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# Introduction: From Dialogues on Organizational Psychology to Organizational Psychology as Dialogue

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*"Processes of negotiating (...) are processes in which the participants multilogue, their understandings change in text-context relationship, creating shared understandings which are emergent."  
(Dachler & Hosking, 1995)*

At the occasion of Peter Dachler's academic retirement, and to "warm up" for his "Abschiedsvorlesung", entitled "Abschied vom Subject", we organized a small symposium,<sup>1</sup> where colleagues from inside and outside the University of St. Gallen formulated their thoughts on topics and themes in organizational psychology that had occupied and resounded in the research and writing of Peter Dachler. Afterwards, we asked the contributors to this symposium to create short essays based on their interventions and the responses of the participants in this symposium. This book brings as a result of this collective dialogue a series of texts that reflect upon the understandings and implications of social constructionist approaches to organizational life. From the dialogues we undertook at the symposium and the ones the authors continued in their connected writings, an idea of organizational psychology emerges that focuses on organizational processes as dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup> The Symposium has taken place June 17, 2003 at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

We will start with further characterizing this book as a form of dialogical writing. Thereafter a short overview of the respective contributions will be provided. The closing paragraph of this introduction shall finally try to envision and confabulate some of the future scholarly priorities at our Research Institute for Organizational Psychology at the University of St. Gallen.

## 1. Writing as Dialogue

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The present book was arranged such as to portray the writing of the following contributions as dialogue. The dialogical quality of writing thereby primarily comes to bear in relation to the text's language and writing style. Accordingly, a *first* aspect of this book which earns special attention relates to the stipulation that all essays should try to retain something of their dialogical quality. The respective contributions are therefore less written as finished academic texts, but rather appear as stories, narrating the engagements of every "author" with a certain aspect of Peter Dachler, social constructionism, and organizational psychology. Most symbolically, we have included Peter Dachler's "Abschiedsvorlesung" in the lecture-form it was performed. More importantly, this lecture itself forms a dialogue with one of the "grand" themes of the last 20 years in organizational psychology and far beyond, the so-called "death of the subject", and how this might change our relational practices in organizations and everyday life. Also the other essays can be read as a dialogue between the past, present and future of organizational life, which shall stimulate us to reflect upon the current conditions of organizations as social processes. As reflections of their time, these essays can create a continuity, and actively (in)form some parameters of future research at the Research Institute for Organizational Psychology at the University St. Gallen.

A *second* aspect which deems this book particular is that it includes texts both in German as well as in English whereby we have provided introductions for each essay in its complementary language. This bilingual option not only illustrates that Peter Dachler divided his live on both sides of the Atlantic, but also points at the dialogue between German and English, between two cultures and between the local anchorage and the international spread, most scholars today are required to pursue. The simultaneous use of two languages shall simultaneously highlight the instability of meaning, and keep us reminded that the translation from one language into another can never occur in the sense of an accurate 1:1 relationship, but will always be accompanied by an alteration of the initial sense.

A *third* idiosyncrasy of this book is that the respective texts were organized as dialogues. Hence, the book is dialogically conceived as authors reflect in dyads around four themes that were selected as important parts of the research of the Research Institute of Organizational Psychology, since its conception in 1979, and that we presented to examine for their future potential. These four themes are: "conceptions of social constructionism", "social constructionism and practice", "the social construction of leadership" and "social constructionism and gender". For each part, short introductions relate the contributions to the thinking of Peter Dachler and how the theme became problematized.

## 2. Texts in Dialogue

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Readers who want to warm up their dialogical sensitivity are welcome to read the texts of Annette Kluge and Chris Steyaert. You might read over the shoulder of Annette Kluge and enter in the middle of all discussions. The carnival metaphor might sensitize you to the many colours, nuances and ironies of social life. When reading along with Chris Steyaert, you might explore the wider connections of the dialogical principle as they have been developed by Buber, Bakhtin and Bohm, feel the necessity of dialogue and even give it a try.

With this warming up, you can enter the first of four sections. In the first section on "conceptions of social constructionism", René Bouwen elaborates social constructionism's generic impact on organizational science. In opposition to positivist research presuming that organizations are knowledgeable by means of sound measurement and sophisticated analytic procedures, social constructionist theory conceives of organizations as constructions emerging due to their members' relational processes. The implications for theorizing and practice are manifold, and it gets obvious throughout Bouwen's text that the functionalist understanding of management issues such as knowledge, organizing, communication, change, etc. gets significantly challenged. The pivotal premises of constructionism is that organizational success and sustainability are interwoven with the quality of joint relational constructions and mutual relationships. Bouwen lays claim for relational organizing by illustrating the necessity of participative and inclusive modes of interpersonal exchange. Communities of practice in that respect are portrayed as the essential building blocks of new social realities, i.e. innovative meaning configurations deriving from the interconnection of employees' rich diversity of inputs and backgrounds.

The second article on "conceptions of social constructionism" by Johannes Rüegg-Stürm illuminates the paradigmatic root assumptions of management research and practice, which appear overtly un(der)-reflected in contemporary science. Concerning relational constructionism, Rüegg-Stürm points out that Peter Dachler's writing has challenged many of the taken-for-granted epistemological assumptions of organization researchers. In accordance with Bouwen's text, Rüegg-Stürm underscores the constitutive role of relational processes for organizational reality. His text further raises awareness that the research process in constructionist terms is less conceived as an objective, value-free undertaking, but rather has to be thought of as a collaborative act of meaning creation. Consequently, Rüegg-Stürm opts for the complementation of prevailing rational-technical concepts of management and organization by a perspective that comprises the social processes underlying and constituting organizational realities. Hence, the myth of infinite predictability and controllability is overthrown by a view that accounts for the cultural-relational aspects of organizational life. In conclusion, Rüegg-Stürm suggests the appropriation of meta-discourses, such as systems theory by Luhmann or the theory of structuration by Giddens, which are believed to inhere the potential to bridge the gap between traditional, read instrumental, and innovative, read constructionist, theories.

Andreas Harbig opens the section on "social constructionism as practice". He takes up the seeming controllability of human conduct as implied by technological and economic theories to conclude that managers within the 90s have apparently lost the ability to reflect upon their respective deeds. While pursuing ever more sophisticated management/control procedures, organizations have missed the opportunity to question the appropriateness and utility of its ventures. In the course of this increased activism, organizational members were allocated the role of instrumental objects that were supposed to carry out organizational duties. In contrast thereto, Harbig suggests to reformulate the management image of "warrior" in terms of "creator", a metaphor which to him appears more promising to account for relational and creative organizing, and which provides a perspective that incorporates the diversity and difference of organizational members. Leadership practice would then be transformed in such ways that employees' perspectives are taken into consideration, that organizational reality becomes a matter of genuine collaboration and negotiation, and that there would be an increased focus on issues of composition and creation, rather than mere administration and management.

While having repeatedly been entitled "historian" by Peter Dachler over the course of their long-lasting collaboration, Emil Walter-Busch within his contribution in the section on "social constructionism as practice" takes up this as-

signed subject position to launch a journey to some seminal writings from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In specific, Emil Walter-Busch presents some of the texts by Mary P. Follett which exhibit distinct ideas later taken up in connection with social constructionist theorizing. While being predominantly remembered due to her work on democracy, moral philosophy, power, etc., Walter-Busch additionally pinpoints Follett's significance for management literature, and illustrates how her writing has paved the way for a relational conceptualization of organizational life. Her writings on difference, for example, have shifted our understanding in organization studies to such an extent that variability and divergence were no longer conceived of as evil forces which had to be eliminated, but rather as a source of genuine creativity. Organization practice in Follett's sense becomes the acknowledgment and harmonizing of differences, i.e. the interpenetration of people's difference to create the experience of unified spirit. Walter-Busch finally lists the many commonalities between Follett's and social constructionism's theory, which then helps to establish an inter-text between the historical work of Follett and the more recent contributions by Peter Dachler.

In the next section on "the social construction of leadership", Werner R. Müller critically reflects upon his own consultancy work aimed at the introduction of new leadership models. This leads him to conclude that matters of leadership by organizational scholars were habitually carried out under a technological logic, which has often led to unexpected and negative side effects. In particular, Müller explains the failure of those interventions by means of their incremental incompatibility with employees' understanding of leadership. Yet, social constructionist theory offers a perspective wherein leadership emerges as a collaboratively negotiated and mutually agreed subject position. Once established discourse on leadership acquires an objectified, taken-for-granted quality which makes any sort of change a troublesome undertaking. Hence, discourse becomes problematic once it implies unequal relations between leaders and subordinates. For example, if discourse works to establish subject-object (instead of subject-subject) relationships between leaders and subordinates, negative emotions and resistance are due to arise. Enacting leadership in terms of subject-object relations, employees will inevitably experience themselves as powerless, as well as lacking agency, coherence and authenticity. Taking into consideration the potential oppressiveness of leadership discourse, Müller points out the need to conceive of leadership not as a personalized act of a singular person, but rather as a complex set of relationships where the power of definition and voice gets allocated to the collective sphere.

The second text in the section on "the social construction of leadership" by Jürg Manella investigates social constructionism's potential to oppose the idea of unrestricted feasibility which keeps penetrating the realm of management. Manella suggests to focus leadership upon the cultivating of conditions which enable emergence, innovation, and creativity. While illustrating his ideas through the metaphor of the gardener, it becomes increasingly clear that leadership cannot be put into practice by means of one-sided command. Instead, leadership implies collaboration, i.e. sound interaction which constantly needs to be nourished and gloomed. Consequently, leadership is equalled with the co-production of shared organizational realities, and the simultaneous establishment of mutually accepted rules. Taking the argument further, leaders become "enablers", "supporters", "accelerators", etc. which skilfully integrate the idea of relating into their leading practices. Manella finally reminds us that it will no longer be sufficient to design leadership education according to principles of best practices, in that it is equally important to account for the social processes underlying profound leading.

Gudrun Sander opens the section on "social constructionism and gender" and provides a developing narrative of gender research wherein each new generation of feminist theorizing marks an alteration of preceding feminist writings. Feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism all had distinct effects within their respective area of application, and until today all three approaches retained their significance for gender issues in organizations. Sander lucidly illustrates the specific gains and limitations of the three approaches in connection to gender equality initiatives in organizations. In accordance with social constructionism, feminist postmodernism rejects the assumption of objective gender differences (as assumed by feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory), and instead highlights how gender differences are (inter)actively created through hierarchical dichotomies. The gender dichotomy thereby works to set up inequalities due to which women are subjected to an inferior position of power. Yet, while gender gets conceived of as a social construction, rather than a naturally existing entity, feminist postmodernism advocates to resist customarily oppressive modes of "doing gender". Despite the ambivalence articulated by some feminist scholars, postmodernism has nevertheless enriched the field of organization studies by means of its deconstructive methodology. It has enabled the deliberation of societal images of femaleness and maleness, and, by questioning the implicitness of those understandings, has created opportunities to decide upon more appropriate constructions.

The second text in this section on "social constructionism and gender" by Thomas Eberle selectively addresses the question of how gender actually gets

constructed within human interaction. Following Dachler's relational constructionist writing, Eberle points out that the male perspective within organization has become the privileged ontology, which in effect has muted female voices and representations. It is further emphasized that relational constructionist's plea to substitute subject-object relations (as enacted by males) with subject-subject relations (the female mode of relation) has revealed its affinity to female world-views. Yet, by discussing selected studies on gender construction, we are reminded that, rather than showing consistent gendered forms of interaction, males and females in everyday life often oscillate between those two patterns. Eberle therefore questions relational constructionist's claim that subject-object, respectively subject-subject, relations mark typical male, respectively female, patterns of interaction. It appears that "doing gender" can only be understood properly while taking into consideration the respective societal understanding of "maleness" and "femaleness". Consequently, what is needed according to Eberle are studies which do not merely focus on human interaction (e.g. ethnomethodology), but which additionally embrace the institutional, societal level of analysis. Prospective research on "doing gender" then could be enriched by connecting conversational data with results from discourse analysis, the latter providing insight into how male and female understandings are constructed and reiterated through language.

### 3. Envisioning the Future

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As members of the Research Institute for Organizational Psychology we would like to "exploit" the creative energy radiating from our brisk collaboration with Peter, as well as from the contributions of this book in order to further and deepen our knowledge on social constructionist theory and practice. What we see emerge in these dialogues on organizational psychology is that organizational psychology itself becomes a dialogical science and practice.

To conceive the psychology of organizing processes as dialogical can allow us to create a research agenda and teaching curriculum that draws upon the many insights that are brought forward in this book, that is in contact with a specific context or audience and that tries to maintain the creative momentum and make a difference.

Some of the themes and activities that can create a dialogical conception of Organization Psychology can be summarized in the following prospects pointing at the many dimensions of dialogue:

- *an emphasis on the conversational construction of organizational life through developing interpretive, narrative and discursive studies*
- *an emphasis on the dialogicality of social processes as they are manifest in central organizational themes such as learning, creativity, and (organizational) change*
- *an emphasis on organizations as multivoiced by developing one of key realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a diverse and multicultural society and by institutionalizing the relationship between organization and "diversity and gender"*
- *an emphasis on studying life as dialogical by an interest for the complex interweaving of work with other spheres of life*
- *an emphasis on the dialogue of intercultural processes and its translation principles*
- *an emphasis on the social and political effects of organizing by studying organizations and entrepreneurship in a societal context and by studying the role of (new) organizations as a form of political activism and social entrepreneurship*
- *an emphasis on dialogical spaces such as cities which form the diverse platform on which people experiment with new models of living and working together*
- *an emphasis on teaching, training and advice as a dialogical and experiential practice where activities such as team building, coaching, play and improvisation, feedback are practiced as much as further developed*

Last but not least, we would like to continue our hospitable tradition of inviting *guest speakers, lectures and visiting scholars* to fuel into the ongoing theoretical and methodological dialogue at our Institute. Trying to perpetuate the global spirit we inherited from Peter Dachler, we will try to remain open to novel developments in theory and practice, and try to integrate those inspirations into our teaching and research. Yet, as social constructionism since Peter Dachler's vocation to the Research Institute for Organizational Psychology has served as a virtual bridge that has intellectually and morally connected its individual team members, we have at our disposal good reasons to nourish our affiliation with social constructionism and to carry it over to the future into new forms and new problematics.

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## Vor- und Mittendrin-Wort

*Annette Kluge*

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Vor einiger Zeit las ich in einer Kolumne im Handelsblatt ein Plädoyer dafür, dass es einen Preis geben sollte für das nicht veröffentlichte Management-Buch. Einen Preis dafür, dass ein Buch (Gott sei Dank) nicht erschienen ist. Weil schon alles gesagt wurde, was es zum Thema Management zu sagen gäbe. Die Organisationspsychologie ist nicht unabhängig von den Trends der Managementliteratur. Und es lässt sich dabei lange darüber diskutieren, ob sie den Management-Trends voraus ist oder ihnen hinterherrennt.

Nun können sich die LeserInnen dieses Buches ebenso wie der Kolumnist im Handelsblatt fragen: Gibt es zur Organisationspsychologie tatsächlich noch etwas Neues zu sagen?

Diese Veröffentlichung heißt "Organisationspsychologie als Dialog" und hat deshalb nichts "zu sagen", sondern entwickelt ihre Ideen im Austausch mit in ihr arbeitenden praktischen Forschern und forschenden Praktikern. Das, was wir in dieser Veröffentlichung zur Organisationspsychologie im Dialog entwickeln, ergibt sich aus der gemeinsamen Überzeugung heraus, dass die Phänomene in Organisationen als soziale Prozesse zu interpretieren sind.

Die in diesem Buch entwickelten Ideen haben dabei nicht den Anspruch "Neues" zu bieten. Die entwickelten Ideen wollen eine zusätzliche Perspektive auf die Dinge in Organisationen aufmachen. Wenn Sie mehrmals in ein und dasselbe Theater gehen und sich jedes Mal neue Plätze aussuchen, dann werden Sie bemerken, dass die Perspektiven von den unterschiedlichen Sitzplätzen und -positionen aus nicht besser oder schlechter sind, Sie werden aber feststellen können, dass Sie jeweils andere Dinge sehen, bemerken und mitbekommen können. Manchmal das, was hinter der Bühne passiert, manchmal die Musiker vor der Bühne, manchmal die Souffleuse, manchmal die Beleuchter. Mit den Dialogen wollen wir Sie anregen, neue Perspektiven auf das Ge-

schehen in Organisationen zu werfen, um die Vielfalt des offensichtlichen und verborgenen Zusammenspiels vor, auf und hinter der Bühne zu erkunden.

Ich selbst komme aus der "traditionellen", naturwissenschaftlich geprägten experimentellen und psychometrischen Psychologie. Nach meinem Wechsel an den Lehrstuhl für Organisationspsychologie wurde ich von FreundInnen und KollegInnen danach gefragt, welche Forschungsschwerpunkte in St. Gallen bestehen. Zu erklären, was am Lehrstuhl wie erforscht wird, ist dabei eine Aufgabe, die die Kommensurabilitäts-Kompetenz und das -Empfinden des Zuhörers stark fordert. Ich versuche es für dieses Buch einmal so:

Die Phänomene, die sich die Psychologie in Organisationen anschaut, sind vielgestaltig: die Aufgabe, das Individuum, die Gruppe, die Organisation. Mit quantitativen Methoden des Messens wird der Aufgabe, dem Individuum, der Gruppe, der Organisation auf den Grund gegangen. Wir diagnostizieren und intervenieren. Mit Fragebogen, Testverfahren und Entwicklungstechniken ausgerüstet, begeben wir uns in die Welt der Organisationen, um diese "zu vermessen" und zu "be-greifen". Wir erforschen das organisationale Terrain wie Geographen Städte oder Länder beschreiben: Wie viele Einwohner gibt es? Wie viele Einwohner kommen dazu? Wie viele ziehen wieder fort? Wie hoch ist die Lebenszufriedenheit? Welchen Ausbildungsstand haben die Einwohner? Welchen Tätigkeiten und Berufen gehen sie nach? Wie gut ist die Infrastruktur? Wie ist die demographische Entwicklung? Wie ist das Klima? Die Atmosphäre?

Diese Informationen sind allesamt interessant und verblüffend, lassen sich doch solche Missverständnisse aufklären, wie z.B. dass es in Seattle im Jahresdurchschnitt weniger regnet (entgegen allen Vorurteilen) als in München. Die statistischen Bundesämter versorgen uns mit derlei Information. Wir können diese Informationen zu mehreren Zeitpunkten erfragen ... und erheben ... und verfolgen damit Entwicklungen über die Zeit, wie z.B. die Geburtenrate, Zuwanderung, prozentualer Anteil von Industrie- oder Dienstleistungszweigen. Wir erfassen aber nicht die Natur des Lebens dort. Wie ist es, in einer Stadt wie München oder Seattle zu leben? Wie erleben die Münchner Fussball oder das Oktoberfest? Was eint die Kölner und ihre Liebe zur Stadt?

Kölner und Düsseldorfer (die Städte liegen beide am "selben" Rhein und sind ca. 65 km von einander entfernt) eint die "Jেকে Zeit" (der rheinische Karneval) und doch gelten die Städte eher als verfeindet und rivalisierend (nicht nur wegen der Vorliebe für Altbier oder Kölsch). Und ist der rheinische Karneval vergleichbar mit dem Karneval in Rio oder der alemannischen Fasnacht?

Was für eine Frage (!) - natürlich nicht, werden Sie jetzt denken. Aber dennoch sind Karnevalszüge "messbar": Wie viele Wagen gab es? Wie viele Tonnen Kamelle (die in Aachen Klümpchen heißen) wurden geworfen? Wie viele

Leute standen am Straßenrand? Wie lange dauerte der Zug? Wie häufig mussten die Rettungsdienste aktiv werden? Aber helfen uns diese Informationen zu verstehen, was Karneval ist und wie die Kölner, Düsseldorfer und Menschen in Rio diesen feiern? Warum rufen die Düsseldorfer "Helau" (was ursprünglich "Hölle auf" geheißen haben soll), während die Kölner "Kölle alaaaf" rufen?

Karneval feiern ist ein sozialer Prozess. Karneval feiern ist kontextspezifisch und kulturabhängig. Karneval feiern hat eine Tradition und Funktion innerhalb katholisch geprägter Geschichte. Humor und Witz werden eingesetzt, um Kritik zu üben und politische Verhältnisse anzuprangern. Karneval feiern wird aber auch in Kriegszeiten in Frage gestellt. Karneval feiern ist gelebte Diversität. Alle Feiernden dürfen anziehen, was sie wollen, und aussehen, wie sie es wünschen.

Man kann Karneval in Zahlen fassen und messbar machen, aber man wird ihn deshalb nicht verstehen können. Verstehen könnte gefördert werden, wenn man die Veränderungen von Karneval über die Jahrhunderte zu beschreiben versuchte, man kann die Karnevalisten befragen und sie von der persönlichen Bedeutung von Karneval für sie berichten lassen (Ich habe einen Freund, der von Krefeld nach Köln gezogen ist. Dieser Freund war in Krefeld ein großer Anti-Karnevalist und ist nun, seit er in Köln wohnt und mit einer Kölnerin verheiratet ist, bei der Nippeser-Bürgerwehr – so heißt der Karnevalsverein – der aktivste Karnevalist, den ich mir vorstellen kann. Krefeld liegt übrigens auch am Rhein und ist ca. 80 km von Köln entfernt).

Vielleicht kommt man dann auch den Veränderungen von Karneval auf die Spur, z.B. der neuen Kultur der "Stunk-Sitzung" (in Köln) oder der Aachener Strunx<sup>1</sup>-Sitzung als alternative Karnevalsveranstaltung zu den großen Prunksitzungen gedacht. Der traditionelle Volks-Karneval wird hier Belustigungsgegenstand seiner selbst, da der rheinische Karneval eine sehr ernste Angelegenheit zu sein scheint.

Sie mögen sich jetzt vielleicht denken: Ja, aber das ist doch nur ein saisonales Phänomen, die 5. Jahreszeit, oder? Das lassen Sie aber nicht die Rheinländer hören! Karneval ist ein harter Ganzjahres-Job und eine ernste Angelegenheit. Abschließend noch eine persönliche Empfehlung: Um das Phänomen rheinischer Karneval zu verstehen, können geographische Informationen nützlich sein, besonders zu empfehlen ist jedoch die teilnehmende Beobachtung.

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<sup>1</sup> Strunx ist der öcher (Aachener) Ausdruck für "Mist".