

Moral responses to uncertainty: The economies of worth towards a reconceptualization of decision making and management

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Preprint, April 6, 2021

Abstract

The sizeable literature that deploys Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991, 2006) "economies of worth" model of moral cognition to study organization and management under conditions of uncertainty and value pluralism is connoted by a striking variety of interests, terminology, and theorizing approaches. This review argues for the literature's emerging cumulative cohesiveness and for its value as a source of concepts and problems for researchers exploring organizational behavior, organizational complexity, knowledge and innovation, organizational justice, and leadership. By mapping the literature onto the elements of the source model, the review induces several constructs that – though requiring integration and development – outline a distinctive conception of organization: the collective exercise of moral sense is necessarily coterminous with decision and policy making; information and formal structures and practices arise out of it, as opposed to forming its context; the core concern of management is the functionality of the socio-material networks in which it unfolds. After defining several integrative and developmental research questions and locating the roots of the literature's variety in the specificities of the economies of worth's interdisciplinary

translation, the review concludes by proposing a research approach based on four epistemological and methodological shifts that retains the model's core assumptions but moves beyond its special conceptual confines and uses more general tools.

Introduction

Organization is founded on moral cognition: the capacity of actors to evaluate formal structures, routines, plans and behaviors for coherence against alternative conceptions of the common good, and thus to stabilize or undermine them. So, succinctly, may be reported the hypothesis underlying the economies of worth, the model of “moral competence” by sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot (Boltanski, 1990; Boltanski and Thévenot 1991, 2006). This powerful insight is leveraged in a sizeable and growing organization and management studies (OMS) literature (“subject literature”) that uses the economies of worth to investigate coordination (e.g., decision, strategy and policy making; organization and work design; management control systems; organizational responses to public controversies; etc.) in conditions of uncertainty (i.e., incalculability of action outcomes; lack of references in past experience; interdependence of actor choices) (Gomez and Jones, 2000) and pluralism (i.e., co-presence of multiple cognitive and evaluative formats) (Thévenot, 2007b) under which the exercise of instrumental rationality is problematic and moral meanings take on a fundamental role.

It is not self-evident, however, that beyond this broad definition and the reference to the same model the subject literature is cohesive. As will be shown, it comprises studies at different analytical levels, on themes ranging from distributed decision making to institutional development and maintenance, recruiting the economies of worth along with theoretical stances and interests that include critical sociology, neo-institutionalism, managerial practices, and collective cognition. This variety might signify an ability to engage with multiple

paradigms and interests from a unitary and distinctive perspective, but also fragmentation and limited theoretical heft.

An evaluation is required to qualify the corpus as a resource, not only for scholars attracted by the originality and depth of the economies of worth, but also for a broader audience of researchers exploring decision making, innovation, organizational complexity, organizational justice, and leadership. For these themes in which uncertainty and pluralism are salient the economies of worth – rooted in and integral to the heterodox transdisciplinary project of the French economics of convention (Biggart and Beamish, 2003; Wilkinson, 1997) and French pragmatic sociology (Bénatouïl, 1999; Blok, 2013), with its problematization of economic rationality (e.g., classic institutionalism and game theory; Wilkinson, 1997; Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010) and deterministic social dispositions (e.g., Bourdieuan *habitus*; Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014; Dodier, 1993) – evoke the prospect of specific and realistic accounts of organization. But are such accounts offered in the subject literature? How do they link across multiple research interests? How effectively do they project and build on the insight that organization is a matter of negotiating moral intuitions and inferences?

The present review builds on and extends the constitutive and developmental work in the first comprehensive review by Jagd (2011) and the more recent map of the state of the art by Cloutier, Gond and Leca (2017). These surveys have constituted the subject literature in the first place by tracking, bringing together and organizing studies informed by different interests and objectives but similarly equipped with the economies of worth's system of multiple rationalities and processes of justification, evaluation, and critique; argued for the economies of worth's considerable, and still largely unrealized, theoretical potential; and indicated new stances and areas for research. To address questions of cohesiveness this review, after a brief recapitulation of the economies of worth's roots and positioning in the conventionalist-pragmatic project, circumscribes and presents the subject literature. This is

then mapped onto a representation of the economies of worth's epistemological, ontological, and methodological elements, showing that the usage of the model is characterized by patterns of element selection, reinterpretation, and combination with other theoretical frameworks.

The review's first contribution is to synthesize the results of these patterns and argue for the emergence of several broad constructs that, collectively, outline a distinctive conception of organization and management, but require integration and development through several general research questions. Second, the review attributes the patterns and the resulting variety of focus, terminology, and methods in the subject literature to the peculiarities of the economies of worth's interdisciplinary import and translation, which has followed not the well-travelled route of analogical inter-domain reasoning (Cornelissen and Durand, 2014; Suddaby, Hardy and Huy, 2011) but an idiosyncratic path of conceptual and methodological borrowing and repurposing. This compact case study of theorizing in OMS on the back of an imported model provides a sense of the specific problems – as well as the gains – that come with using the economies of worth. To move beyond these problems in pursuit of further conceptual development and integration, an epistemological and methodological shift is proposed: using the economies of worth not as a theorizing toolkit but as a signpost, marking a starting point in the assumption of moral competence and indicating the goal of a coherent view of organizations as dynamic phenomena (e.g., Gomez, 2006; Gomez and Jones, 2000) stabilized by satisfying a requirement of justice. Travel along this route, however, will be supported by more general tools than the economies of worth, procured from pragmatics, information theory, and social network analysis.

The economies of worth and the conventionalist-pragmatic project

To contextualize and orient the analysis, and as a primer for researchers unfamiliar with the economies of worth, this section recapitulates the model's origins and positioning.

The economies of worth are a pillar of French pragmatic sociology (Bénatouïl, 1999; Blok, 2013; Jagd, 2011), a label that, besides the formulation of the model in *De la justification: Les économies de la grandeur* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; English translation *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, 2006), covers Boltanski's and Thévenot's work building on this book (e.g., Boltanski, 1990, 2009; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2011; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 2000; Lafaye and Thévenot, 1993; Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye, 2000), as well as Actor-Network-Theory (Latour, 2007), the “symmetrical twin” of Boltanski and Thévenot's sociology of critical capacity (Guggenheim and Potthast, 2011). “Pragmatic” is a nod to linguistic pragmatics for a sociology that studies how the meaning of social arrangements is worked out in situated exchanges of speech and practical acts, and it denotes a focus on actions and actors (Jagd, 2011, p. 345; Quéré and Terzi, 2014, p. 92). The influence of American pragmatism, particularly through the mediation of Mead's and Goffman's symbolic interactionism and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, is also recognized (Blokker and Brighenti, 2011, p. 398; Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014, p. 570; Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010, p. 2; Frère and Jaster, 2019).

Common interests – socio-economic action in conditions of uncertainty; transcending the micro-macro methodological dichotomy in the social sciences; and the construction of coordination by competent actors – link French pragmatic sociology and the “heterodox” French conventions school, or “economics of convention” (Biggart and Beamish, 2003, p. 455). Without this transdisciplinary exchange *De la justification* “must be a miraculous work in the field of pragmatic culturalist sociology” (Diaz-Bone, 2014, p. 326). Jagd (2007) lists the book among the fundamental contributions of the conventionalist field itself.

The economics of convention constitutes a critique of economic rationality theories such as game theory and institutional economics (Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010, p. 1; Wilkinson, 1997, p. 306). In the conventionalist take, organizations, markets and networks are problematic entities. Their existence presupposes multiple conventions: rules of action signified by systems of behaviors, discourses, and objects that stabilize the reciprocal expectations of actors, reduce cognitive efforts, support mutual clarifications, and make collective interpretations possible (Gomez and Jones, 2000, pp. 697-701; Wilkinson, 1997, p. 318). Examples include the rules of the road (with their apparatus of signals, traffic lights, speed radars, driver education, licenses, fines, etc.) and, for business, the specifications of lumber in the futures market, collective labor contracts, financial reporting standards, and expectations about the availability of managers outside of regular office hours. Conventions carry with them a plurality of evaluation criteria: prices and costs, for instance, make sense only after product specifications, labor qualifications, standards of effort, etc. are defined (Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010, p. 5; Jagd, 2007, pp. 87-88).

Conventions are solutions to the condition of uncertainty, manifesting as problematic situations in which probabilistic calculations of outcomes are meaningless, no criterion for ranking preferences obtains, all interpretations are debatable, and strategies and goals are indeterminate. In such situations, coordinated action requires actors to reach an accord through the exchange of plausible arguments (Biggart and Beamish, 2003 pp. 456-457): not rationality, but rationalization (Gomez and Jones, 2000, p. 698). This is feasible if rationalization is bounded; otherwise, actors may be caught in an infinite regress of reasons about reasons. Building accords requires, paradoxically, a backstop in a “rational void” (Gomez and Jones, 2000, p. 698): a zone of inference screened off from reasoning. Conventions provide that screen as far as it remains possible to refer to them for justifying behaviors and decisions.

The problems of uncertainty and conventions transcend both the methodological individualism and the holism-structuralism of mainstream economic and sociological theories. (Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, pp. 43-45) refer to neo-classical economics and Durkheim's sociology (see also Latsis, 2006, p. 257), but this critique encompasses economic institutionalism, as has been seen above, and Bourdieu's dispositional sociology, as will be documented shortly.) Social coordination cannot be apprehended from either pole of this individual-collective, particular-general, or micro-macro axis. Rather, it is dependent on the capacity of actors to intersubjectively negotiate the meanings of particular situations by linking them back to general normative principles (Biggart and Beamish, 2003, pp. 449 ff.; Boltanski, 1990, p. 89; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 39 ff.; Wilkinson, 1997, p. 319). Conventions support a "bridging of the micro and macro through the concepts of collective learning and social-network organization" (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 328). The juxtaposition of methodological individualism and holism is transcended through a "complex pragmatic situationalism" (Diaz-Bone, 2011), in which the unit of analysis is represented by situations: "complex arrangements or constellations of objects, cognitive formats, problems (co-ordinations to be realized), institutional settings, persons, concepts" (ibid., p. 49).

Situations arise because conventions, and consequently organizations, are only temporarily stable: contingencies can push existing conventions into crises that stimulate the formation of new ones, re-making the sense of the organization itself (Diaz-Bone, 2014, p. 326; Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010, p. 5). Stabilization and dynamism are explained through the assumption of a moral-critical competence in actors (a shift from a Bourdieuan dispositional sociology; Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014, p. 563; Dodier, 1993, p. 561; Guggenheim and Potthast, 2011, pp. 159-161). Observing actors in the field adapting to, critiquing, and creatively modifying social situations (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 11 ff.; Lemieux, 2014, p. 156) leads to hypothesizing that they possess a competence enabling

them to deal with problems of coordination by referring to widely shared, pluralistic, and non-deterministic “principles of coherence” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 182, translated).

While conventions are used to justify or critique behaviors, these ultimate normative backstops for rationalization are available to assert or negate the coherence of conventions.

To articulate this hypothesis is the purpose of *De la justification*. The book aims to “operationaliz[e] and formaliz[e] the competences [of actors] that are partly cognitive and partly shaped by everyday experience” (Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014, p. 571), to “support empirical inquiries on how persons put to work their sense of justice to critique, justify or converge towards accord” (Boltanski, 1990, p. 76; translated).

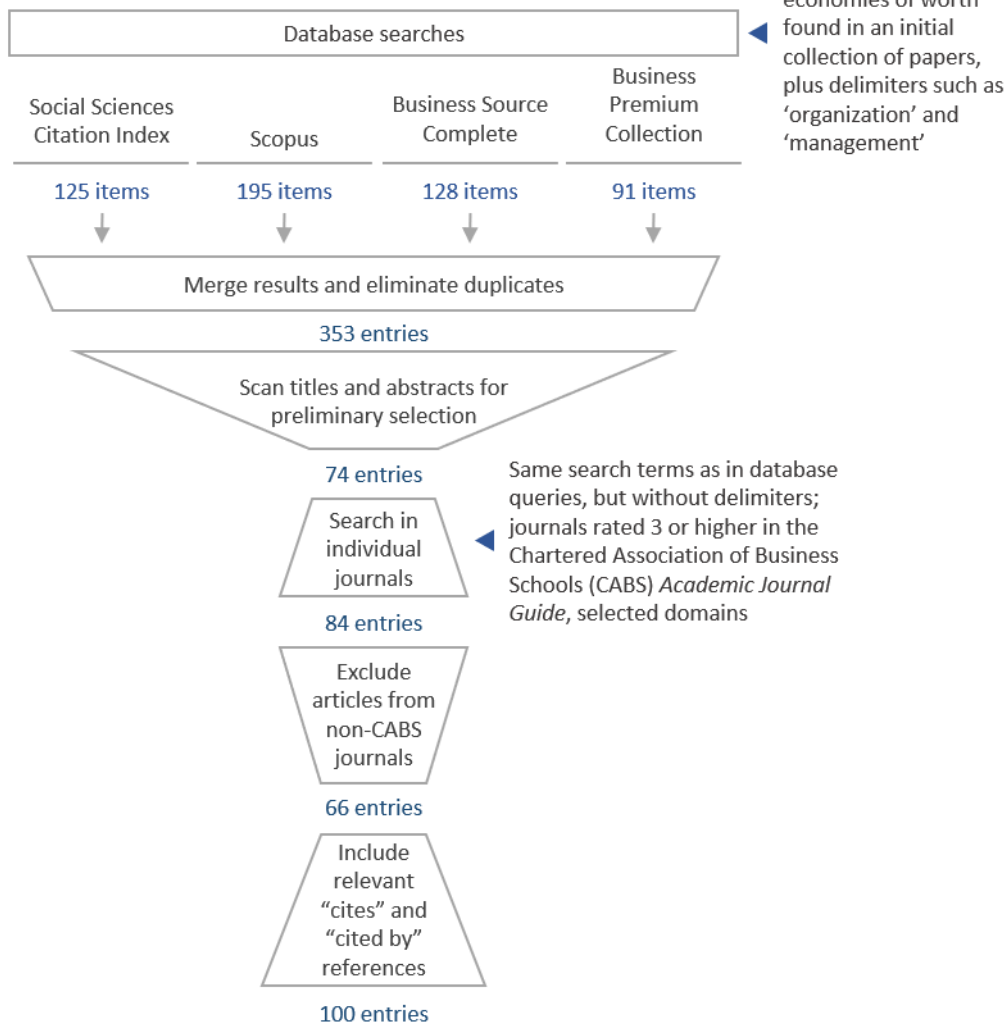
The model, in other words, is meant to be a base for, but not the realization of, broader projects. These, under the labels of “sociology of critical capacity” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999) and “sociology of situated judgement” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000), focus on “the critical operations performed by actors”, entailing a requirement for critical sociologists to “give up (if only temporarily) the critical stance, in order to recognize the normative principles which underlie the critical activity of ordinary persons” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, p. 364), and on a conception of social agreements going beyond the juxtaposition between “the demands of social justice, and [...] the economic imperatives of efficiency and competition”, particularly in the analysis of “the debates within an organization on the decisions to be taken” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000, pp. 218-219). This plurality of competing normative principles in continual need of conciliation is the core matter that scholars come to grips with when they deploy the economies of worth into OMS.

The OMS subject literature

The OMS literature in discourse is represented here by studies meeting three criteria: they reference the economies of worth; use them for theorizing and research in organizational

contexts including firms, firm networks, cross-sector partnerships, and public administrations; and, with few exceptions, are published in journals rated by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2018). Starting from searches in four academic databases, the final list of contributions is the result of successive steps of filtering and expanding the search scope. A summary view of the procedure is in figure 1; a more detailed description is in appendix 1.

FIGURE 1
LITERATURE SEARCH AND SELECTION PROCEDURE



Details of search and selection procedure in Appendix 1

The publication criterion limits the review, with the exceptions motivated in the appendix, to work published in English. While this militates against comprehensiveness (the economies of worth are well frequented by social scientists writing in French and German), it puts the focus on conversations that are accessible to most international OMS scholars.

Figure 2 shows the growth of the subject literature over time, mainly after the 2006 translation of *De la justification*. Figure 3 shows the range of publications in which studies have appeared. Figure 4 shows how the economies of worth are identified across the corpus (the literature searches contained these terms and their variants); the variety of labels, albeit somewhat confusing, reflects the model's articulated parentage and content.

FIGURE 2
GROWTH OF THE SUBJECT LITERATURE, 1991 – 2020
Number of studies by year and cumulative

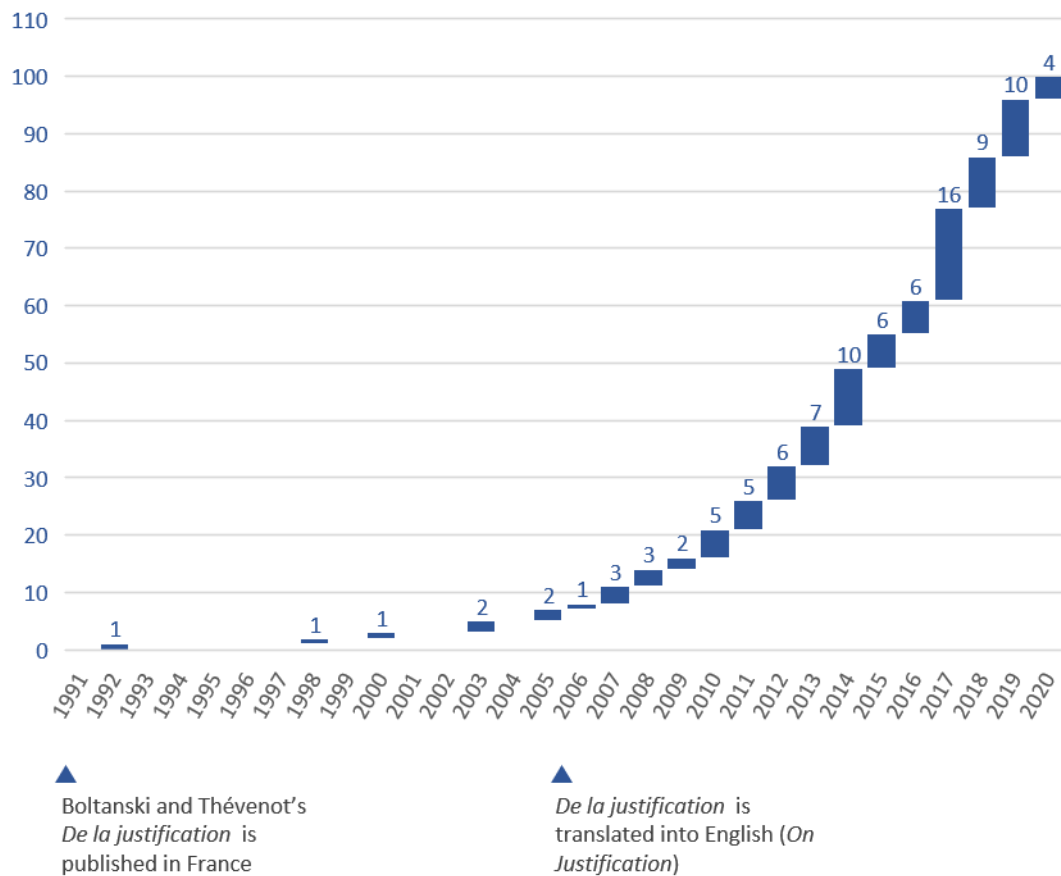


FIGURE 3
SUBJECT LITERATURE PUBLICATION RANGE
Number of studies by editorial domain and journal

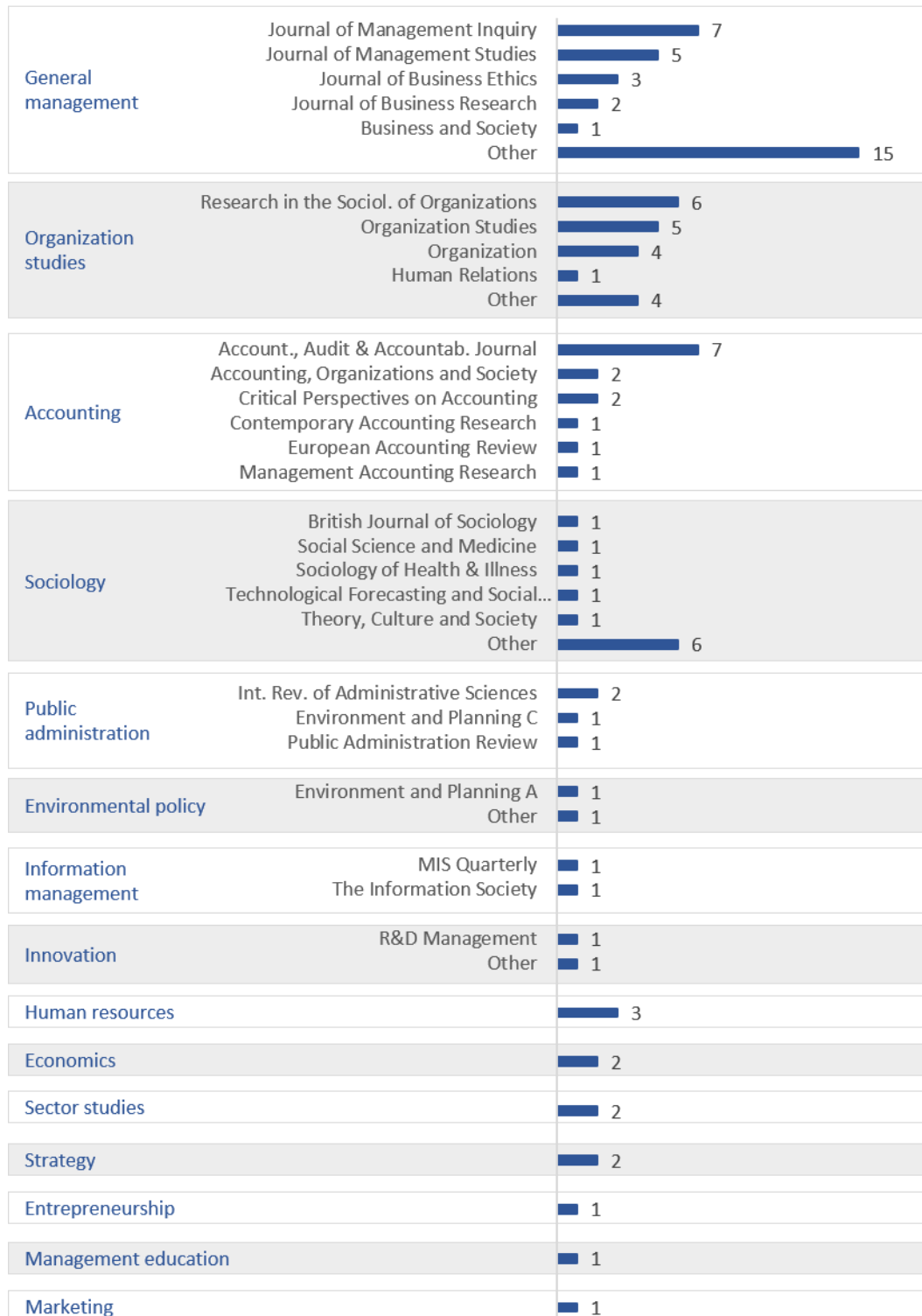


FIGURE 4
LABELING OF THE ECONOMIES OF WORTH
Percentage of studies

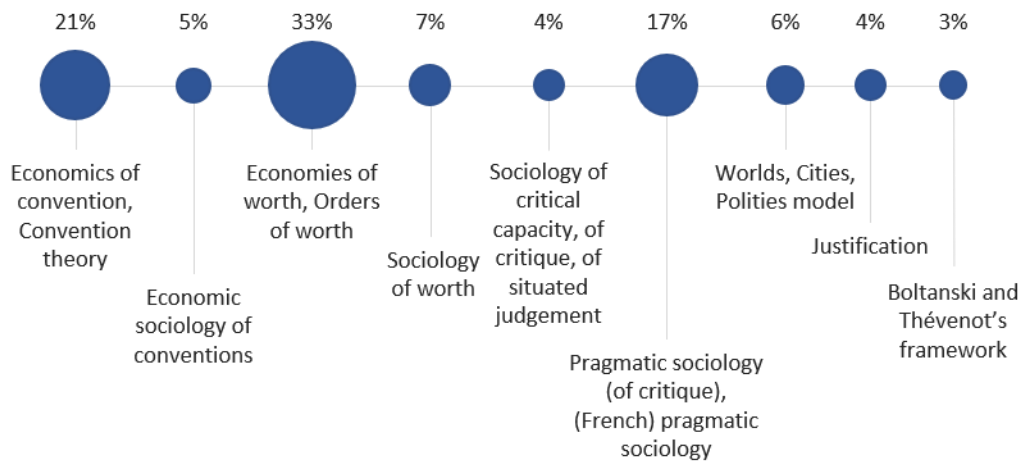
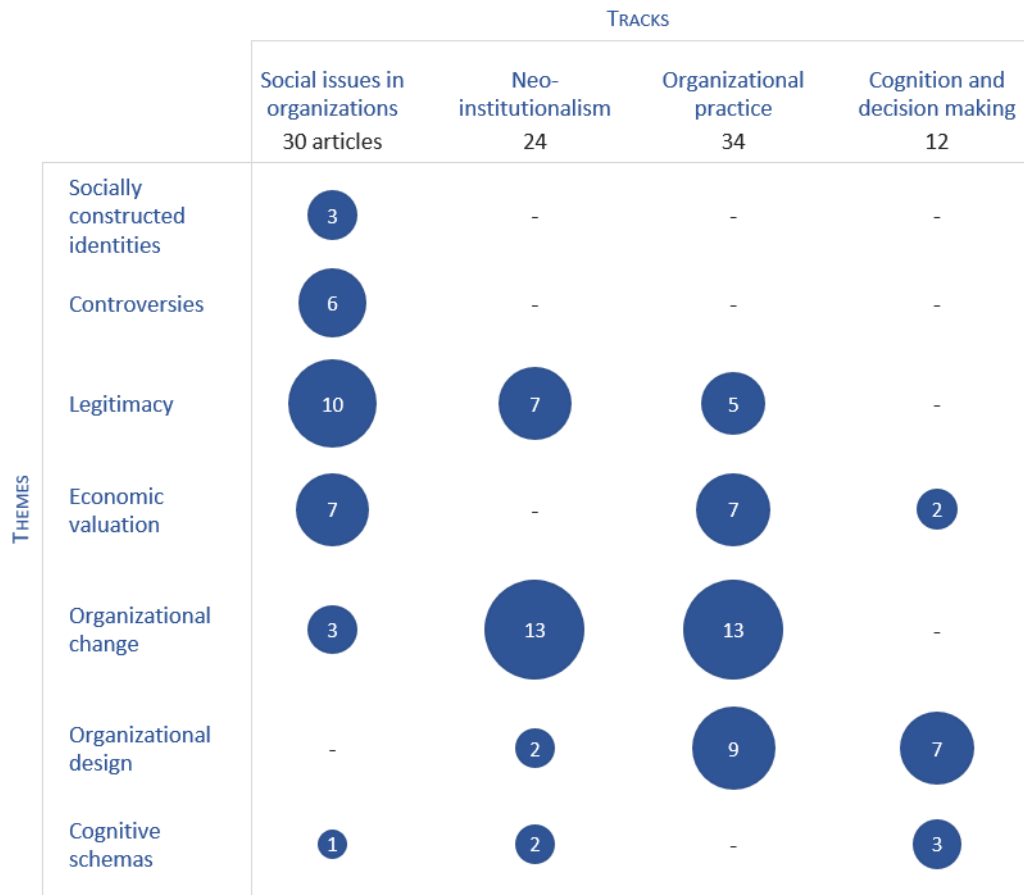


Figure 5 attests to the variety of the corpus's interests. Studies are classified across four main tracks and several themes. The tracks are groupings of the theoretical or research interests pursued in the corpus, defined by matching studies to well-established categories, and roughly corresponding to progressively more fine-grained analytical levels, from broad social issues to the cultural-cognitive representations deployed by individual actors. Themes are defined inductively based on the analysis of key concepts and findings. The methods used to classify the subject literature along these and other dimensions are described in appendix 2; the full data table, including highlights and analysis of each study, is in appendix 3.

FIGURE 5
THEORIZING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS
Number of studies



Subject literature analysis: selection, combination, reinterpretation

To analyze the subject literature a heuristic tool is introduced. The EoW-map is a representation, abstracted and simplified, of *De la justification*'s core content: a model's model. It maps the epistemological, ontological, and methodological elements of the economies of worth, which are used as categories to classify the corpus. Built for the purposes of this study, the EoW-map is not meant as a "true" reading of the economies of worth (hence the distinct label). Loss of resolution is inevitable; the functionality of the tool, however, depends on not omitting important elements and on limiting distortions. To this end, each element is first presented with the support of references from Boltanski, Thévenot and commentators in sociology and economics – collectively constituting an "establishing"

literature – and then examined in terms of its uptake in OMS – the subject literature. Two additional categories accommodate studies that discuss the theorizing and research affordances of the economies of worth (“Interests”, in the epistemology section) or use the “justification work” approach initially proposed by Jagd (2011), which is not part of the original model (in the methodology section).

Studies are assigned to the EoW-map element that they select as their main, and usually only, loan. Further, a distinction is made between studies that also deploy concepts and constructs from other theoretical frameworks – combination – and those that do not. A summary view of selections and combinations is in figure 6. Finally, the analysis highlights cases in which the original formulation of a concept has been modified in a reinterpretation akin to, albeit less comprehensive than, “domestication” defined as “repackaging, refining, and repositioning a discourse [...] for consumption within [the OMS] community” (Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon, 2011, pp. 318, 323). The patterns of selection, combination, and reinterpretation are discussed in the rest of this section, organized along the categories of the EoW-map.

FIGURE 6
CONCEPT SELECTION AND COMBINATION
Number of articles

		TRACKS							
		Social issues in organizations 30 articles		Neo-institutionalism 24		Organizational practice 34		Cognition and decision making 12	
EPISTEMOLOGY	Regime	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
	Justice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Competence	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
	Grammar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Interests	-	3	-	4	2	4	-	-
ONTOLOGY	Orders of worth	8	3	4	1	4	3	3	-
	Subject	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
	Object	-	1	2	-	4	1	-	-
	Test	-	2	1	-	1	1	-	-
	Agreement	-	1	-	1	9	1	3	-
METHODOLOGY	Situation	1	-	1	-	1	-	2	1
	Justification work	7	3	4	1	1	-	1	2

COMBINED CONCEPTS

Social issues in organizations: Accountability, Accounts of place, Affect, Boundary rules, Communicative process, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discursive closure, Discursive strategy, Elusive domination, Governance structure, Hypocrisy, Ideal subject, Ideology, Moral legitimacy, Paradox, Policy competency, Power, Power relations, Radical change, Social acceptability, Economic value, Translation

Neo-institutionalism: Account, Action logics, Agency, Entrepreneurial networks, Field, Institutional complexity, development, identity, logics, processes, work, Micro-foundations, Organizational pluralism, Organizing vision, Relationality, Temporality

Organizational practice: Action logics, Assemblage, Coordination systems, Corporate Social Responsibility, Distributed leadership, Evaluation, Frames, Free-rider problems, Hybridization, Legitimacy, Management, Marketing and relationship logics, Narratives, National evaluative repertoires, Organizational identity, pluralism, structure, Organizing dissonance, Overflows, Paradox, Performativity, Productive friction, Professional autonomy, Strategic actors, Strategy-as-practice, Weberian foundations of legitimacy

Cognition and decision-making: Agencements, Commensuration, Conventions, Dominant logics, Heterarchy, Information regimes, Organized dissonance, Repertoires of evaluation, Task interdependence

Limited epistemological engagement

A feature of the subject literature is that it has mostly abstained from referencing the economies of worth's specific epistemology – an indication that its epistemic interests, although related, are elsewhere.

Justification as a pragmatic regime

The object of inquiry for the EoW-map is justification: “the act of providing reasons for the validity, legitimacy and defensibility of (a) an action, (b) a belief and/or (c) a social arrangement” (Susen, 2017, p. 350). Justification occurs when setting goals, devising strategies, and allocating resources are uncertain problems: times of reasoning and argumentation (Boltanski, 1990; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 54; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, p. 361). It is based on cognitive operations by which actors first recognize the problem at hand as an instance of a general type, and then qualify and order its elements based on a principle associated with the general type (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 12, 48). Sequences of such operations can ultimately fix a problem's meaning and define a path for action.

The exercise of justification marks out a pragmatic regime, i.e., a region of action, characterized by a “mode of intervention and agency [...] oriented towards the general or the public” (Thévenot, 2001, p. 66) and a specific cognitive format (Thévenot, 2007b). Boltanski and Thévenot each propose (in other texts than *De la justification*: Boltanski, 1990, 2009; Thévenot, 2001, 2007b) regime architectures that include justification in either case but conceptualize other regimes and the cognitive moves required to switch between them in different ways.

The boundaries of the justification regime are a plausible theoretical and methodological topic. However the concept is rarely referred to in the subject literature, and then as a heuristic device (Daudigeos *et al.*, 2019, to describe areas of “elusive domination” in “neo-participative” organizations), or as a stimulus to theoretical reflection (Brandl *et al.*, 2014, on the correspondence between regimes and degrees of institutionalization; Bullinger, 2014, opposing the analytical layering of different regimes of engagement and information to the pervasive categories of discourses and practices in institutional logics theory). In some cases, the term is used as an alternate label for the orders of worth, the core of the model’s ontology.

Justice and moral sense

The function of justification is the achievement of just accords. Some readings of *De la justification* may be off the mark in seeing actors as “equipped with only [...] their tendency to embrace some form of moral idealism” (Lemieux, 2014, p. 160). Justice in the EoW-map, instead, is the justice of arguments (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 29) in matters of coordination: intuitions and inferences on the acceptability of critiques, justifications, and agreements (Boltanski, 1990, p. 76) about social arrangements.

The idea that social arrangements are viable only while they escape a verdict of non-justice recurs throughout the subject literature, in themes such as the equity of socially constructed identities, analysis of controversies, legitimacy, evaluation, and acceptance of organizational change. Yet, one of its broader implications is seldom explicitly recognized: in contrast to rationality-based views of organizations, the exercise of moral sense is not a separate layer of judgement applied either before or after the exercise of instrumental rationality. Instead, moral sense (encompassing, as will be shown, multiple criteria of “worth”, including competition, efficiency, equity, creativity, etc.) is always integral to the definition of organizational arrangements.

Moral competence

Moral sense is a human competence: “societies such as ours [...] can be defined as *critical societies* in the sense that all actors are equipped with critical capacities [...] and deploy them almost constantly in the course of ordinary social life” (Boltanski, 1990, p. 61; emphasis in the source). Competence means possessing “adequate capacities to submit to [the] constraints” that regulate agreements; “being reasonable, judicious”; and grasping the coherence (or lack of) between normative schemas and the situations of social life (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 181-182).

This parsimonious definition, “adapted to the minimal requirements of agreement reaching in a polity” (Boltanski and Thévenot, cited in Susen, 2017, p. 370 n), positions moral competence as a cognitive faculty required for, but distinct from, the performances by which agreements are built (compare the “minimal model of the actor” in Goffman, 1967, p. 3). Moral competence is neither agency, nor sensitive to the unequal possibilities that actors have of accessing and controlling the social environment (Boltanski, 1990, p. 61; 81): these, although relevant, are distinct problems.

Unsurprisingly, in neo-institutionalist contributions (Boxenbaum, 2014; Gagnon and Séguin, 2010; Pernkopf-Konhäusner, 2014) competence is interpreted more widely to include a capacity for various other situational and strategic intuitions, as well as acquired personal and professional skills. In the context of a tension between agency and structure, this move is required to attribute to individuals, on the micro level, sufficient strategic and decisional capacity to counteract the weight of institutional logics on the macro level.

Moral grammar

Moral competence is modelled with a generative grammar (Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014, p. 571), a statement often repeated, but seldom investigated, in the subject literature. A grammar is “a set of constraints” (Boltanski, 1990, p. 25); it is generative when,

given a finite number of elements (e.g., the words in a lexicon), it can be applied to produce and evaluate an unlimited number of combinations (e.g., the possible sentences in a natural language) (Pinker, 2007, pp. 76-81). The term itself is not indexed in *De la justification* and Chomsky, to whom it must be credited, is not cited (he is acknowledged in other texts: Boltanski, 1990, p. 70; Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates, 2014, p. 571); but this connection between moral cognition and Chomskyan linguistics deserves elaboration.

It is Rawls initially who, referencing Chomsky, compares the problem of defining moral capacity with “the problem of describing the sense of grammaticalness that we have for the sentences of our native language” (Rawls, 1971, p. 47). A structural analogy between Chomsky’s theory of linguistic cognition and a generalized theory of moral capacity is proposed by Mikhail (2011), who defines three components matching Chomsky’s architecture. The first is a generative moral grammar, or theory of moral competence: “a theory of the steady or acquired state of the mind/brain of a person who possess a system of moral knowledge”. The second is a universal moral grammar: “a theory of the initial state of the moral faculty, assumed to be a distinct subsystem of the mind/brain along with an account of how the properties that [the universal moral grammar] postulates interact with experience to yield a mature system of moral knowledge”. The third is a theory of moral performance: “how moral knowledge enters into the actual representation and evaluation of human acts and institutions and other forms of actual behavior”. Referring to the generative moral grammar: “the normal individual’s moral knowledge consists in part in her possession of what I will call a moral grammar: a complex and largely unconscious system of moral rules, concepts, and principles that generates and relates mental representations of various types” (Mikhail, 2011, pp. 15-16).

Because natural grammars, linguistic or moral, are non-explicit, their study must be mediated by formal models, as expressed by Boltanski’s brother Jean-Élie, a linguist: “As this

knowledge does not emerge to the level of the subjects' consciousness, the linguist, who can only observe its effects, has no other option than to propose a model [...] an ideal machine the performance of which conforms to the effects of the subjects' competence" (Boltanski, J.-É., 2002, pp. 15-17; translated). In other words, "grammar" can refer to two distinct constructs: a domain of the tacit knowledge of subjects, and a formal model of the same. The economies of worth meet the latter definition.

De la justification neither picks up a Rawlsian project (fundamental differences are outlined in Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 29; 2000, p. 222) nor attempts to follow the Chomskyan analogy all the way to a complete theory of moral competence. Even the economies of worth's observational and descriptive adequacy, i.e., whether they provide a plausible account of moral knowledge (Mikhail, 2011, p. 23) (empirical studies in the subject literature may be interpreted to suggest that they do), is an interesting problem but not a fundamental one here. The key insight of the economies of worth is that a system of moral competence is operative; this is supported by cognitive anthropology (e.g., Dwyer, Huebner and Hauser, 2010; Mercier and Sperber, 2017), where moral competence is conceptualized as a component of a modular mind (language competence being another, among several). The problem raised by the connection with Chomskyan linguistics is rather how to use the theory of a competence that is located on a "subpersonal" analytical level (i.e., the level of systems that enable, without explaining, the complex activities of persons, such as expressing their reasoning and feelings; Carston, 2000, p. 91) to assist in researching organizations.

Interests

One way to address the problem in the subject literature has been to combine the economies of worth with other frameworks, letting these provide much of the conceptual architecture.

Neo-institutionalism scholars researching institutional dynamics in the presence of pluralistic rationalities have proposed the economies of worth as a methodological “toolbox” to address the “blind spots” of institutional logics (Cloutier and Langley, 2007, 2013; some cautions are voiced by Diaz-Bone, 2014; see also Bullinger, 2014), or as a party in cross-fertilization (Gond and Leca, 2012) to highlight the moral aspects of institutional logics, the role of individual agency in institutional change, and the processes through which change unfolds against the weight of structures. Wider combinations, mobilizing not only neo-institutionalism, but also practice theory and Actor-Network Theory, are proposed for the study of accounting (Annisette and Richardson, 2011; Annisette, Vesty and Amslem, 2017; Russell, Milne and Dey, 2017), strategy as practice (Denis, Langley and Rouleau, 2007; Gond, Leca and Cloutier, 2015) and organizational routines (Kozica, Kaiser and Friesl, 2014).

Gond (2017) proposes to address similar limitations (“normative blindness, neglect of actors’ critical capacities and lack of consideration for material devices”; p. 361) in critical perspectives on corporate social responsibility. Reversing this dynamic, De Cock and Nyberg (2016) highlight the limitations of the economies of worth for critical analysis (disregard for institutions, power, and domination) and look to Boltanski’s pragmatic sociology of critique (e.g., Boltanski, 2009) for a more comprehensive critical framework. Both the economies of worth and the pragmatic sociology of critique are also picked up by Barondeau and Hobbs (2019) with a view to enriching project management theory.

Ontological borrowings

If the subject literature, by and large, has not engaged with the EoW-map’s epistemology, it has heavily borrowed its ontology with a variety of patterns, depending on which of the model’s entities have been picked up.

Orders of worth

The orders of worth are the core of *De la justification*. Recalling the definition of justification above, they model the schemas that actors are hypothesized to use to identify a situation as an instance of a general type (e.g., exchange in a competitive market; industrial production; civic practices; etc.) and to qualify and order its elements.

The concept can be decomposed in two layers. The first is an axiomatic (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 96-102) that defines the constraints governing any just evaluative and distributive order. The second layer is represented by the orders of worth proper: culturally specific constructions, each informed by a principle of accord, i.e., a normative rationale of social coordination (e.g., profitability, efficiency, equity, etc.) providing a particular intension (i.e., the definition of the states of worth and their signs) for the generic constraints of the axiomatic (chapter IV of *De la justification*).

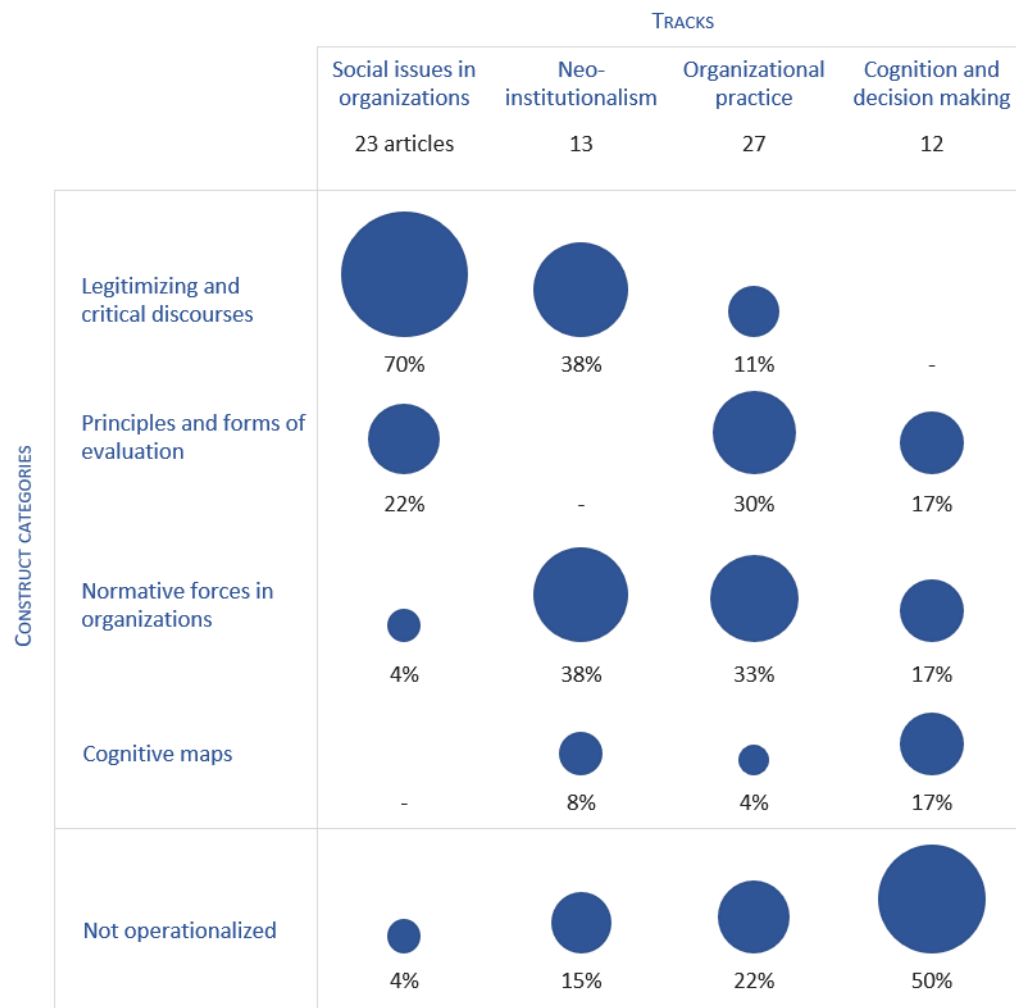
Six orders of worth are identified in *De la justification* and two more are adumbrated in Lafaye and Thévenot (1993), and Boltanski and Chiapello (2011). (Descriptions and synoptic tables can be found throughout the subject literature, e.g., Gond, Leca and Cloutier, 2015; Reinecke, van Bommel and Spicer, 2017.) Like the generative grammars of natural languages, they are historical and local: situated in present Western culture, with no claims to broader generality (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000, p. 210).

Plurality may seem to pose a problem for coordination: there is no guarantee that reference to different orders of worth will yield compatible interpretations of a situation; incompatibilities and disputes (part IV of *De la justification*) are in fact the norm. But plurality is less a problem than a source of possibilities. The scene of social coordination is not one of actors locked into their respective interests and evaluative stances who need, now and again, to figure out a truce. Instead, actors are jointly interested in interaction as a means of developing projects (functional to personal, organizational, or institutional interests) and

mobilize cognitive and material resources to keep it going: a “continuous work of interpretation by agents [...] as they seek new agreements that will allow the interaction to continue” (Dodier, 1993, p. 583). Frère and Jaster (2019, p. 154) note that, in pragmatic sociology, social conflict is not only a normal, but also a (potentially) functional condition: “when actors are [...] cognizant of these different fashions of consciousness, it is no longer dysfunctional if their view differs from others”. It is thus justified that “a given person can refer to any and all measures of worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 151). Such cognitive flexibility is functional for a social species facing the problem of “living together in the world” (a phrase by Hannah Arendt cited in Thévenot, 2007a).

The orders of worth are picked up often in the subject literature: 60 percent of the studies, or 80 per cent of the empirical ones, operationalize them. Selection comes with reinterpretation at other analytical levels: from being structures in a formal model of moral cognition, orders of worth are used to connote actors’ discursive or rhetorical stances; valuation principles; normative pressures on organizations; or higher-level interpretive maps. Figure 7 shows the distribution of these different construct categories across the main theoretical tracks.

FIGURE 7
 OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE ORDERS OF WORTH
 Relative weights of construct categories in 75 empirical studies



These translations have enabled scholars to examine the discursive and practical resources that are available, at the cultural, institutional, and organizational level, to actors engaged in reducing uncertainty and constructing coordination, and find evidence of their moral content: the crystallized residue of the justifications and critiques that went into building conventional forms such as organizational architectures and routines. Values-infused conventions are studied for their stabilizing, sometimes immobilizing, effects on organizations through constructs such as the moral anchors of professional membership rules (Annisette and Trivedi, 2013); cultural rigidities of public procurement schemes (Barès et al., 2019); effects of branding on public attention to corporate behaviors (Bertilsson and

Rennstam, 2018); compatible attitudes between cooperating SMEs networks (Boesen, Sundbo and Sundbo, 2017); cognitive orientations of dominant coalitions towards strategic alliances (Boivin and Roch, 2006); “normalization” of the governance arrangements of commodity chains (Coq-Huelva, Sanz-Cañada and Sánchez-Escobar, 2014); multiple legitimizing ideologies in creating an “ideal subject” social entrepreneur (Dey and Lehner, 2017); reference values in the qualification of sustainable businesses (Frig and Sorsa, 2018); attitudes towards climate change in industry strategy guidelines (Kietäväinen and Tuulentie, 2013); forms of accountability in responding to natural disasters (Perkiss and Moermen, 2018b); national attitudes towards training (Pernkopf-Konhäusner and Brandl, 2011); legitimization principles in corporate communications correlating to investment in sustainability certifications (Richards, Zellweger and Gond, 2017).

But if, on the one hand, values can stabilize, on the other value pluralism embedded in architectures and routines can sustain change in practices, e.g., Imdorf and Leemann (2012) and Leeman and Imdorf (2015) on fair hiring by training networks that distribute among partners evaluation tasks and hiring risks; Reinecke (2010) on operationalizing a critique to orthodox economic value in commodity pricing; Strauß (2018) on using artistic interventions to mobilize reflection and critique on organizational routines; Swaffield, Evans and Welch (2018) on the multiple rationales for corporate action on food waste.

These studies project the orders of worth from being the structures of a grammar to giving meaning to the structures of constructs such as organizations. While this move helps to substantiate the moral competence hypothesis by finding its traces where the search for efficiency, adaptation to contingency, or institutional isomorphism may be thought to operate alone, it still leaves the focus on structures and excludes change and agency. Factors of institutional and organizational dynamism remain at the macro scale (e.g., neoliberal globalization in Perkiss and Moermen, 2018a; technological innovation in Mercier-Roy and

Mailhot, 2019 and Miranda, Kim and Summers, 2015), or the micro one (institutional entrepreneurship in McInerney, 2008; strategic actorhood in Demers, Giroux and Chreim, 2003; Midgley, 2010; St-Pierre and Bouchard, 2005). To inject in the analysis the situationalist dynamism required to move beyond the opposition of micro and macro, other approaches are used in the subject literature, as will be shown when discussing the EoW-map's methodological section. Interestingly, some of these approaches make do without the orders of worth altogether, especially in the track of cognition and decision making that, intuitively, should be closest to the operations of moral cognition (see the "Not operationalized" row in figure 7) – or rather, they keep them as an assumption that remains outside their analytical boundary.

Subjects, objects, and tests

The dynamic possibilities inherent in value pluralism become evident when the abstract grammar of the orders of worth connects to concrete situations through the lexicon of the "worlds" (part III of *De la justification*). Providing models (here, in the sense of both representations and ideals) of societies governed by each order of worth (market society, industrial, civic, etc.), the worlds are inventories of stylized human subjects-roles (e.g., trader, engineer, bureaucrat, etc.) and the material or symbolic objects that connote them (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 177), their attributes and their relations, providing the meaning of each order of worth with extension.

By interpreting and qualifying the entities and relations observed in social life in the terms of the model worlds, actors construct the difference between "contingent actions, which cannot actually engage entities that find themselves juxtaposed by mere accident, and actions that cohere according to a superior common principle [of coordination]" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 177). Bénatouïl (1999, p.384), referencing Dodier (1993), notes how pragmatic sociology does not require a pre-definition of persons or roles. Rather, definitions

are formed through “a particularly important, albeit complex, form of action, i.e., qualification [...] implemented by others, or by [actors] themselves”. The same goes for other material and symbolic entities.

One implication is that the aspects of social reality that can be labeled public do not pre-exist, if not as “contingent actions”, the exercise of justification and critique. Another is terminological: a distinction should be made between a situation as an object of qualification, and the situation in which qualification (as a special form of action) is carried out. For present purposes, departing from usage in *De la justification*, the former is labeled a “problem”, reserving the term “situation” for the latter (see Diaz-Bone, 2011, p. 49). A third implication is that both “problems” and “situations” are constituted as networks displaying degrees of variety and possibilities for frictions, depending on the presence of subjects and actors who, because of their interests, attitudes, positioning relative to the problem, material resources, etc., mobilize the various worlds in different interpretative patterns.

Non-human entities, too, inject variety in situations. Some objects can be interpreted as imperfect instantiations of the ideal objects from one given model world only (e.g., a perfectly tuned machine in the industrial world). But others are “composite objects” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 339) that evoke Star and Griesemer’s (1989) boundary objects, combine elements of different worlds, and aspire to fitting in all of them at once. In some cases, the variety-carrying function of objects arises from the very imperfection of their design, i.e., their permanently contestable fit within a social arrangement (“equivocal”, or ambiguous, objects; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 340), which keeps the interpretation of problems from stabilizing, but also conflicts from hardening. Issues of variety and design become acute with the most articulate notion of materiality in the economies of worth, i.e., the arrangement (the original term, *dispositif*, evokes the ideas of system and plan, too), a construction in which material, representational and symbolic entities are combined to sustain

complex coordination (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 179). Like actors, variety-carrying objects can have a double role: as material components of problems and, at the same time, as part of the structure of justification and critique, connecting the two levels of action (management control systems are an example).

Studies in the corpus that select the concepts of subject and object (see figure 5) bring these relations to light. For example, Emery *et al.*, (2008) and Fronda and Moriceau (2008), deal with the frictions of hierarchical interpretations: critical actors resist the view of themselves as subjects in the executive-mandated vision of new management control systems. Mailhot *et al.* (2016) examine leader-object couplings in project management as means to construct and maintain coherence in the presence of functional and hierarchical variety (multiple worldviews and strategic versus operational objectives). Several studies frame information systems, strategic plans, and products as performative objects that reduce variety in organization (e.g., limiting the range of available information) or increase it thanks to design ambiguity, imperfection, and unsettlement (Barbe and Hussler, 2019; Capron and Gray, 2000; Chenhall, Hall and Smith, 2013; Daigle and Rouleau, 2010; Daudigeos and Valiorgue, 2018; Dontenwill, 2012; Mailhot and Langley, 2017).

The relations among subjects and objects in the EoW-map are grasped through the medium of tests that “bring onto the stage objects and persons reciprocally engaged in the situation [i.e., the problem] being judged” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 162). Tests (*épreuves*; chapter V of *De la justification*) can be conceived of as intuitions and inferences on whether an arrangement of subjects and objects is well-ordered relative to a single order of worth (e.g., based on observation, the lathe seems to perform to specifications under the control of a competent machinist). Tests themselves can be questioned in the figure of the *différend* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 275-278) in which what is challenged is not the quality of a relation, but the frame of reference, i.e., which order of worth should define the

problem (e.g., the lathe performs to specifications, but what really matters is that the cost of the pieces thus made is uncompetitive). Testing applies to the relations in a network of subjects and objects; *différend* disputes consist in identifying a different but partially intersecting network (at least some elements are in common, although they are qualified differently), that establishes a competing meaning of the problem.

As cognitive schemas, tests are permanently available for articulating judgements. Skilling and Tregidga (2019) and Vesty, Ren and Ji (2018) follow this conception in the field of accounting, where reporting formats implement plural tests of worth (with different degrees of variety) to enable differentiated valuations. Another tack is followed by Dansou and Langley (2012), who interpret *épreuves* and *différends* disputes as orders of testing that express degrees of agency and are events of institutional work, i.e., happening at critical moments when prevailing routines and principles are challenged. A similar focus on the agency and the punctuated salience of tests is in Dionne, Mailhot and Langley (2019) and in Raviola (2017). Resolving the conceptual gap brought on by this reinterpretation requires a distinction between tests as cognitive schemas, and the acts of justification and critique by which one test is declared meaningful and passed, while another is denounced as either failed or meaningless. This juxtaposition of the grammatical relations in the EoW-map and the pragmatics of justification and critique marks a shift of theorizing stance, as will be discussed later. An example of the interplay of cognition and pragmatics in relation to tests is in Whelan and Gond (2017) on the realization of “ontological shifts” and radical change through an accumulation of *épreuves*.

Agreements

The composition of variety requires agreements (part V of *De la justification*). These solutions can range from tightly coupled designs that only admit the structures and qualifications of one order of worth and marginalize the others, to loosely coupled ones that

compromise among several orders of worth. Occasionally, solutions can be found that are fully justifiable against multiple orders of worth (Whelan and Gond, 2017). Boltanski and Thévenot also review forms of “relativization” in which the search for publicly justifiable solutions is replaced by local agreements that hide or displace problems.

Several studies have interpreted the design of formal structures, routines, and management control systems as compromises that enable organizations to continue and adapt in the presence of plural action and evaluation logics (Banoun, Dufour and Andiappan, 2016; Bérubé and Demers, 2019; Bobadilla and Gilbert, 2017; Bouillé and Cornée, 2017; Cloutier and Langley, 2017; Cortese and Andrew, 2020; Dahan, 2015; Kozica and Brandl, 2015; Marchal, 1992; Mesny and Mailhot, 2007; Rousselière and Vézina, 2009).

A more radical view is that organizations can be designed not only to manage to variety, but to actively promote it: in fluid, unsettled contexts, the capacity to keep multiple logics in play through devices such as accounting, and to generate them through arrangements such as “heterarchical” organizations, is at a premium (van Bommel, 2014; Georgiou, 2018; Girard and Stark, 2003). Compromises, settled or unsettled, are replaced by Stark’s (2011) permanent and purposeful “generative friction”.

Huault and Rainelli-Weiss (2011) analyze, uncharacteristically, a failure to compromise that stunts the development of a financial market; in so doing, they highlight the pragmatic requirement that needs to be satisfied for any agreement, namely the “social construction of a problem whose solution could be seen as serving a common interest, despite conflicting worldviews” (ibid., p. 1412).

Methodological choices

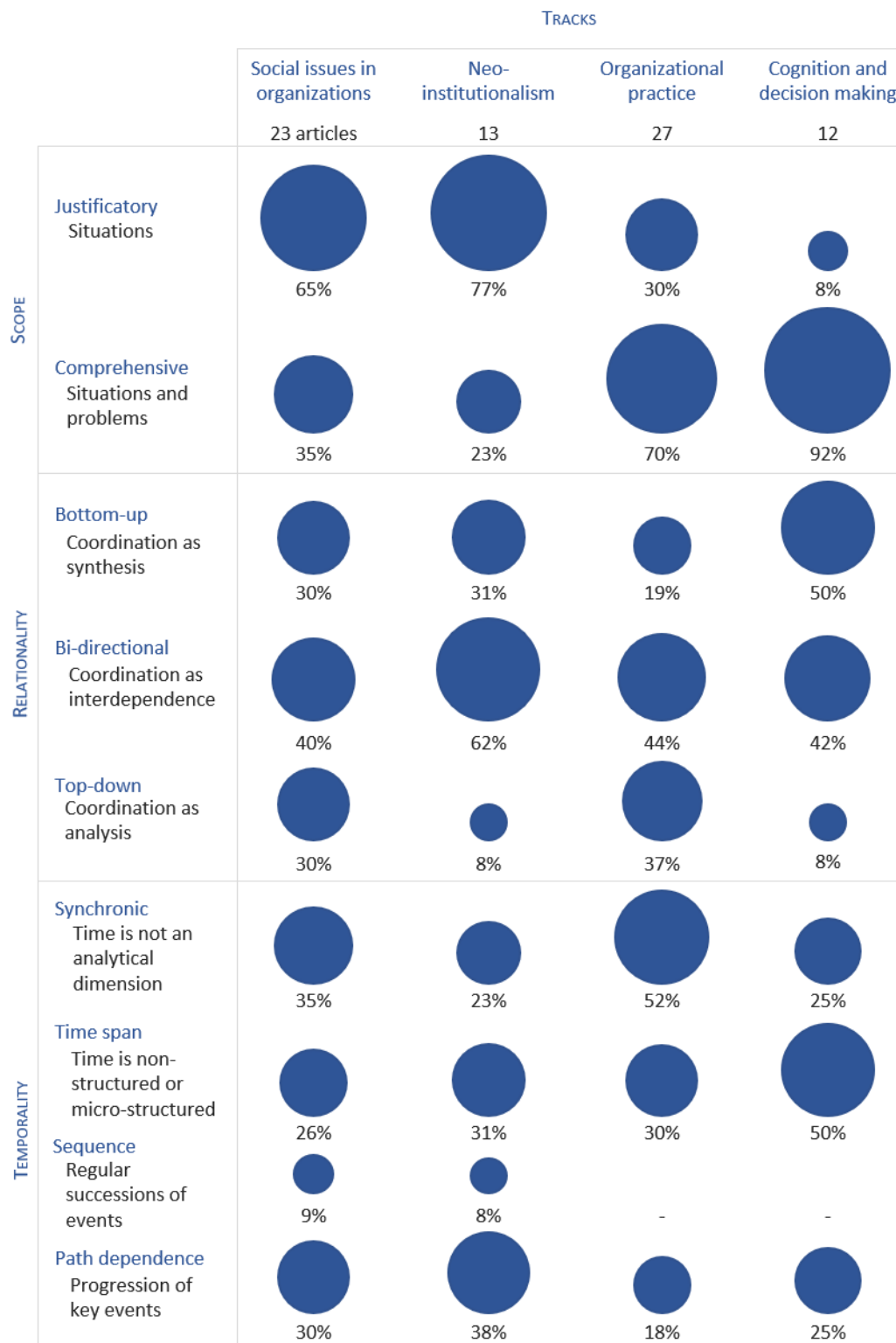
The analysis of the “worlds” and of agreements brings into the picture the social arrangements in which problems of coordination are practically constructed and solved. Capturing such arrangements is a considerable methodological problem.

Situation

The unit of analysis from the stance of the economies of worth is a situation, defined as set of entities (human actors and objects) linked by relations (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 11) that require qualification and ordering. This definition applies to “problems”, rather than “situations” (the distinction introduced above). But problems and situations appear together, and both can be conceptualized as networks, possessing scope and relational properties. For dynamism, a temporal dimension must be added (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 31). Dodier (1993, pp. 560-561) notes that Boltanski and Thévenot “are concerned with short sequences and timeframes, and shifts between situations”, coherently for a sociology that, unlike Bourdieu’s for example, does not require the longer timeframes of societal change.

The subject literature does not circumscribe situations along scope, relationality and temporality consistently, as is clear from figure 8. Units of analysis in empirical studies are differentiated in terms of whether they include only situations of justification and critique or also the corresponding problems; whether relations are bottom-up, with coordination emerging as the synthesis of actors’ interpretations, top-down, with coordination resulting from the application of normative conventions, or bi-directional, with coordination being the result of a dialectic among interpretations and conventions; and whether analysis is synchronic or diachronic, the latter furthermore adopting different temporal structures (Maggetti, Giraldi and Radaelli, 2015).

FIGURE 8
SITUATIONS AS UNITS OF ANALYSIS
Relative weights of analytical choices in 75 empirical studies



Considering the studies for which the “situation” element of the EoW-map is central, three constructs emerge. One is coordination as the result of local orderings of information, as in Dodier and Camus (1998) on how doctors’ assessment of patients configures organization in the emergency service of a hospital and Gkeredakis (2014) on hierarchical and functional interdependences in large projects. Coordination here is something that “does not take place at some ‘macro’ level of analysis” but is an “irreducibly local engagement [...] to fabricate interdependence” between local and general tasks (Gkeredakis 2014, p. 1495). A second theme, from another stance, is of coordination being achieved locally, but within hierarchies of scope and time scales, e.g., Ramirez (2013), for whom local situations are configured through institutional work, and Irwin, Jensen and Jones (2013), who assign a similar situation-defining function to practices of critical engagement; Brandl et al. (2019) reverse this dynamic: structures do inform coordination, but in ways that depend on the unfolding of local situations. Finally, Ekbia and Evans (2009) and Moreira (2005) suggest that explaining coordination requires going beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of a situation and account for the embeddedness of actors in multiple networks and their practices, both shaping their interpretation of what constitutes valid information in the face of a problem.

These different takes on coordination are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Reconciling them within the confines of empirically detectable and practically manageable units of analysis, however, is obviously challenging.

Justification work

Jagd (2011, p. 348) has originally called for research “to study organizational change from a diachronic perspective” using the concept of “justification work [...] processes of critique, justifications, testing or compromising performed by actors”. This pragmatic approach, which often uses the ontological apparatus of the EoW-map organically and not selectively, seeks to bring together individual agency and institutionalized structures by

constructing an intermediate processual layer. This move supports conceptualization and research of the legitimacy-maintaining competence of stakeholders (Baba and Mailhot, 2016; Jaumiers, Daudigeous and de Latour, 2017; Munzer, 2019; Nyberg and Wright, 2012, 2013; Ottoson and Galis, 2011; Patriotta, Gond and Schultz, 2011; Reinecke, van Bommel and Spicer, 2017; Rolandsson, 2015; Taupin, 2012); the interactions of justification and power relations (Barros and Michaud, 2019; Gond *et al.*, 2016); the interpretation of institutions by actors in the field (Finch, Geiger and Harkness, 2017; Gherardi and Perrotta, 2016; Kaplan and Murray, 2010; Oldenhof, Posstma and Putters, 2014; Whelan and Gond, 2017); the political reproduction function of rhetorical strategies (Nyberg, Wright and Kirk, 2017); and the moral microfoundations of organizational complexity (Demers and Gond, 2020; Passetti and Rinaldi, 2020).

Justification work is seen as a strand of agency that integrates organizations internally and connects them with their institutional or political context. In this, it remains dependent on assuming organizational entities subject to the forces of institutions and power, as well as implying other strands of works addressing, for instance, decision and policy making.

Discussion

Based on the preceding analysis, this review proposes three contributions: an assessment of the constructs that the patterns of selection, combination and interpretation have produced, and of what may be gained by connecting and developing them; an interpretation of the subject literature's variety as resulting from the interdisciplinary translation of a uniquely conceived and executed model; and the outline of a strategy to pursue integrative theorizing and research by moving beyond the model's specialist confines.

Emerging constructs and research questions

Theorizing and research with the economies of worth have brought notable contributions. Previous reviews (Cloutier, Gond and Leca, 2017; Jagd, 2011) have identified empirical and conceptual additions to the understanding of non-profits and co-operatives, inter-organizational co-operation, organizational change, neo-institutionalism, critical perspectives in organization theory, valuation, and individual responses to organizational pluralism. To this list can be added insights into low-hierarchy organizations, information in pluralistic environments, and distributed decision-making. Through these explorations the subject literature provides conventionalist-pragmatic interpretations for phenomena from grassroot-level coordination to broad cultural conventions by way of the architectures and routines of firms and enriches the concept of organization with a fundamental moral dimension and a distinctive focus on socio-material practices.

Moreover, as the analysis of the subject literature has argued, by aggregating individual contributions it is possible to induce several emerging constructs, recapitulated in Table 1, that together adumbrate a distinctive conventionalist-pragmatic conception of organization and management. These, however, are unconnected and underdeveloped; building a cohesive account requires tackling conceptual and methodological issues through some broad research questions.

TABLE 1

EMERGING CONSTRUCTS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMATIZATIONS

EXAMPLE CONSTRUCTS	EMERGING CONSTRUCTS	FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PROBLEMATIZATIONS
Cognitive orientations of dominant coalitions discouraging strategic alliances (Boivin and Roche, 2006) Legitimization principles in corporate communications correlating to investment in sustainability certifications (Richards, Zellweger and Gond, 2017)	Moral content of organizational structures and practices as a source of behavior stabilization	What boundary conditions define the switch between the stabilizing and dynamizing effects of moral content?	Value conflict and composition as integral to setting and solving problems of organizational design and policy
Operationalization of a critique of orthodox economic value in the structures and practices of a commodity pricing organization (Reinecke, 2010) Distribution of evaluations and hiring risks across the members of a training network enabling fairer hiring practices (Imdorf and Leemann, 2012)	Moral content of organizational structures and practices as a source of behavior dynamism		
Alignment of partners in cross-sector collaborations on the underlying moral purpose of the collaboration (Cloutier and Langley, 2017) Rhetorical alignment of lobbyists and regulators on rationales for new rules (Cortese and Andrew, 2020)	Value pluralism managed through conventional agreements	What boundary conditions define the presence of agreements or of normalized friction?	
Dissonance between user and standard setters on the meaning of fair value measures of assets (Georgiou, 2018) Multiple registers for assessing organizational performance supporting innovation (Girard and Stark, 2003)	Value pluralism as driver of organizational learning through normalized friction		
“Discreet resistance” at the grassroots level affecting the implementation of top-down organizational change (Frona and Moriceau, 2008) Leader-object couplings structuring coordination across functional and hierarchical interdependences (Mailhot et al., 2016)	Frictions and couplings in socio-material networks	How to capture systematically agencies, frictions, couplings and connections in socio-material networks?	Information and organization emerge together from problem setting and solving in socio-material networks
Design and operation of accounting practices facilitating compromise among multiple evaluative principles (Chenhall, Hall and Smith, 2013) Socio-material “assemblages” sustaining durable compromises (Mailhot and Langley, 2017)	Agency of objects in socio-material networks		
Doctors’ assessment of patients’ “mobilizing worth” for dealing with emergency cases (Dodier and Camus, 1998) Compatibilization of local tasks with the overarching objectives of “megaprojects” across problems of knowledge and evidence (Gkeradikis, 2014)	Coordination emerging from local orderings of situational information	How to capture systematically the situated orderings of information into coordination?	
“Institutional work” deflecting critical situations after top-down changes in the evaluation criteria of professional practices (Ramirez, 2013) “Translation” from scholarly critiques to operational issue discussion groups in Public	Coordination achieved locally under institutional hierarchies of information		

EXAMPLE CONSTRUCTS	EMERGING CONSTRUCTS	FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PROBLEMATIZATIONS
Engagement in Science situations (Irwin, Jensen and Jones, 2013)			
Information in decision making defined-constituted by actors' socio-material connections and practices (Ekbja and Evans, 2009) Value of evidence for clinical practice guidelines set by actors' participation in different epistemic communities (Moreira, 2005)	Information defined-constituted by actors' embedding in socio-material networks-situations		
Justification work maintaining institutional legitimacy (Patriotta, Gond and Schultz, 2011) Justification work interacting with power dynamics in controversies (Gond et al., 2016) Justification work making multiple interpretations of value compatible in a marketing system (Finch, Geiger and Harkness, 2017) Micro-processes of justification establishing the moral legitimacy of water sustainability practices (Passetti and Rinaldi, 2020)	Justification as a strand of agency integrating organizations internally and connecting them with context	What is the managerial stance towards justification and critique?	Justification as coterminous with decision and policy making

A first set of questions is about the conditions under which moral content switches from being a source of behavioral stabilization in some cases, to being a source of dynamism in others, while value pluralism switches from being a problem tackled through agreements, to enabling innovation and adaptation through permanent productive friction. Without plausible moderators to justify these seemingly inconsistent functions, neither moral content nor value pluralism can be attributed explanatory power for observed organizational structures and routines.

Such moderators, in keeping with conventionalist-pragmatic assumptions, must be looked for not in the context surrounding organizational entities, but in the socio-material networks that constitute problems and situations and in which justifications and critiques ultimately yield conventions. Two methodological questions arise: how to capture systematically the networks' multiple human and non-human agencies, connections, couplings, and frictions; as well as the exchanges of competing information orderings by which actors achieve coordination.

Finally, observing justification work as a strand of agency that both integrates organizations internally and connects them to their context leads to a managerial question: what the stance of managers towards justification and critique is; in other words, whether and how they use them in decision and policy making and to promote organizational learning. If justification and critique are in fact constitutive of organization, then they can be expected to be focal for the practical attention of managers, i.e., neither subsidiary to questions of instrumental effectiveness, nor managed in a layer of political activity distinct from operational considerations.

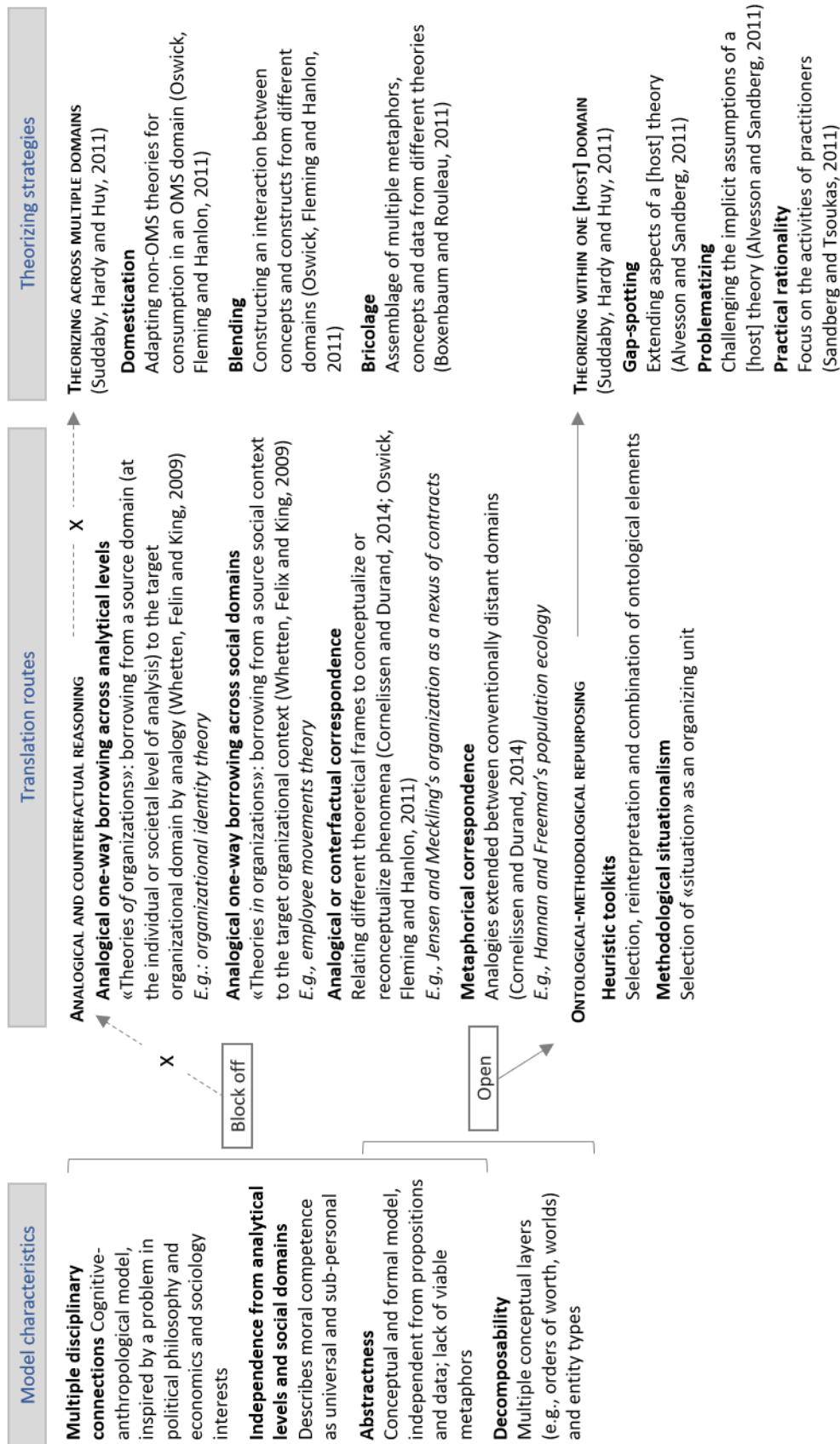
Solid answers to these research questions could problematize assumptions such as that value conflict and composition provide the context (as opposed to being integral) to the setting and solving of organizational design and policy problems; that information is an environmental signal or a commodity to be processed through organizational structures (as opposed to being constituted along with organization itself in the activity of socio-material networks); and that justification is only one of many concerns for managers (as opposed to being coterminous with decision and policy making). The capability to bring these broad challenges to dominant theories of organization and management would expand the theorizing scope and potential of the subject literature and constitute it as an important general perspective for scholars.

The limits of importing and theorizing with the economies of worth

Born outside of OMS, the economies of worth have been imported there; and their characteristics have dictated the possible import routes and, consequently, the feasible kinds of theorizing and research, as summarized in Figure 9.

FIGURE 9

TRANSLATION ROUTES AND THEORIZING WITH THE ECONOMIES OF WORTH



The analogical and counterfactual forms of reasoning that systematically relate theoretical frames in source and target disciplinary domains (Cornelissen and Durand, 2014, p. 1001) are problematic in the case of the economies of worth. The model is located at the junction of cultural sociology, a critique of mainstream economics, political philosophy, and cognitive anthropology, creating some reasonable uncertainty and interpretive variety about what the source and target domains are (hence the variety of labels and tracks in the subject literature). Moreover, its aim to transcend the distinction between micro, meso, or macro analytical levels (e.g., individual, organizational, or societal) and avoid constructs such as individuals, groups, or classes (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 11) blocks off one-way theoretical borrowing between levels or contexts (Whetten, Felin and King, 2009), as well as two-way correspondences or interactions between different domains (Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon, 2011, p. 328). Finally, its abstractness and precision prevent the more daring connections that can be established by metaphors (Cornelissen and Durand, 2014, p. 1001), at least to the extent that these are viable when metaphors are concrete, semantically flexible, and imbued with sensory and imaginative qualities (Cornelissen, 2005). The economies of worth are, in a sense, too specific to be the sort of “radical traveling theory”, conceptually broad and capable of significantly challenging conventional assumptions, that can generate equally broad and innovative OMS theories on the back of analogy and after a process of domestication (Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon, 2011). Other analogical strategies for theorizing across domains (Suddaby, Hardy and Huy, 2011) such as blending (constructing an interaction between concepts and constructs from different domains; Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon, 2011) and bricolage (the open-ended, creative assemblage of multiple metaphors, concepts, and data from different theories; Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011) are also difficult.

However, the model's abstractness and its decomposability offer other possibilities, i.e., the observed patterns of selection, reinterpretation, and combination. For the sake of classification, these are placed here under the heading of ontological-methodological repurposing, comprising two import routes: heuristic ontological toolkits and methodological situationalism (with the justification work approach being a combination of the two).

Both routes lead to theorizing within one domain (by contrast with analogical or metaphorical cross-domain strategies) (Suddaby, Hardy and Huy, 2011). Toolkits are used principally for gap spotting (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) or "blind spot" covering in host theories and for problematization (ibid.) that questions some assumptions underlying host theories. Situationalism enables the construction of practical rationality accounts that focus on the activities, tools, interactions, and intentions of practitioners (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

The question is whether these theorizing routes and strategies can support the integrative and developmental research questions outlined above. While practical rationality and problematization are likely to remain fruitful, keeping up the use of the elements in the EoW-map risks perpetuating the patterns that, although productive, have not so far cohered to the extent required for a general and autonomous view of organization and management. Moreover, it requires engagement with a special model of unique design, unfamiliar to most OMS researchers. A different approach is called for.

Shifting beyond the economies of worth

As is acknowledged also in the subject literature (e.g., Moreira, 2005, p. 1977), theorizing and research motivated by conventionalist-pragmatic interests can go beyond the analytical frame of the EoW-map (whether on its own or in combinations). A shift in four epistemological and methodological steps is proposed here.

The first step is to acknowledge and retain, as a starting point and grounds for a theorizing stance, the economies of worth naturalistic assumptions of a universal moral competence – or, in other words, to take the model as a signpost rather than a repository of tools.

The second is a focus shift, consequent from the first, from moral competence to the performances in which it is used or, in methodological terms, from moral grammars to the “pragmatics of reflection” that Boltanski and Thévenot adumbrate in the postface to *De la justification*. Justification work studies, with their categories and sequences of pragmatic moves, point the way. However, the boundaries of the pragmatic approach should be specified more precisely. The reflective performances of interest are occasions of collective decision making that, as they aim to generate consequences beyond the confines of the decision-making situation itself, are subject to requirements of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, pp. 430-431). They correspond to the consequentially wide design activities – strategizing, planning, policy making – that constitute the core matter of management (Argyris, 1996), and by which managers ensure the “de-routinization” of current behaviors when uncertainty throws up exceptions, problems, and blockages to action, and their “routinization” along new lines (Gomez, 2006; Gomez and Jones, 2000, p. 706). Thus, they mark in practical terms the boundaries of the justification regime. These deliberations are pragmatic in the sense of linguistics: they problematize the meaning of organizational conventions and strive to redefine it through exchanges of discursive and practical moves.

Analyzing performances in terms of the meanings they generate, however, raises problems for comparability and the detection of regularities and variances: meaning is dependent on the contingencies of each performance (as well as on the interpretations of observers); the problem is compounded for large-scale performances with multiple centers of activity. Hence a third focus shift, from meaning to information. Unlike meaning, information

is actual, physical, and measurable (thus enabling the computation of metrics and the detection of patterns), as required by a sociological theory of information such as Garfinkel's (Garfinkel, 2016; Rawls, A.W., 2016, p. 45) which, in its conception of information as "entirely given by the ordered relations that constitute it" (Rawls, A.W., 2016, p. 13) resonates with the conventionalist idea that information does not pre-exist, but is instead created, in the "social bath" where actors are immersed (Gomez, 2006, p. 221, translated; see also Ekbia and Evans, 2009; Moreira, 2005). The assumption is that the quantity of information generated over the course of a performance is a proxy for the pluralism of meanings that are mobilized in it, whereas its subsequent reduction by information processing signifies the convergence of interpretations and the crystallization of agreements and conventional forms. In effective performances information flows and ebbs, in ineffective ones it stagnates.

Information patterns and metrics, however, cannot be compared without reference to the conditions in which they emerge: pragmatic action is effective but not unconstrained, which Gomez (2006, p. 221) frames as the problem of modeling simultaneously both poles of the action-structure axis as they constitute each other. The fourth focus shift is from the symbolic aspects of organizational structures and practices (which includes moral content) to their effects. Conventions, formal or informal, pre-configure socio-material networks: some actors, and not others, are conventionally legitimated and given the resources to act; certain audiences, and not others, are within reach of their signals, which carry different conventional weights for different recipients, and so on. Actors, however, equipped with material and symbolic objects and their affordances, can mobilize different conventions expressing different structures, enabling different agents, establishing different communication channels, and opening new possibilities. The attributes and equipment of actors, their relations, and the reconfigurations that their pragmatic moves bring about can be captured and made

comparable by using the concepts and instruments of social network analysis to visualize and quantify structures, and to infer causal relations between structural parameters and information creation and processing (e.g., Sinclair, 2015).

Do these shifts relegate the economies of worth to the position of a mere starting assumption? A signpost marks a starting point, but also indicates a direction. The economies of worth offer to the conception and practice of management the idea that moral values and justice are immanent in viable large-scale coordination; and that, by implication, managers are tasked with realizing justice in crucial aspects of socio-economic life. The task of managers is to examine how the performances under their remit play out, and intervene on the inertia, blockages and deficits that impede healthy information creation-processing and the convergence to behaviors that are just – i.e., well-adjusted to mutating material conditions and social priorities. Gomez and Jones (2000, p. 706) liken researchers in management to psychoanalysts, who cannot fully articulate psychological equilibrium but know that it implies the absence of symptoms of “pathology and pain”. But equally, and in acknowledgement of the critical capacities that French pragmatic sociology grants to actors, it could be said that managers, like psychoanalysts, are themselves “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983), who cannot fully articulate the form and meaning of firms or administrations but can detect dysfunctions in the unfolding of organization and attempt to treat them. Justice in the terms of the economies of worth may be the root of a deontology that would not isolate managers in principal-agent relations, set them up as corporate moralizers, or charge them with the role of all-knowing designers. This, after moral competence, is the other core offering of the economies of worth to OMS and practice.

Conclusion

This review has been prompted by the belief that the OMS literature that builds on the economies of worth and the conventionalist-pragmatic project represents a distinctive and important contribution and an increasingly fruitful resource for organization and management scholars. Aiming at comprehensive presentation and evaluation, it has offered a map to the literature's intellectual context and its conceptual, methodological, and empirical content, and argued for its potential towards the problematization of mainstream assumptions. The prospect is one of theories whose elements – action, information, networks – would map realistically onto management work and offer powerful actionable generalizations to practitioners (Argyris, 1996), as well as stimuli towards reflection on and re-articulation of their social role.

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