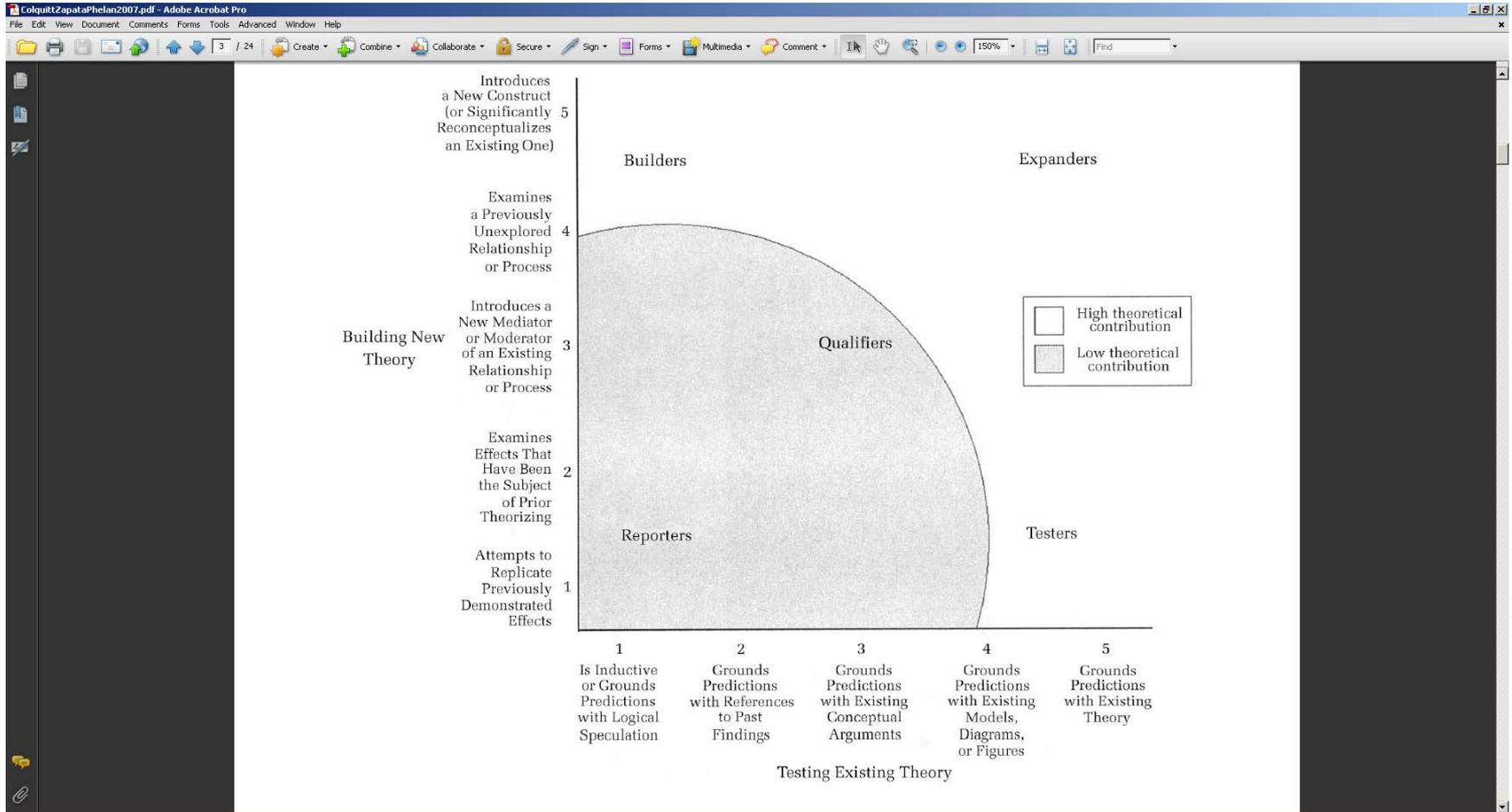
Theoretical Framing Based on Research Goals: Examples

- **Theory Generation**
 - What's the practical problem? **We lack basic understanding of process**
 - What do we know? **We know some variables**
 - What don't we know? **We don't know process**
 - How is current study going to help fill this gap? **New process theory**
- **Theory Elaboration**
 - What's the practical problem? **We lack complete understanding of process**
 - What do we know? **We have some related theories that might explain process**
 - What don't we know? **We don't know which theories best fit**
 - How is current study going to help fill this gap? **Elaborated theory**
- **Theory Testing**
 - What's the practical problem? **We don't understand variance in process**
 - What do we know? **We can predict relationships**
 - What don't we know? **We don't know strength of relationships**
 - How is current study going to help fill this gap? **Variance theory**

Soapbox!

Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007), trends in theory building and testing

Where are the new theories?



Where would you locate yourself?

Can you stretch your contribution (to make it a *high* contribution)?

3. The field of business and management

- A weakly institutionalized field: different approaches, methods, and a great variety of topics
- One-sided borrowing from other disciplines, such as economics, sociology and psychology → a lack of ‘indigenous’ theory development that might travel to other parts of the social sciences and as such will reverse the flow of theory borrowing (Markoczy & Deeds, 2009; Oswick et al., 2011; Whetten et al., 2009)
- A (rhetorical) proliferation of theories that in essence may be comparable and at times equivalent, rather than contrasting (Hillman, 2007; Leavitt et al., 2011; Tsang & Elsaesser, 2011); e.g., group value, social identity and pro-self/pro-others frameworks

Soapbox!

**Agarwal and Hoetker (2007), A
Faustian bargain**

Trade-offs

- Novelty and theoretical fetishism (Suddaby, 2014) vs. real knowledge progress
- Singular, partial explanations versus joined up “integrative” thinking (levels, assumptions, explanations)
- Proliferation of theories vs collective paradigms and research programmes

Boundary condition

The management or organizational centrality test: the degree to which the research (a) focuses on a distinct management or organizational problem, and (b) offers a management or organization-centric theoretical explanation, or *both*

oB and contextualized-B

Big-B versus Big-O: what is organizational about organizational behavior? - Heath - 2001 - Jou - Windows Internet Explorer

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/job.77/pdf

WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY Journal of Organizational Behavior
Volume 22, Issue 1, Article first published online: 13 MAR 2001
Abstract | References | Cited By

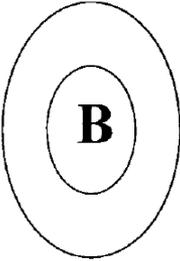
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oB

Big-B. Emphasizes interesting *behavior* that may be relevant for organizations.

Disadvantage: Doesn't satisfy *Core Competence Test*: Is this a topic on which OB researchers have unique insights that are not likely to be shared by researchers in related social science disciplines like psychology, sociology, political science or economics?



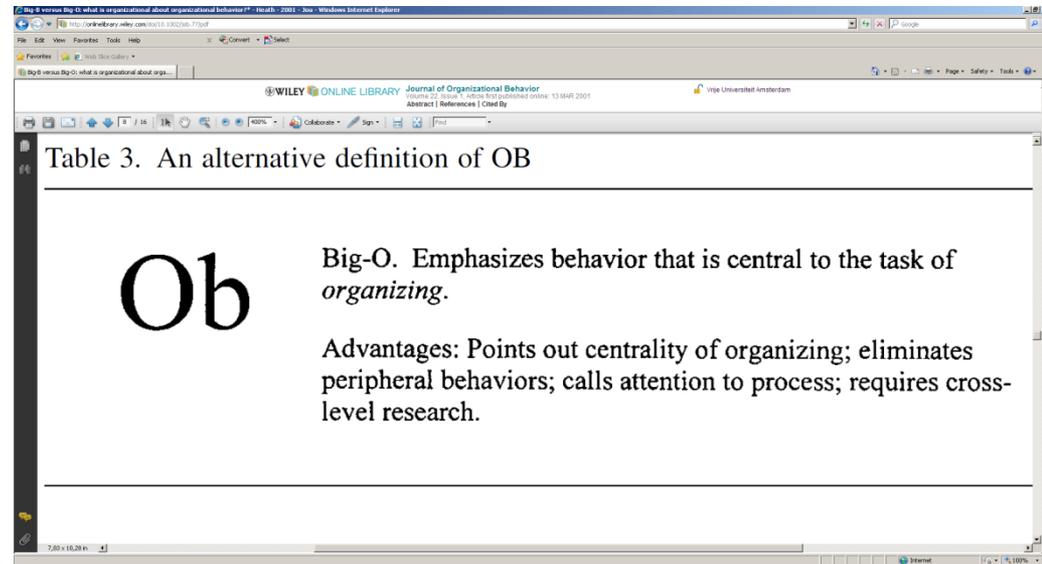
Contextualized-B. Emphasizes behavior that occurs *in an organizational context*.

Disadvantage: Doesn't satisfy *Organizational Centrality Test*: How much would we understand about organizations if we understood everything there was to know about _____? Many behaviors that occur in organizational contexts are relatively peripheral.

Done Internet 100%

What would be Ob?

- Social norms?
- Cooperation?
- Decision making?
- Communication
- Socialization?
- Leadership?
- Organizational change?
- Job/role transitions?



Exercise

- Think of it as a categorization and ask yourself the question *what is this (phenomenon/subject) a case of?*
- When you have identified the general category, then focus on the features and relations of the category: do these involve *distinct management or organizational elements?*

Case examples

Social enterprise: Dacin et al. (2011), Social entrepreneurship: A critique and future directions.

Disorders and creativity and risktaking: Cognitive disorders (e.g., ADHD, impulsivity) and entrepreneurship