CCO and the academic-professional gap:

Combining the rigor and relevance of Organizational Communication

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Abstract

The key question of CCO scholars is, *What is an organization?*. Still, it is not easy to answer what is key in what organizations can do with CCO-scholarship. Its sophisticated theories, nuanced definitions, and meticulous methodologies can be a source of delight and fierce debate for insiders, but can become insurmountable hurdles for outsiders. Based on our work at the intersection of academia and practice, we reflect on our experiences to trace how CCO insights can be made useful for professionals. We give an overview of the elements which were most helpful, and where the hard translation issues arose. Next, we present a practical case example, where we made sense of its dynamics through CCO insights, leading to surprising outcomes for both theory and practice. We conclude with a final thought on how the constitution of the gap between academia and practice might be a topic for CCO in itself, wondering whether the gap is a helpful metaphor.

CCO and the academic-professional gap: on the rigor and relevance of our work

Oh yes, we held inspiring meetings between CCO scholars and professionals when EGOS conferences were organized. No, these workshops were not EGOS pre-conferences. We called them pre-EGOS conferences. Here is why.

The importance of the annual meetings from the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) for the CCO-community cannot be overstated. Scholars from around the world have gathered under its hospitable umbrella, from the initial subthemes to the 'Organization as Communication' Standing Working Group, and at other meetings organized before, during and after the conference. Two of these sessions were organized on the intersection of academia and society: In 2014 was the first one in Rotterdam's monumental townhall under the title of "CCO in Practice" (Van Vuuren, Porter, Novak & Knoers, 2014). Here, a group of researchers and consultants gathered for a two-day event to encourage the cross-breeding of ideas and practice. Professionals shared some of their most pressing concerns, which the academics tried to clarify and solve using whatever was available in the CCO toolbox. We did this again in 2017, at the Copenhagen Business School during an academia-meets-practice development workshop "The practical and social relevance of communication-centered organizational research" (Bencherki, Blaschke, Knoers & Van Vuuren, 2017). This was again both a wonderful as well as a frustrating gathering. On the one hand it was wonderful, as we saw the connections between public agencies and autopoiesis and between charitable foundations and the four flows. At the same time, it was frustrating as the tensions between rigor and relevance became very obvious. Peirce's pragmatism and pragmatic professionals are not easily compatible.

As said, these sessions were no official pre-conferences, because none of the visiting professionals were EGOS members, a strict requirement for inclusion in the official program. That was the reason these workshops with professionals became pre-EGOS conferences instead of EGOS pre-conferences. A wordplay which reflects the quest central to this chapter: how to build stronger connections between the separated worlds of academia and practice. A strong connection between those two spheres would benefit both: the scholarly work of CCO can be invaluable for professionals and practice can inspire CCO scholarship. Achieving this connection between rigor and relevance will need a lot of translation activities.

Rigor and/or relevance in CCO scholarship

Even though the key question of CCO scholars is "What is an organization?", it remains hard to answer what is key in what organizations can do with CCO-scholarship. Its sophisticated theories, nuanced definitions, and meticulous methodologies can be a source of delight and fierce debate for insiders, but can become insurmountable hurdles for outsiders. To untrained ears, speaking fluent CCOese runs the risk of sounding like obscure gibberish. Which, we insist, it is not! On the contrary: there is nothing as practical for professionals in organizations as a strong theory that describes the very processes of how their organizations emerge, perpetuate and transform (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). However, there is a caveat. The data presented and used in CCO analyses could not be closer to the daily lives of professionals, including open interviews in the military (e.g. Browning et al., 2009), rich cases in hacker collectives (e.g. Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) and vignettes of team interactions in hospital care (e.g. Fox & Brummans, 2019). But the theorizing about these examples from shopfloor to executive board is then oftentimes embedded in abstract ontological-epistemological frameworks, dense philosophical explorations and counterintuitive paradoxes. One cannot blame the interested practitioner becoming confused by Ricoeurian distanciation (e.g. Lohuis & Van Vuuren, 2017) or what (dis)ordering means (e.g. Vásquez, Schoeneborn & Sergi, 2016). While the academic community learns to speak this language and sharpens its lens for the dynamics, practitioners oftentimes miss the why, the what and the how. That is a waste.

The tension between academic insight and practical relevance in the field of organizations is, of course, a struggle recognized by many others. At the end of her term as president of the Academy of Management, Pearce (2004) reflected on what had been useful to her while she was leading this academic community: "[A]s I think about what was useful, and which mistakes I was able to avoid, I became aware that very little of this useful knowledge about my most important challenges came from our scholarly world. Rather, the really useful insights, the knowledge that helped with the tough problems, came from what I am calling our world of shared folk wisdom about management and organizations" (p. 176). Pearce came with an interesting suggestion to solve the problem of small overlap between folk wisdom and scholarly work. Where one may expect a plea for using more theories to replace folk wisdom on management, she suggested to carefully check folk wisdom against reality.

The so-called research-practice gap refers to the failure of research to impact practice and the lacking translation of practical concerns into research projects. Leaning on Luhmann's system theory, Kieser and Leiner provocatively state that research and practice are ultimately irreconcilable systems, deeming fruitful collaborations between the two doomed to fail for at least one but probably both sides (Kieser & Leiner, 2009, 2011, 2012). They are challenged by others (e.g. Sharma & Bansal, 2020) who see this as a rigid definition of science, showing “how the pendulum has swung in business schools over the decades from being not considered scientific enough to make a contribution to practice to being so scientific, such that we cannot contribute to the practice of management” (Shani & Coghlan, 2014: 435). Again, others (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014) have proposed that the paradoxical relationships between academics and professionals are in themselves generative for practice and fruitful for research. Moreover, talking about the tension reifies both the problem of the struggle as well as the importance of respectable and respective conversations between the two fields. A wide range of solutions are provided to bridge the gap (see Kieser, Nicolai & Seidl, 2015 for a review).

For us, the authors of this chapter, the tension is our daily reality in a literal sense. Peter is an experienced communication professional, organization consultant and managing director with a decades-long interest in academia. Mark is a hybrid academic, combining a role as (part-time, tenured) associate professor of organizational communication with a role as strategic consultant in an attempt to become more relevant for practice. We collaborate at the intersection of theory and practice, getting firsthand experience of the gap. We recognize Pearce’s surprise of the wisdom and folly of folk wisdom, Bartunek and Rynes’ (2014) struggle with different time horizons (insert apology to the editors of this volume about here), and all the others’ descriptions of the ways in which rigor and relevance serve as competing values.

These experiences are the data for the current chapter. We aim to do two things. First, we summarize what we think are the main treasures CCO has to offer to practice. This includes the practical lens of its methodology and the discursive resources of its terminology. Second, we explore how practice can inform our theorizing. We provide a case to show how the CCO toolbox informed professionals what they were experiencing. After these explorations, we conclude with some suggestions for more cross-fertilization between CCO theory and professional life.

How CCO can be(come) beneficial for practice

For outsiders, CCO has a rather technical, abstract way of speaking about organizations. Professionals have a hard time to understand the questions and the answers brought up by the academic community. This is not because professionals are stupid - both genius and idiocy can be found in equal measure within and outside of academia. The reason is that the language used within CCO is foreign to them. The perspective has no natural resemblance to the ways in which they look at the world. They don't immediately recognize the relevance of agency nor have they time to read good books about "scholars who define and operationalize the agential dynamics of organizing in different ways" (Brummans, 2018: 2). What goes for agency also counts for authoritative texts, agencement, assemblage, actants or autopoiesis. And that is only the letter A! The initial missing enthusiasm would not be a problem when CCO was irrelevant for practitioners. However, in our own our daily practice we witness that the CCO-lens does provide a detailed and illuminating perspective to professional's everyday realities. The relational nature of organizing, to name one example here, provides a counternarrative to the depiction of organizations as institutionalized hierarchical structures. Given that I am the team leader now, one professional asked, why are my colleagues not following my orders? Of course, scholars and professionals would agree, leadership is more complex than that. But on explaining why their realities are more complex, we relied heavily on the CCO approach to present an alternative perspective. We could unpack his observed behavior and present the perspective of role constitution where a leadership relationship is composed of reciprocal and mutually reinforcing identities of leaders and followers. One of the strongest assets of CCO thinking *is the reduction of communication naivety.* Still, reducing naivety needs something else than mere abstract sophistication. Bridging the abstract conceptualization and the fine-grained analysis of the way we organize ourselves, CCO can contribute to professionals. But CCO-scholars need to prove the freshness of these new ways of seeing, preferably through translating CCO concepts in terminology professionals understand, otherwise in helping them to understand the CCO language.

We, the authors, have broad experience with attempts to translating CCO's concepts in our practice. Our attempts have been met with bewilderment and with flashes of insight. Generally speaking, CCO has strong potential for enriching the views of practitioners. Through a CCO lens, they become aware of new ways of seeing their organizing. In hindsight, we see a pattern of things that are helpful and some elements that are not helpful. We summarize the most helpful insights of CCO for professionals, as well as the most problematic ones.

CCO's most helpful insights for practitioners

Seeing organizing as a process - The language of verbs. The crucial step that we see as a key insight from our journey with professionals is to move away from 'the discourse of being' towards performative language: becoming, doing, relating' (cf. Anteby et al., 2015). The social construction – idea rather than fact. This is a liberating thought for many professionals. Since organizations are constituted through communicative acts they end up as mental constructs. These images are shared but will never be completely overlapping with someone else's image of the same organization. While this idea complicates organizational life, it is closer to reality: “My firm always will be slightly different from your firm.” Everyone tends to view their own mental construct of the organization as true, hence the emphasis on ‘corporate identity.’ A CCO approach problematizes this approach of organization in a way that many professionals can relate to. For example, Christensen and Cornelissen (2011) describe how corporate communication overlooks the process through which organizations are constantly (re)produced through talk. This is easily recognized in organizations, as professionals struggle with the difficulties of different images of what their organization is or should be. It is a liberating idea for them to realize that organizations have no voice of their own (cf. Tayler & Cooren, 1997) and that the depiction of the organization in any specific setting thus partly depends on the person who is speaking on behalf of the organization. This helps them to better understand some of their struggles.

Organizationality. Opening up one’s perspective of what an organization actually is has liberating consequences. Exploring why formal organizations remain the norm for many professionals is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is evident that the awareness of looser social collectives as organization-like forms that are sometimes even superior to the standard organization is liberating. We explored the consequences of this idea for people’s understanding of their organization and teams. The awareness of organizing as a process loosens some of the strict assumptions professionals have. A prominent example of this, is the openness for a wider range of organizational forms beyond the institutionalized bureaucracy to looser social collectives. For example, Comas et al. (2015) present a polymorphic framework to show how terrorist organizations operate in different configurations, including networks (e.g. the self-managing bundles of individuals who perform attacks) and movements (e.g. political ideologies that are discussed on online platforms). We use ‘organizationality’ to capture the range of organizational forms, the term

Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015) introduced for the gradual differentiation of social collectives. They proposed the minimum criteria of what constitutes an organization as combining a) interconnected decision-making; b) collective actorhood; and c) identity claims about what the collective is or does. Understanding the possibility of organizationality (beyond a dualistic organization versus non-organization) has consequences on several levels.

First, the boundaries of an organization are no longer seen as an indispensable aspect of achieving goals. For many assignments, an organization turns out to be part of the problem rather than a solution. Bureaucracies are hindering the needed flexibility. Other forms of organizing such as a network and a movement can be much more effective, as Comas et al (2015) have shown. This does not disqualify a bureaucracy altogether. It all depends on the task at hand. Deep awareness of organizationality includes that in some cases a bureaucracy is the best way to get a job done. This also counters the idea that network organizations are the holy grail, as can be heard in organizations who are fed up with their strictness. It all depends on the question for which organizing starts. Organizationality radically positions the structure as a consequence of the purpose for which organizing takes place.

Second, the boundaries around teams and between professions need to become problematized. Being able to work in multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary teams becomes a professional core competence. This realization is vividly described by Lifshitz-Assaf (2018), who explored open innovation dynamics in teams. A shift from *how* to work to *why* collaboration was necessary led to what she calls identity refocusing. This breaks the boundaries between groups, as the collective goal becomes more important than keeping the initial professional factions intact. As Taylor and Van Every

(2011: 43) state: “the game is about whose interpretation [a definition of a given situation] will dominate.” This awareness that for the goals of the teams the teams themselves may be blockades is crucial for dismantling the boundaries between groups if they want to deliver the best outcome. We have seen this process regularly when working with professionals in teams. The assumption is made implicitly that the organization should be the ultimate beneficiary from one’s actions. Letting go of that opens up new ways of seeing and organizing. Particularly, a CCO view of communication helps to see the work of communication professionals differently. The inherent liminal nature of the communication profession (Reed & Thomas, 2021) makes them realize how their profession deals with constitution rather than ‘just’ information.

The analytical payoff. With the CCO lens comes an interest for details. The analytical payoff of closely following how, for example, decisions are communicatively accomplished in meetings gives a new perspective on how collaboration and negotiation emerge. Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) provide an example of this that resonates with professionals. Tracing how versions of a strategic text scaffold the whole process shows the power (or: agency) of such a text. Of course, doing these analyses are more complex than the straightforward survey or interview, but professionals feel that these analyses provide insights that come much closer to the answers on their real questions than standard audits. We use examples from theories to explain the concepts, and three examples are often seen as most illuminating. First, Brummans’ (2007) example of the textual agency of a signed document helps professionals to see how a text can create a persona of and for oneself, transcending space and time. It happened several times that someone came back later, proud of having exposed false claims through references to policies that did not say what was suggested it would say. Second, Benoit-Barné et al.’s (2009) analysis of the accomplishment of authority explains well how a range of words, gestures and things together establish a sense of authority. Finally, a special mention here deserves Koschmann's (2013) identification of the way in which a metaphor served as an authoritative text for establishing a sense of identity. An authoritative text refers to an abstract textual representation with a dominant reading for a group (Kuhn, 2008). The US Declaration of Independence might serve as a good example. This document in a way represents the soul of that country and what is strives for. In a less dramatic -but oftentimes more strict- fashion, in organizations such texts develop as well. These texts can be written mission statements (e.g. Kopaneva & Sias, 2015), but also metaphors can become authoritative texts, as Koschmann (2013) has shown. He describes how a collaboration initiative gained traction when seeing themselves as a dashboard for making sure "everything is working together"(p. 78). While the intricacies of authoritative texts are hard to explain, organization members are very aware of the crucial role certain metaphors play in their understanding of their collective. The metaphors they range from referees and coaches to Huckleberry Finn and Band of Brothers. With these metaphors identified as authoritative text, they are becoming sensemaking devices for what the group is and could be.

Aspirational talk. Christensen et al. (2013) define aspirational talk as "communication which announces ideals and intentions rather than reflect actual behaviours" (p. 373). Managers know that announcing ideals can be a tricky business. A lack of proof for the actuality of good behavior can damage an organization´s image, especially in skeptical contexts. Expressing good intentions to a cynical crowd may pave the road to a reputational hell. Here words have clear consequences, albeit the opposite ones that were hoped for. The impact of this *j'accuse* may deter leaders to consider ambitious policies, thereby hampering needed courageous actions to work towards ideals. Every attempt to get out of this deadlock is worth consideration. Aspirational talk is such an attempt. It provides an alternative situation when words do not reflect in actual behavior – these words could be the announcement of an aspiration, as intended behavior. This type of idealization is better known as “inspiration”, a word with a much better press than hypocrisy. According to Christensen et al. (2013: 380), this is an essential first phase of actual behavioral change: “To stimulate change and improvement, managers are encouraged to invoke fictions, in a sense to practice hypocrisy.” That is the key of aspirational talk: there is a positive version of hypocrisy. This is a relief, which refers first of all to CSR communication (Christensen, 2013), but also to other settings, like core values (Van Vuuren, 2015) in a vision document. In one higher education institute where they had become rather cynical about the value of strategic plans, we introduced the distinction between the two types of hypocrisy. Strategic plans are always hypocritical as they depict a situation that is different from the current state. There is a gap between what you say and what you do. The question became whether they want to pursue the state they described or not. Translating their strategy as hypocrisy turned out to be helpful in reformulating the strategy in a more realistic future state.

Providing a sophisticated language for communication processes. For practitioners, there seems to be a curse of successful communication. Paradoxically, for people who assumed communication as a given, communication becomes most visible when it is absent. When a project is a failure, it is often due to “the lack of communication.” People are angry, dissatisfied, because they were not informed. In post-project assessments, project teams often list communication as one of the most needed areas for improvement. If “the communication” had been better, the project would have run smoother. Rather than a constitutive force, communication is treated as an easy, yet the weakest link in the whole process. And the communication professionals are responsible. At the same time, the same communication is easily overlooked in the evaluation of successful project. If things go smoothly and a project went well, claims are made about the strength of leadership, charisma and trust. In that sense, transparent communicate is a goal and a curse: as soon as you managed the communication processes so well that people really understood each other, ‘the communication’ is transparent, hence invisible. The saying goes “success has many fathers, while failure is an orphan.” Communication managers have to put effort into making crystal clear which contribution they made to successes. They have to claim their part of the success that is so easily attributed to leadership, vision, focus and teamwork. Otherwise they will remain – in line with the saying- managers of the corporate orphanage. But – and here is the key – they need the discursive resources to identify the constructive, constitutive and complex nature of communication. This is what CCO can provide. Its focus on constitution provides the language that help professionals to move beyond a caricatural idea of communication, what we previously called the reduction of communication naivety. An example of this constitution is CCO’s approach to organizational identification. While the importance of identification is reflected in the rich stream of research (see Ashforth, 2016; Ashforth et al., for a review), the emergence and appearance of this organizational identification in the everydayness of organizational life remained an open question. Chaput, Brummans and Cooren (2011) answered this question with their study of member’s attachments to a new political party. They showed that organizational identification is not a mindset that merely becomes explicit through utterances in a meeting, but that it were the actions of identifying with a common purpose, a document, a name that created the sense of sameness we call identification. Another example shows the exact opposite: Bean and Buikema (2015) apply the four flows model of constitutive communication to show how the decline of the terrorist organization al-Qa’ida was communicatively accomplished. The destabilizing communication activities they proposed include production of distorting fake orders in terrorist networks and other forms of information as weapon of mass distortion. Whether it is about constitution or dissolution, CCO research shows how the pervasiveness of communication in organizational processes. In this sense, one communication professional once compared communication for organizations with water on earth: someone who only sees water in seas and ditches, will be surprised to learn that over half of the human adult body is water. In organizations, communication is -still- oftentimes reduced to information, and the sending and reception of messages.

The more problematic aspects of translating CCO for practice

The rigidity of its philosophy. While a constitutive perspective is helpful in understanding certain processes, it serves as an add-on to other perspectives. These other perspectives might have contradictory ontological and epistemological underpinnings. People do leave the *terra firma* of interactions. This is not restricted to professionals only, as scholars also differ in their approaches. For example, Ocasio, Loewenstein and Nigam (2015) link CCO to institutional logics without buying into its ontological claim: Their perspective follows a critical realist approach, relying "on the assumption that although institutional logics scale up and thereby emerge from situated communicative events distributed throughout organizations and institutional fields, they have an ontological reality distinct from communication" (Ocasio et al., 2015, p. 30). Czarniawska (2001) shared her musings about the possibility to be a constructionist consultant, vividly describing the clash between different logics (e.g. logics of practice, of theory, and of representation). That is part of the problem: speaking from a particular logic makes it really hard to see the rationale of another logic. When you have made sense of something, it is challenging to see how an alternative makes sense in a different way, rather than being stupid, evil or naïve. So when professionals do not follow the abstract CCO logic, they are not stupid. They reside in a lived reality in which some of the CCO language does not make sense. It is really hard to consider social constructionism while you are standing next to a coffee machine.

The debates between the schools. Professionals with a strong theoretical interest sometimes look for a thorough understanding of the CCO perspective. The differences between the approaches is a puzzling element here. Of course, they know that rigor and specificity is a hallmark of academic debates, but they don't see the relevance for their work. In this sense, interestingly, of the different streams of CCO, the Four Flows approach (Iverson, McPhee & Spaulding, 2017) has the most natural appeal to practitioners. McPhee and Zaug (2000) were the first to propose that organizations are constituted through the intermingling of four kinds of communication processes. These Four Flows include membership negotiation (demarcating the boundaries between those who are in or out), reflexive self-structuring (recognizing talk creates shared memories), activity coordination (establishing connections between individual activities so they add up to a collective achievement), and institutional positioning (through which individuals can become representatives of the organization). Professionals recognize the four activities as issues they face in their organization. Moreover, the underlying framework of structuration theory with its duality of structure is something that professionals recognize. Governmental officials immediately recognizes the web of rules, regulations and resources that guide, afford and constrain their actions – and also that their dealing with these resources reproduces or transforms their routines. Therefore, the four flows rationale oftentimes has more direct resonance with their worldviews than Luhmannian or Montreal School sources, at least in the way we present them.

The complexity of the language. The irony is not lost on professionals exploring the CCO approach that a group who insists on the power of language speaks such an impenetrable language that only insiders can understand. Insisting on language as crucial for ordering calls for a certain quality of language itself. The quality of rigor and precision is oftentimes achieved for conversations within the academic community, but for outsiders something else is needed. Translation can work both ways: either practitioners learn to speak CCOese, or scholars with a CCO background formulate their perspective in terminology that practitioners use. It is not strange for professionals to learn new terminology when acquiring new concepts. They learned about lean six sigma and black belts, about agile and sprints, so why not initiate them in imbrication and autopoiesis? The problem remains that these words are part of a whole new way of seeing the world. One can only fully understand imbrication after having felt 'imbricated' (i.e. that floating feeling when the awareness strikes that everything might be socially constructed). So separate concepts will not do the trick. Moreover, professionals will need to talk to their colleagues as well. Having a real impact requires language that can also be explained to others. Here the scholar will need to face the challenge of ethnographers: learning the language of the other in order to create relational rapport and a shared understanding (Tanu & Dales, 2016). Below, we give a more detailed example how we used CCO's concepts to help practitioners making sense of their situation. In Figure 1, we included a figure of the Four translations from the Montreal School (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 177, Figure 7.1). The original wording was met with confusion by our participants, which led to a new version we jokily called the 'Montreal School for Dummies' model. Here we replaced distanciation, textualization and presentification with more accessible words (see Figure 1).

We will now summarize a case about a collective initiative that became constituted and then dissolved again, to the surprise of many. We analyzed this case and turned it into a learning opportunity for both practitioners and scholars (Van Vuuren, Knoers & Verloop, 2019). We will summarize the case, and then link the learning points to the stronger and weaker elements of CCO mentioned above.

***Overheid* in Contact: a tale of two narratives**

A group of professional experts from different backgrounds, including communication, participation and public services, came up with the idea to create an online platform to facilitate an ongoing high-quality conversation about improving government-society interaction. Over time, this online conversation was hoped to foster a collective vision, collaboration, and ultimately the increased quality of services and contact with governmental agencies. They called this platform *Overheid in Contact (*OiC, literally: *Government in Contact)*. All readers were invited to write articles that would open the discussion. All readers had access to all articles and could comment on each other. On the platform, they shared their views, knowledge and insights into service provision by the government, democracy, participation, working in networks, data, communication and leadership. Ambitions and expectations were high, yet implicit. Rachel, (a pseudonym for) the initiator of the platform, became the called editor-in chief of OiC, guided the authors in the process to develop their submissions into high-quality articles for the website. The platform published a high-quality article per week on its website between September 2017 and November 2018, widely read by an enthusiastic audience. The amount of and variety in backgrounds of readers grew from the start until the end. Rachel, however, became increasingly frustrated with the way things went. She shut down the platform on November 15, 2018. This left the readers perplexed: how could such a good magazine *not* succeed? Given our connection to both the OiC initiative and the CCO community, we were intrigued by the rise and fall of this new organizational arrangement, by the mix of excitement and frustration, the shock by the readers and Rachel's felt inevitability for making this decision.

The CCO terminology helped us to make sense of the shock. Therefore, we invoked the constitutive translation dynamics (as described in Brummans et al, 2014) which provide the terminology to give a communicative explanation for the rise and fall of the initiative Overheid in Contact. Figure 1 summarizes the process and analysis. The black boxes 1-4 are taken from the CCO-chapter in the handbook of organizational communication (Brummans et al., 2014), summarizing the core ideas of the Montreal School in accessible language. These boxes and arrows together depict the process of organizational development (p. 176-182). While the description in their text focuses on the boxes (1-4 in Figure 1), it is important to note that the actual message of translation and incarnation is in the arrows (Arrows A-D in Figure 1). It represents how many practices and conversations (Box 1) can scale up to a collective experience over time (Box 2). When the participants continue to recognize themselves as a coherent unity, they start to refer to this unity as an 'it'. Through this depersonalization, their collective experiences become authored and turned into text (cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). This is the Arrow B-translation, where the organization becomes a conversation topic that is extracted from actual practices. 'It' becomes a symbolic organizational template, conveying the organization's intentions, code of conduct and identity. Organizations that become texts can be read by (or read to) internal and external publics. This is the Arrow C-translation. The traces of yesterday's organizing create predictability for future conversations and provide the template for representation of the collective entity (Box 4). The collectively experienced unity can act when it is represented by people or things that are recognized as typically fitting or incarnating 'the organization.' Finally, the recognized collective fuels new interactions. The organization in this translation has such a homogeneous substance that it can be recognized (i.e. re-cognize, brought back to mind) and thus be made present again (i.e. re-present-ed) in new interactions (Arrow D).

Using the constitutive translation dynamics, we could trace the differences between the participants of what was actually constituted. For the purpose of this chapter, we only report the section of the analysis that is relevant for understanding the relationship between CCO theory and practice (Figure 1).

[insert Figure 1 about here]

We had access to virtually all correspondence, emails, documents, surveys and reports on OiC, ranging from the very initial idea (Spring 2017) to the latest responses after its shutdown (November 2018). Next to these data, we considered that the sequential nature of the four translations might elegantly match a narrative research approach. It is the sequence of translations through with sense emerges. Therefore, we held life story interviews (Lohuis et al., 2016; McAdams & McLean, 2013) with seven professionals directly involved in OiC. We more or less asked interviewees to 'relive their constitution of OiC.' This narrative interview helped us to trace the development of the collective, and map it on the process visualized in the model. Through our analyses, we identified two different narratives of what OiC was and should become. Rachel's conceptualization of OiC differed significantly from the other group members. Over time, in the minds of the participants, two types of organizations had emerged: a failed community (according to Rachel; Arrows A-D) and a successful magazine (according to almost anybody else; Arrows A'-C').

The leader's narrative: a failed community (Arrows A-D)

A group of professionals came together and talk about the options of starting a platform (Box 1). This was the only time in the entire process that they met in person. The publication of the first articles was a clear indicator that they were creating something together on this platform (Arrow A). The articles were seen as the first step towards a community, and by all these authors handing in stories, they had something in common (Arrow B). They read each other's texts and were able to share those within their networks. As the hub in the network, the editors took care of the back-office. The editorial team sometimes had to go through many rounds of revisions, sometimes even rewriting the entire text in order to reach the satisfactory quality they set for themselves and all others. The high quality of the articles did not go unnoticed. New readers subscribed to the newsletter every week. As a platform, they took part in activities related to the mission of OiC (Arrow C), including a National Day for "Civil Servants 2.0" Here, they handed out business cards, had a slide in their presentations explaining the community. "That was a fantastic day." But it was an exception: further, there were no more activities. A scheduled meeting in January 2018 was cancelled because not enough participants showed up. While the quality articles were published, read and lauded, it came with a cost: the editorial team spent literally days per week (without payment) to get an article out. During Spring 2018 it became a frustrating endeavor to collect and publish the articles as most authors did not meet their deadlines. The authors took no responsibility as team members as the initiator had hoped for (Arrow D). This was not the type of community she had hoped for. And there was no business case, while the investments were high, particularly for the editors.

The frustration kept growing when the authors continuously failed to meet their deadlines. There should be a moment that this initiative would make some money. The investments became severe. A set of masterclasses on topics central to the platform was cancelled as not enough people enrolled for them. The editors felt like being stuck in “just the articles.” The community never materialized. It was really frustrating for the editors that all their hard work did not move beyond the stage of articles. So, ultimately, they pulled the plug.

The alternative narrative: a successful magazine (Arrows A’-C’)

A group of professionals came together and talked about the options of starting a platform. The platform took shape, relying on the dominant metaphor of a magazine. With the magazine, a whole set of elements for a collective identity emerged. From the start (Box 1), the interactions were filled with magazine-related terminology: authors, editors, editing, readers, page views, articles, and a format. The activities logically became a magazine, and thus it made sense to think of the platform in those terms (Arrow A’). These words came up everywhere in the emails, the website and the narrative. Readers referred to OiC as ‘the magazine’ (Arrow C’) and authors used it as explanation for their writing and reading (Arrow D’). A key characteristic was that you could learn something from the articles. “They were so good, no one had to react to them. They were done. What could you say? If you wanted response, debate and reactions, you should submit something that is of less quality. Now you read, learned, and remained silent.” The timely (weekly) appearance of high-quality articles from different authors was a clear indication that the community was working. Its success as a magazine became so dominant that it muted alternative goals of the platform. While the magazine metaphor gave the group traction as a collective identity, it was not helpful for creating a community.

How communication constituted two different organizations

These two different narratives of the platform were clashing in three ways, leading to two different ideas about what OiC was becoming.

The first tension [Clash 1] was present when different experiences arose. The online-offline incarnations were unbalanced. The platform emerged almost exclusively online. The few moments in which they physically met or collaborated (like organizing workshops on Civil Servant Day) were very energizing. But most often, most authors did not show up at meetings, and the efforts were singularly focused on the online magazine. Looking back, the editor said: “I should not have agreed on cancelling these meetings. You must come together sometimes to form a team.” The platform became so tightly dependent on the production of articles, pushing all participants in the roles of author and editor, that an alternative distanciation towards a community would be odd.

The second tension [Clash 2] arose when *a skewed investment of effort and time passed unnoticed* when the platform was shaped. Through the analysis, it became apparent that key conversations were *lacking* in this phase. Given the highly visible output, it was assumed that the ‘back office’ (the editorial work) was smooth and did not need further attention. The depersonalization of this collective experience was a mismatch with the amount of work the editorial duo had to do to realize the publication of the articles. The two days a week editorial work remained invisible, was taken for granted, and was thereby *lost in translation.* This would become frustrating for the editors later on, still out of sight for authors and readers. With such investments, it can become worrisome that OiC did not attract acquisition, contracts, or paid commissions. The single focus on the high-quality magazine left those other voices muted. The editors were hailed for a role they did not want.

They wanted to be more than just editors, being highly skilled consultants and experts in digital communication and governmental services.

The third tension [Clash 3] followed logically from the other two tensions: With those different expectations, the failing of the masterclasses (that did not logically flow from the magazine as it would have followed a community) and the disappointment and surprises for the authors and readers when the editor decided to shut down the platform. The success of the magazine and quality of the contributions made them blind for the problematic issues that could only be seen from the hope for a community.

The OiC case, CCO theory and practice

Overheid in Contact looked like a success to everyone except for leader/editor/initiator Rachel. The analysis of the demise of the platform was helpful for the professionals, as they were so surprised about it. It was baffling to them, a group of highly professional collaborators, who made the platform to share their insights on contact, service and collaboration, how could they have overlooked these dynamics? Our analyses showed them the importance of awareness for implicit analogies that people use when they start something new. The alternative reality of the magazine became dominant, leading to people acting like editorial staff. The power of a metaphor in the translation process should therefore not be underestimated (cf. Koschmann, 2013) This dominant translation had a downside: it can mute other translations (e.g. online-offline, or the return on investments from participants) that are also important to achieve successful and sustainable incarnations of organizations. We talked a lot about the becoming of the platform, where things went wrong, and how the platform emerged in a way that the most active person did not want but still actively facilitated. Still, we needed to do a lot of translations. We even created a

"Montreal school model for dummies" in order to show the participants what these boxes and arrows meant.

The impact of the CCO analysis was immediate. After reading the analysis, the editor considered a restart of OiC: "With the insights you gave me that we turned ourselves into a magazine, that messed it all up. So, if we let this go… then the platform can continue, develop itself organically, like it was meant from the start."

For ourselves, this case was a turning point as well. This is recognizable for teachers: it enhances their reflexivity too (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2017). We were developing an idea to create a community for professionals who work at the intersection of two fields (*Blikopeners*, literally: can opener, but also: a new way of looking). We try to use the learnings from our OiC study, in at least two ways. First and foremost, we focus on 'the becoming' of this new community from day 1. We try to make explicit what members feel about the community. We give room to different views, and give all members the freedom to join or leave whenever they want. We are reflective about the ways in which constitution takes place. Second, we explicitly welcome different views and perspectives, and let everyone explicate the constitution that they see happening.

Concluding thought: bridging the gap or time for a map?

For CCO scholars, the setting of collaboration between professionals and scholars can be a fruitful area for research. Expert have to do boundary work, translating their expertise in order to be made useful to nonexperts (Bechky, 2020). This boundary work is now often done by the professionals, and a few scholars in a consulting role. This is really hard. We need help from the CCO community, which has so much to offer to practice. It would be good if insights from CCO were translated in order to become useful to nonexperts. The question is: How?

A creative way to address this question is given by Dipboye (2014), who problematizes the bridging-the-gap metaphor for "its underlying assumption that one can link and make one the worlds of the scholar and the practicing manager" (p. 490). He suggested that scholars and practitioners may have to accept that the realities of the two parties are too different, in both tasks and styles. The very metaphor of gap bridging might be too reductionist. So rather than bridging the gap, he proposes the metaphor of map making to guide mutual benefit of each other's efforts and experiences. Scholars are the mapmakers in the world where practitioners travel: "The science of cartography can provide knowledge and a useful tool in the form of a map. However, these are abstractions, and in the journey the traveler will encounter unexpected dangers, uncharted forks in the road, barriers in the path, and other gaps between reality and the map" (Dipboye, 2014, p. 490).

A CCO-map of the professional field in which people organize themselves, and are organized by their circumstances, that would be a great idea. In this chapter we sketched some of the elements that could become part of this map. These include of course the strengths of CCO for practice: the language of verbs to unveil the processual nature of organizing; the range of organizational constellations (loosely arranged under the header of organizationality, the eye for detail and its analytical payoff; the freedom provided by the concept of aspirational talk; and the sophisticated language that could capture both the failures and the successes of communication. Also the more stubborn issues that widen the gap between academia and practice should be considered, including the commitments to specific ontological and epistemological underpinnings and schools that might be relevant within academia, but hinders translation to practitioners, as well as the hard work that needs to be done when translating the concepts to the lived realities of people in organizations.

We are well aware of the fact that not every scholar sees it as one of the main goals of their work to be relevant for society. A society needs this type of scholars as well, even if both sides are not aware of that. But for most of the academics within this field, we hope to have shown how satisfying and rewarding these interactions with practitioners are. They struggle oftentimes in their work, and the CCO perspective can be beneficial to the core of their activities. Good communication helps, as well as reduced communication naivety. Helping out here is satisfying beyond the sometimes myopic goals within universities.

A positive sign for crossing bridges, closing gaps and drawing maps is the current Handbook project. In a way this book embodies the coming-out of a group of scholars who have had an inspiring time together in a corner of organization studies, but now they present the ideas to the world. Engagement with other scholars, and new questions from professionals will further the discussion.

While the majority of this chapter tries to make scholars move towards professionals in organizations, it is easy to overlook that scholars are organization members too. A collective endeavor to describe university life from a CCO perspective could show how the dynamics scholars see ‘out there in the field’ also explain their own experiences as employees in a system. Notwithstanding the differences between academic and non-academic institutions, there will be shared experiences of populating organizations, just as other professionals do. And, lastly, practitioners went to our schools and universities before entering their organizations. Some who become managers will be our management students first. The notes on a pedagogy of CCO that Kuhn and Schoeneborn (2015) proposed should therefore be taken to heart as well.

But even with all these ideas and intentions, some questions will remain. What would be the best possible map for practitioners? And how can the CCO community guide them through the jungle of elegant theories and thought-provoking concepts? This could be a very exciting topic to organize a meeting, where everyone is invited. Who knows, it may one day even become an official pre-conference.

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Figure 1. How communication constituted two different organizations