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Traduttore, traditore? Gains and losses from the translation of the economies of worth

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[Correction added on 26 June 2023, after first online publication: Formatting errors have been updated in this version.]

Abstract

The economies of worth, a theory of moral cognition and coordination by sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot, are increasingly used in organization and management studies. We critically review a broad selection of this literature to assess what has been gained from the interdisciplinary translations of the original theory. We identify in the literature multiple patterns that contribute from different angles to a consistent set of concepts for research at the intersection of organizations, socio-technological change, and morality. We also indicate theoretical and methodological developments that would further enrich these gains.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years, the organization and management literature that uses the economies of worth, a theory of moral cognition and coordination by sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1991], 1999, 2000), has steadily expanded (for prior reviews, see: Cloutier et al., 2017; Jagd, 2011). Currently, it covers theory and research on non-profits and cooperatives, interorganizational cooperation, public controversies, organizational change, individual responses to normative pluralism, accounting, strategy-as-practice, marketing, low-hierarchy organizations, information networks, and distributed decision making.

The literature's growth and breadth of application attest to the versatility and generativity of the economies of worth (Cloutier et al., 2017), but they also invite an assessment of what the use of this theory has contributed overall to the conceptualization of organizations and management. The economies of worth are a foundational component of a transdisciplinary project in French pragmatic

sociology (Dodier, 1993; Frère & Jaster, 2019; Lemieux, 2018) and the French school of the economies of conventions (Eymard-Duvernay, 2002; Latsis, 2006; Wilkinson, 1997) that aims to build a comprehensive account of socioeconomic coordination. In other words, the economies of worth promise to be relevant to general organization and management scholarship beyond their best-known feature, that is, the model of moral principles labelled 'orders of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). However, translating ideas across disciplines is fraught with challenges and trade-offs, with some promises possibly getting lost in translation. We might wonder—jocosely—if the Italian proverb *traduttore, traditore* ('translator, traitor') applies here. More to the point, we address two research questions:

- RQ1 *What have organization and management studies gained from the interdisciplinary translations of the economies of worth?*
- RQ2 *What, if anything, has been lost in the process of translation that could be recaptured in future research?*

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To examine these questions, we critically review (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020; Jones & Gatrell, 2014; Wright & Michailova, 2023) more than 100 articles that rely on the economies of worth in organization and management journals. We establish the conceptual background for the review by presenting the objects of interdisciplinary translation, that is, the fundamental hypotheses and assumptions of the economies of worth. We then describe the methods used to select, analyse and categorize the literature, and present the results as eight distinct patterns that map the literature in terms of interests, insights, focal phenomena, salient concepts, and different uses of the economies of worth. Finally, we read across the patterns to construct the literature's overall contribution, based on the idea that multiple, differentiated translations of a theory can increase its reach in the target domain but can also induce a lack of clarity about assumptions and aims (O'Mahoney, 2016; Røvik, 2016; Spyridonidis et al., 2016).

We conclude that the translations of the economies of worth have gained for organization and management studies a consistent conceptual set that can effectively anchor research at the intersection of organizations, socio-technological developments, and morality, in broad and topical areas such as grand challenges, effects of socio-technological change on organizational designs, and organizational ethics. We also indicate specific theoretical and methodological developments that would more strongly embed these gains in organization and management studies and augment their already considerable potential for future research.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

We highlight the key hypotheses and assumptions of Boltanski and Thévenot's theory, for which we adopt the label *economies of worth*.¹ This term, taken from the subtitle of the English translation of Boltanski and Thévenot's seminal book (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) and widely used in the reviewed literature, signifies that the theory deals with how people determine the appropriate ends of coordinated collective action—that is, what common goods are *worth* pursuing—and the corresponding appropriate means—that is, the *economies*, in the sense of

¹ Boltanski and Thévenot's theory is referred to by various labels. Some centre on the concept of worth (e.g., 'economies', 'orders' or 'sociology of worth'). Others highlight the theory's connections with pragmatics and philosophical pragmatism (e.g., 'pragmatist sociology' or 'pragmatic sociology'; 'French pragmatism'). Still others honour the roots of the theory in conventionalist economics (e.g., 'sociology of conventions'; 'convention theory'; 'economics of convention'). Boltanski and Thévenot also use 'sociology of critical capacity' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999) and 'sociology of situated judgement' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000)

rational arrangements, of human and material resources that better contribute to the pursuit of the common goods, share in worth to a higher degree, and rank higher in society.

In summary, the economies of worth hypothesize that individuals possess a natural *critical competence* enabling them to form beliefs about the appropriateness of ends and mean vis-à-vis the practical conditions of collective action (cognitive hypothesis). Such beliefs undergo *justification* by being asserted, assessed and critiqued in intersubjective exchanges (behavioural hypothesis). Aligning different justified beliefs requires the establishment of *conventions*, defined after Schelling (1960) and Lewis (1969) by Thévenot (2003) as commonly held models of the 'rules of the game' (p. 181) governing coordinated collective action (ontological assumption). Justification occurs in relatively short-lived *situations* that bring together actors and the practical conditions of collective action (methodological assumption). A description of each component follows.

Critical competence

The theory's central cognitive hypothesis is that individuals are commonly endowed with *critical competence* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2000, 2006; Boltanski, 2012 [1990]), that is, a cognitive capacity enabling them to form intuitions and inferences about the relations between ends, means, and the practical conditions of collective action and to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate relations.

Critical competence is an analogue of linguistic competence, that is, the natural capacity, oriented by socialization, to distinguish grammatically valid and invalid sentences. Similar to linguistic competence, critical competence is tacit; therefore, to study it, scholars must infer and model its *grammar* (Boltanski, 2012; Boltanski & Browne, 2014): a formally defined set of structures and constraints whose combinations yield results—that is, distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate relations of ends, means, and practical conditions—that correspond to those that can be attributed to critical competence based on empirical observation.

The grammatical structures of critical competence are the *orders of worth*—normative rationales that express different conceptions of the common good. Orders of worth are accessible to any actor in a broadly defined culture (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Six orders of worth—market competition, industrial efficiency, domestic tradition, civic equity, celebrity, and inspired creativity—are found to operate in France (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), as well as in other Western societies (Moody & Thévenot, 2000),

toward the end of the 20th century. Other works also outline an ecological order of worth in which the common good is environmental balance (Lafaye & Thévenot, 2017 [1993]; Thévenot et al., 2000) and a project-oriented order of worth in which the common good is the dynamic reconfiguration of social relations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005 [1999]). Orders of worth are accompanied by the representation of *worlds*, that is, models of the idealized polities governed by each order of worth. Every world possesses stylized human *subjects*—or social roles—as well as material and symbolic *objects*. Moreover, each world is characterized by specific criteria for evaluating worth with corresponding information formats (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2007).

The orders of worth are subject to grammatical constraints. All orders of worth conform to a common set of interlocking axioms of justice that legitimize the ranking of society's members in terms of worth notwithstanding their fundamental human equality (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). For example, in any world, acquiring greater worth requires demonstrable effort and investment, and any unequal distribution of worth must demonstrably benefit society. Consequently, all orders of worth are equally valid in principle. Equal validity also means that every order of worth can be questioned and critiqued from the point of view of every other (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Moreover, mobilizing an order of worth for justification or critique requires establishing coherent relations between the relevant subjects, objects, evaluations, and information formats of the corresponding world, which 'introduce into the objective order the sort of rules that govern the construction of a well-founded argument' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 140).

The grammar of the orders of worth supports and directs the *cognitive operations* of critical competence, namely generalization and qualification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). *Generalizations* are intuitions and inferences about the nature of collective behaviour, formed by an engaged observer based on circumstantial cues. For example, in a factory setting, the presence of persons wearing work uniforms and safety equipment; of machines; and of practices that refer to engineering standards and mechanical tolerances suggests that the observed behaviours belong to the 'industrial' world with its corresponding order of worth, that is, efficiency.

Qualifications are intuitions and inferences about whether the conditions of collective behaviour are well-ordered relative to the world which, based on generalization, appears to apply. For example, if some machines are not running, the observer may infer that the efficient operations of the 'shop floor' are disrupted. If 'top floor' managers seem clueless about what caused the stoppage, the observer may infer that they do not fit their managerial

role—in other words, they are unworthy of it. The observer might then hypothesize that the root of the shop floor problems is the fact that top floor managers are promoted based on evaluation criteria (e.g., seniority) that, unlike technical competence, are not appropriate in the industrial world (although they might be in others, e.g., the domestic or civic world).

Justification

Generalizations and qualifications are behaviourally expressed in *justification*, through which the appropriateness of coordinated action is collectively judged: 'people [...] seek to carry out their actions in such a way that these can withstand the test of justification' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 37). Justification consists of exchanges of speech acts and deeds by which different 'reasons for the validity, legitimacy and defensibility of (a) an action, (b) a belief, and/or (c) a social arrangement' (Susen, 2017, p. 350) are asserted by some actors and evaluated and critiqued by others (Cloutier et al., 2017).

The salient events of justification are *clashes* about which orders of worth apply in concrete circumstances (i.e., about appropriate generalization) and the *tests* by which the ordering of concrete circumstances within an order of worth (i.e., appropriate qualification) is assessed. The ultimate outcomes of justification are accords around generalization and qualification which take the form of *consensus*, an unambiguous judgement of appropriateness that usually mobilizes only one order of worth, and *compromise*, an ambiguous judgment that reconciles multiple orders of worth (e.g., top floor managers are henceforth to be promoted considering both seniority and technical competence; however, without specifying a firm rule for weighing each criterion). Compromises can be stabilized by material, symbolic, or representational devices that incorporate elements from different worlds and thus remain ambiguous as to which normative principles they embody. Ambiguous devices escape straightforward generalization and qualification, which keeps normative conflicts from coming into the open and hardening (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

Besides consensus and compromise, a lack of accord is also a possible outcome. Moreover, justification can be displaced by private *arrangements* that escape public debates and allow some actors to fix the rules of the game (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

Conventions

Justification is one among various *pragmatic regimes* representing modes of engagement with the conditions of

coordinated action (Thévenot, 2001b). Specifically, actors enter the justification regime when the *conventions* that regulate coordinated action are missing or uncertain. Conventions are models of behaviour that all actors are expected to hold and adhere to in a class of circumstances, comprising explicit rules, routinized practices, symbols, and objects (Biggart & Beamish, 2003; Eymard-Duvernay, 2002; Gomez & Jones, 2000). A common example is the rules of the road, with their apparatus of codes, driving behaviours, signage, and speed cameras. Examples in the domain of organizations and management include regulations; industry standards; strategic plans; and the elements of organizational designs, such as formal architectures, procedures, routines, controls, and culture (Roberts, 2004). While conventions hold, actors remain in the *planned* regime that characterizes a stable organization. Conventions may be dispensed with altogether and replaced by habits inseparable from specific individuals and circumstances in the *familiar* regime that characterizes the private sphere (Thévenot, 2001b).

Organizations can be understood as temporarily and locally stable assemblages of conventions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Diaz-Bone, 2018; Lazega & Favereau, 2002), many of which come from outside the formal boundaries of a firm or administration. For example, a bank's strategic plan sets conventions—rules of the game such as goals, quantitative targets, and policies—for coordinated collective action in areas such as sales, operations, and finance. The strategic plan, however, may include targets for the composition of the bank's capital structure that reflect external conventions such as regulatory standards about capital adequacy. The new information systems that will support strategy implementation may reflect the requirements derived from strategic policies and regulator-imposed formulas for computing risk and capital, as well as other conventions, including, for example, the bank's reporting structure, systems architecture guidelines set by the Chief Information Officer, and IT professionals' application of accepted methods of software design and development.

In moments of uncertainty, such as when organizational action shows signs of dysfunction (e.g., the bank's performance lags that of its peers) or requires substantial change (e.g., because of radical innovation in financial technologies), extant conventions (e.g., the bank's strategy) become questionable and new conventions debatable. Concerned actors (e.g., shareholders opposing the incumbent management team) thus initiate justification, as a form of collective reflection that activates organizational learning and settles when conventions are reconfirmed, modified, replaced, or new ones are established. In this

reflective activity, conventions are rationalized based on more general conventions (e.g., strategy may be rationalized by referring to regulations or established business models in the industry). The ultimate cognitive reference for assessing and comparing the appropriateness of multiple, competing conventions (e.g., different views of strategy) are the orders of worth, which offer a common set of highly general normative principles and evaluative dimensions (Thévenot, 2001a). For example, referencing the orders of worth makes it possible to assess and compare the contributions of different versions of a bank's strategy to competitiveness (market order of worth), efficient use of capital (industrial), stability of the banking system (civic), equitable protection of employment (domestic), or reputation (fame).

Conventions are necessary for the exercise of bounded rationality—specifically, the procedural rationality that leads to organizational choices (Simon, 1955, 1976). Procedural rationality requires boundaries, that is, cognitive resources and structures, to delimit the appropriate scope in which to search for actionable options and satisfactory outcomes, which conventions provide (Cyert & March, 1963; Eymard-Duvernay, 2002; Koumakhov, 2009). However, the elaboration of conventions also requires cognitive structures to contain the demands that uncertainty and complexity place on actors' cognitive capacities (Gomez & Jones, 2000). Such cognitive structures are ultimately provided by the orders of worth and their grammar (Thévenot, 2001a).

Thus, the economies of worth represent a stepping stone toward an account of bounded rationality that integrates procedural rationality and critical competence (Eymard-Duvernay, 2002), that is, reasoning about the consequences and the appropriateness (March et al., 1993, [1958]) of organizational action.

Situations and contexts

The methodological hallmark of the economies of worth is the analysis of *situations* which bring together the concrete circumstances of collective action and actors' critical competence, thus setting the scene for *situated judgments* in which the normative debates of justification are anchored by the recognition of practical constraints (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000). A situated judgment 'includes more than the argumentative aspects of communication. It is also the moment of truth in which the actors, in order to advance their own positions, have to [...] move from argumentative coherence to the test of facts' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, pp. 351–352). Thus, situations are 'complex arrangements

or constellations of objects, cognitive formats, problems (coordinations to be realized), institutional settings, persons, concepts' (Diaz-Bone, 2011, p. 49) that persist for relatively short timeframes (Dodier, 1993).

Situations occur in *contexts* constituted by conventions that have become institutionalized, that is, 'have emerged as pragmatic solutions to economic problems and have become reified as normal' (Biggart & Beamish, 2003, p. 458). These provide actors with tools for coordinated action (Diaz-Bone, 2018) (e.g., the principles and practices of corporate governance that regulate the situations of board-level decision making). However, institutional settings remain incomplete and therefore open to interpretation and critique (Diaz-Bone, 2018) when their appropriateness becomes questionable for some actors, or in changing circumstances. Here, the methodological situationalism of the economies of worth involves mapping situations together with their contexts and tracing the interactions between the critical competence of actors, circumstances of action, and institutional settings (Diaz-Bone, 2011).

METHODS

Literature selection

We analyse 103 empirical and conceptual contributions that apply the economies of worth in studies of justification, evaluation and critique involving for-profit and non-profit firms, interfirm collaborations and public administrations—a criterion consistent with prior reviews (Cloutier et al., 2017; Jagd, 2011).

The selected literature features almost exclusively articles in English in organization and management journals. As such, these articles are likely to be linguistically and practically accessible to many international scholars. Notwithstanding linguistic uniformity, the selection captures the broad international academic networks in which the economies of worth are used: Many authors herein are affiliated with institutions in non-English speaking regions. (Literature in English is also prevalent in prior reviews).

Selection was performed following the systematic procedure shown in Figure 1. From the references listed in prior reviews, a co-author compiled a list of English labels used to denote the economies of worth, to which they added the labels used in early English articles by Boltanski and Thévenot (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2000). The labels were used as search keywords in four databases (top of Figure 1), along with some search delimiters (i.e., 'organization', 'management' and 'business'). The search

results were merged, and duplicates were eliminated automatically or manually. The researcher then scanned the abstracts or full texts to filter out results that were spurious or out of scope. To improve the sensitivity of the search, it was replicated with a less restrictive query (i.e., without search delimiters) on more than 70 organization and management journals in disciplinary domains for which the database searches had already returned at least one result.

A second filter was applied to exclude results in journals not rated by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2018). Those with at least one author with economies of worth-based contributions in rated journals or cited in earlier reviews were kept, however, including two book chapters and one working paper. To mitigate the risk of keyword searches missing relevant items, the 'cites' and 'cited by' references of all remaining results were checked to locate additional articles matching the selection criteria.

The database searches were updated to the end of 2022 in successive rounds, and the 'cites' and 'cited by' references for the new articles were checked and included if relevant. The search in individual journals was not repeated given its modest quantitative contribution in the initial round. Figure 2 illustrates the selection's distribution over time and its growth, with salient publication events also marked.

Literature analysis and classification

The same co-author who performed the selection analysed the articles. Several quotations documenting key concepts and findings were extracted from each article, with a focus on the applications of the economies of worth (almost 300 words per article on average). Comments (about 140 words per article on average) were added to briefly analyse each article's use of the economies of worth, other assumptions and claims. The articles were further analysed to extract several classifiers, including the focal phenomena of the studies, their theoretical orientations, and the salient concepts mobilized in addition to the economies of worth.

The literature was then classified into eight induced patterns representing recurring combinations of the classifiers. The texts and classifiers were iteratively and reflectively evaluated until a reasonably self-consistent, mutually exclusive, and conceptually meaningful categorization emerged. One of the co-authors produced the categorization, which was then examined critically by a second co-author with extensive knowledge of the economies of worth and their applications. The third co-author evaluated the overall consistency and meaningfulness of the

Abstract \supset **AND (OR** (economies of worth; orders of worth; pragmatist sociology; pragmatic sociology; French pragmatism; sociology of worth; sociology of conventions; sociology of critique; sociology of critical capacity; sociology of situated judgement; convention theory; conventionalist theory; economics of convention; Boltanski; Thévenot); **OR** (organizations; management; managers; business))

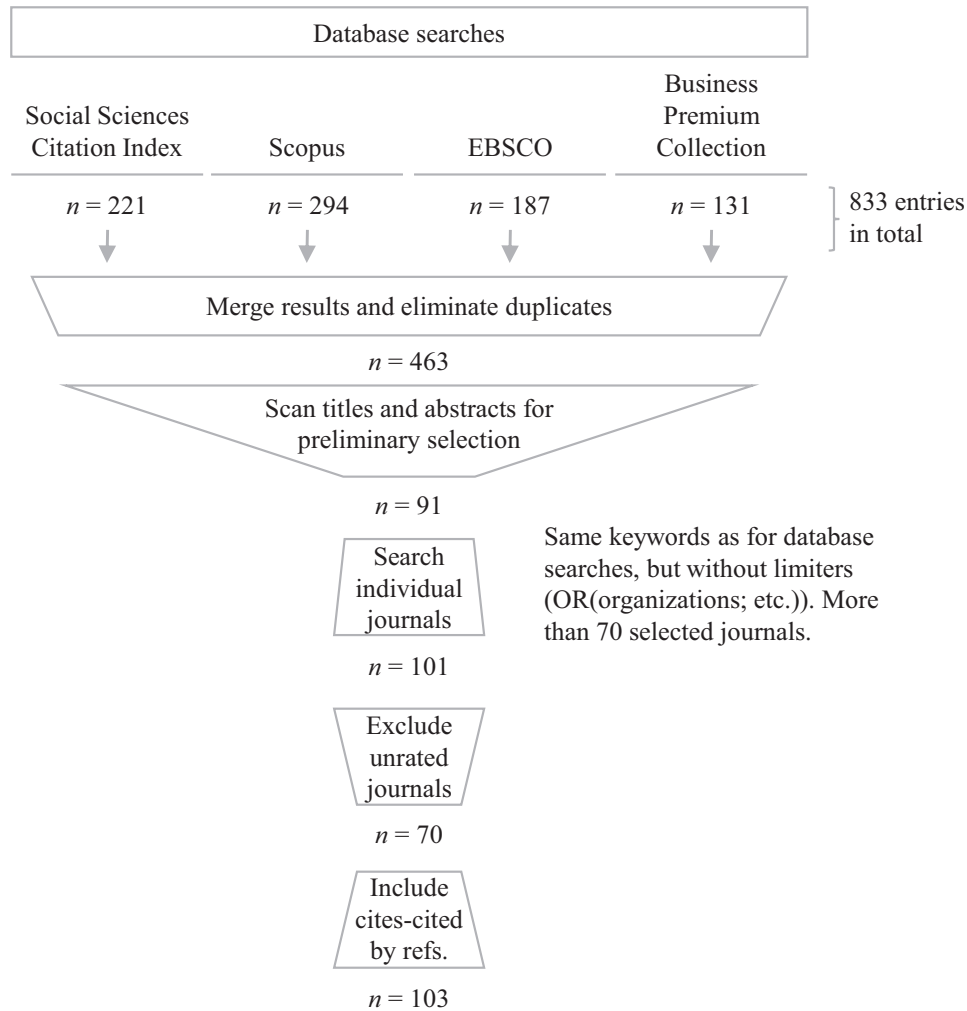


FIGURE 1 Literature search and selection procedure. Successive steps of searching, filtering and expanding the search were performed to methodically assemble a representative selection of the literature. The number of articles retained after each step is indicated under each box (bottom widths proportional to article counts).

eight patterns from an organization and management theory perspective.

RESULTS: UNPACKING EIGHT PATTERNS OF THE ECONOMIES OF WORTH TRANSLATIONS

This section reviews the eight patterns in the literature in terms of their overarching interests, insights, theoretical orientations, focal phenomena, salient concepts, and uses of the economies of worth's concepts of critical com-

petence, justification, conventions, and situations. Table 1 provides a synoptic view. For each pattern, examples from the selected literature are cited. (A list of all the studies by pattern, with full references, is available online as [Supporting Information](#)).

Pattern 1: Normative multiplexity and organizational design

Pattern 1 examines organizational coherence in conditions of normative multiplexity, namely when multiple normative principles compete with potentially disrupting effects.

TABLE 1 Patterns in the reviewed literature.

<i>Pattern</i>	Pattern #1 Normative multiplexity and organizational design <i>n</i> = 6	Pattern #2 Justification and power <i>n</i> = 9	Pattern #3 Justification and legitimacy <i>n</i> = 13	Pattern #4 Institutional entrepreneurship <i>n</i> = 9	Pattern #5 Microfoundations of organizational complexity <i>n</i> = 26	Pattern #6 Bottom-up organization <i>n</i> = 12	Pattern #7 Knowledge differentiation and coordination <i>n</i> = 19	Pattern #8 Normative performativity of objects <i>n</i> = 9
<i>Article count</i>								
<i>Interests</i>	Managerial responses to normative multiplexity	Critique of organizational power	Processes of organizational legitimation	Construction of norms for an organizational field	Interaction of normative multiplexity and individual agency	Local construction of organizational order	Multidimensional evaluations of organizational performance	Function of objects for organizational coordination
<i>Insights</i>	Organizational designs support normative compromises	Contexts of justification are vehicles for political contests	Justification stabilizes the institutional settings of organizational action	Institutional entrepreneurship establishes general conventions	Actors' judgements during practice accommodate normative tensions in institutional settings	Actors' judgements in practice create local conventions	Conventions are required to organize differentiated information for decision making	Objects act on justification by contributing information and enforcing norms
<i>Theoretical orientations</i>	Organizational practice, institutionalism	Critical and political perspectives	Institutionalism, organizational practice	Institutionalism, organizational practice	Institutionalism, organizational practice	Organizational practice	Organizational practice	Organizational practice
<i>Focal phenomenon</i>	Organizational design	Political leadership in organizations	Institutional maintenance and change	Conventionalizing narratives	Individual responses to normative pluralism	Organizational interdependencies	Coexistence of information, knowledge and evaluation criteria	Actors-Objects co-constitution of cognition and behaviours

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

<i>Pattern</i>	Pattern #1 Normative multiplexity and organizational design	Pattern #2 Justification and power	Pattern #3 Justification and legitimacy	Pattern #4 Institutional entrepreneurship	Pattern #5 Microfoundations of organizational complexity	Pattern #6 Bottom-up organization	Pattern #7 Knowledge differentiation and coordination	Pattern #8 Normative performativity of objects
<i>Salient concepts</i>	Action, social or institutional logics	Power relations, strategic narratives, managerial domination	Communicative processes, legitimacy maintenance	Fields, institutional entrepreneurship, organizing vision	Agency, micro-foundations, institutional logics	Local compromises, situational rationality	Dissonance, commensuration, evaluation	Performativity, semiotic content, technological domination
<i>Critical competence</i>	Gives managers insight into normative multiplexity	Mobilizes normative principles as rhetorical resources	Supports reflection about organizational interests, norms, and practices	Envisions normative and evaluative standards for new forms of action	Arbitrates between multiple normative demands	Envisions new practical arrangements for coordinated action	Engages with differentiated information and knowledge	Assesses the correspondence between actors' and objects' normativity
<i>Justification</i>	To elaborate formal mechanisms for compromise	To confirm or critique leadership claims	To articulate legitimate behaviours for organizations	To establish conventionalizing narratives for a field	To render compatible conventions of different scope	To establish new local conventions	To compromise among the interests of decision makers	To design, adopt or reject objects
<i>Conventions</i>	Elements of organizational design	Elements of organizational design, cultural norms	Institutional settings	Conventional wisdom	Institutional settings, elements of organizational design	Elements of organizational design	Institutional settings, organizational design	Devices, socio-technical assemblages
<i>Situations</i>	Organizational practices	Strategy making, controversies	Controversies, stakeholder relations	Field-level events	Organizational practices	Organizational practices	Decision making	Organizational practices

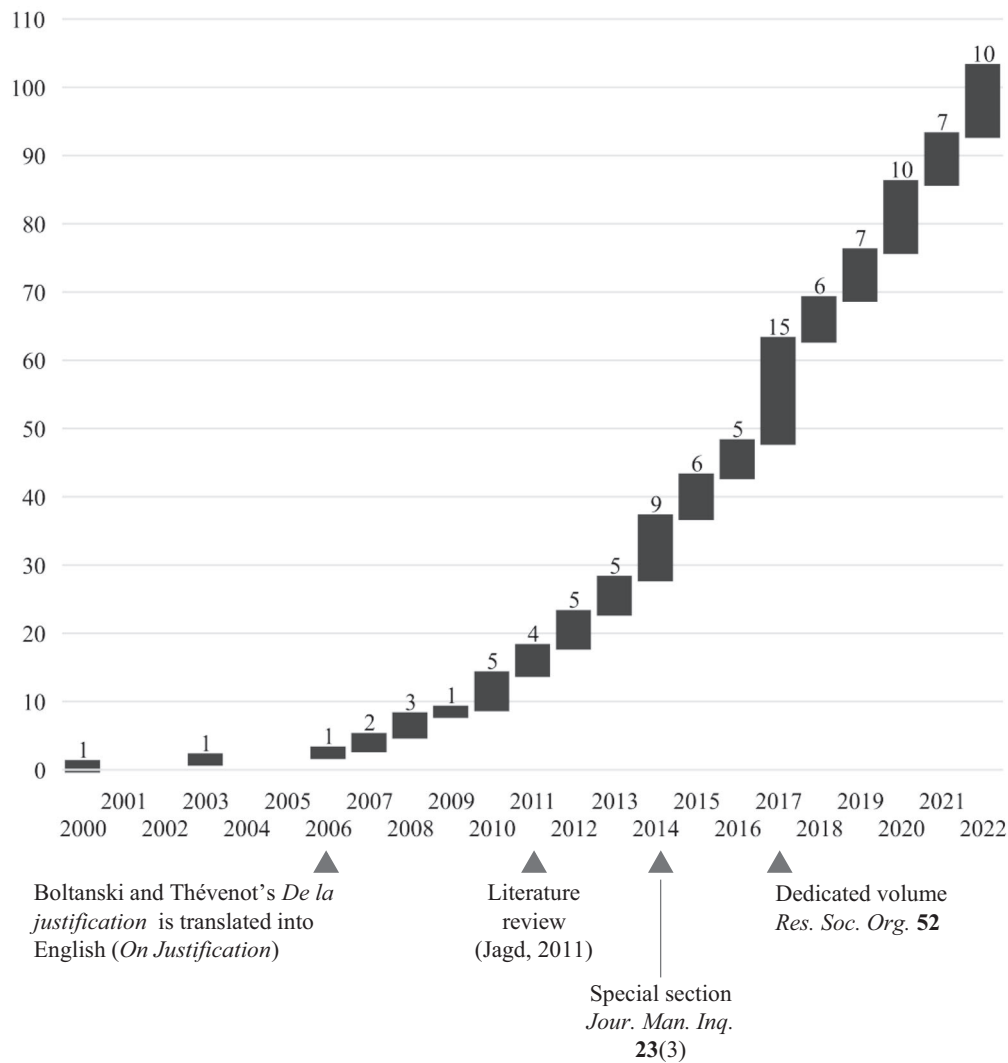


FIGURE 2 Distribution of the literature over time. Number of articles per year and cumulative, with significant publication events marked. Nearly the entire selection follows the English translation of the economies of worth (2006). Over half falls in the 2017–2022 period.

The overall insight of this pattern is that the tensions of normative multiplexity—analysed in terms of orders of worth and inter-world critiques—are contained by elements of organizational design such as formal structures, governance arrangements, management control systems, and culture, whose function is to embody and sustain normative compromises.

For example, in conditions of normative multiplexity the performance of an organization can be evaluated by different actors according to different principles (e.g., financial, productivity, creativity, or inclusion). The design of hybrid performance measurement systems and procedures can enable or hinder compromises among evaluative principles, depending on its degree of multidimensionality, flexibility, and integration (e.g., multiple measures, alternative reporting formats, space for interpretative narratives in reporting) (Chenhall et al., 2013; Morinière &

Georgescu, 2022). Similarly, knowledge-intensive organizations are characterized by ‘coexisting logics’ for the management of human resources based on normative principles including competitiveness (i.e., market order of worth), managerial efficiency (industrial), and technical creativity (inspiration) (Bobadilla & Gilbert, 2017). The concurrence of normative principles is reflected in the development of human resources management systems that attempt to reconcile or hybridize them (e.g., dual career ladder for technical and management personnel, mixed working groups, establishment of authority positions such as competency centres and technical committees). By contrast, an organizational culture strongly connoted by a ‘dominant logic’ (Boivin & Roch, 2006) based on a single normative principle can result in organizations that are comparatively under-designed (e.g., with limited mechanisms for coordination between subunits

and few management control systems) and closed to inter-organizational collaborations.

In this pattern, critical competence gives managers (as organizational designers) insight into the normative principles in play and enables them to elaborate and justify compromise-anchoring mechanisms which, as elements of organizational designs, take their place among the conventions regulating organizational action.

Pattern 2: Justification and power

Pattern 2 addresses power and critique in organizations. Its central insight is that the contexts in which justification plays out are vehicles of political competitions, and that actors seek to maintain or reconfigure them so that justification dynamics, legitimized interpretations of appropriate organizational action, and claims to organizational leadership and jurisdiction are stabilized, challenged, or rearranged.

For example, a dispute about governance arrangements in a cooperative firm leads members who oppose the incumbent board to create spaces for communication and debate separated from the institutional ones controlled by the directors (Barros & Michaud, 2020). Organizational, institutional, and civil society actors in public controversies reconfigure the context of justification by co-opting other actors in positions of power, networking with and mobilizing the carriers of multiple interests, and tactically delegitimizing or legitimizing formal authority (Gond, Barin Cruz, et al., 2016). Managers formulate strategic narratives around novel ideas (e.g., sustainability and public food policy) that construct new forms of uncertainty about appropriate action and justify claims to new areas of jurisdiction (Midgley, 2010). In decentralized and de-bureaucratized organizations, ‘neo-participative management’ uses affirmations of values such as pluralism or fairness, alongside continual changes in organizational practices, to shift the ground under the feet of critics. Here, the permanent uncertainty created by legitimized and institutionalized dynamism can reproduce managerial domination (Daudigeos et al., 2021).

In this pattern, critical competence enables actors to mobilize the orders of worth as rhetorical resources in the quest to maintain or reconfigure power relations, leadership, and jurisdictional claims. Conventions appear in the pattern as elements of organizational design (e.g., governance rules) and as cultural norms that legitimize the participation in justification of actors located within and beyond the formal boundaries of organization.

Pattern 3: Justification and legitimacy

Pattern 3 focuses on the construction of organizational legitimacy through justification. By engaging in publicly conducted justification, organizations and their stakeholders articulate the relations among interests, moral norms, and organizational practices; define and adapt their mutual positions; and confirm or rearrange the institutional settings of organizational action. At the core of the process for organizations is a tension between securing legitimacy and maintaining autonomy.

In the communicative processes of public debate, actors co-construct legitimacy, intended as a ‘continuous variable [indicating] various degrees of scope and certainty’ (Reinecke et al., 2017, p. 56). Communicative ‘justification work’ enables organizations and stakeholders to perform ‘legitimacy maintenance’ when their strategies and policies become the object of overt critique, that is, to construct broad-based compromises that justify the organization from plural viewpoints (Patriotta et al., 2011), re-establish a ‘sense of worth’ among stakeholders, and prevent the breakdown of institutional order (Ramirez, 2013). Similarly, on issues such as industry regulation, skilful actors can construct a compromise around an ambiguous notion of ‘shared understanding’ or purpose that can ‘suture together’ the different orders of worth to which constituents refer (Cortese & Andrew, 2020, p. 472). However, the breadth and ambiguity of compromises can also enable industry players to escape critique and deflect change by playing one order of worth off against others (Taupin, 2012).

In this pattern, critical competence supports actors’ reflection on interests, norms, and practices as they articulate legitimate behaviours for organizations and argue for the maintenance or reformation of the institutionalized conventions (e.g., strategies, policies, regulations) that coordinate organizations with their stakeholders.

Pattern 4: Institutional entrepreneurship

For Pattern 4, organizational action is founded on widely diffused conventions that emerge from the narratives propounded by ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ (McInerney, 2008, p. 1111), that is, actors who endeavour to impose cognitive frames on the uncertainty surrounding new industries and social movements.

For example, institutional entrepreneurs leverage ‘field-configuring events’ such as industry conferences to promote ‘conventionalizing accounts [...] i.e., narratives about how work in a given field ought to be done [...]

anchored in moral ideologies, encapsulated in orders of worth' (McInerney, 2008, pp. 1090–1091). Conventionalizing narratives, once accepted by powerful actors, define a field's normative standards and establish a generally accepted view of the opportunities, risks, and values of new sectors, which can justify and 'stabilize a particular organizational form' (e.g., in terms of adopted technologies, capital structures, and governance models) for incumbents and entrants seeking legitimation (Kaplan & Murray, 2010, p. 37). In radical cases of cognitive reframing, institutional entrepreneurs cause 'ontological shifts' (e.g., meat as a laboratory-grown artifact) that can realign multiple orders of worth (e.g., industrial efficiency and ecological balance) (Whelan & Gond, 2017). In some cases, the production of conventionalizing narratives is a spontaneous collective process. For example, by freely experimenting with an innovation, technology specialists form 'organizing visions' based on different orders of worth that provide other potential users of the innovation with a menu of ready-made justifications for adopting it (Miranda et al., 2015).

In this pattern, critical competence is the capacity to envision normative and evaluative standards for new forms of organized action. Justifications for the new standards, embodied in narratives, come to represent a field's conventional wisdom, that is, a reference against which to assess the appropriateness of business and operating models.

Pattern 5: Microfoundations of organizational complexity

Pattern 5, like Pattern 1, looks at how organizational coherence is achieved under conditions of normative multiplexity. However, differently from Pattern 1, in which organizational coherence is the result of top-down design, in Pattern 5 organizational coherence results from the interaction between the individual agency of organizational members and institutional settings. Organizational members use critical competence to connect institutional settings to local conditions and justification to creatively adapt organizational designs and practices. This view of individual agency mediates between looking at actors as entrepreneurial 'transformers' or acritical 'reproducers' of institutionalized norms (Pernkopf-Konhäusner, 2014).

For example, strategy formulation is theorized as a reflective-critical activity in which 'managers practically construct the links between their micro-daily activities and the macro-structures of their organizations and their environment' (Denis et al., 2007, p. 180). When a strategy

is implemented in systems and procedures, organizational members interpret it through justification work in ways that can protect and stabilize, but also challenge and deconstruct, the compromises between normative principles embodied in the strategy (Demers & Gond, 2020). Actors continually recombine conflicting normative principles through argumentation (Anesa et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2019; Jaumier et al., 2017) and by designing and altering physical infrastructure, routines, and plans so that actual behaviours correspond to multiple value orientations (Oldenhof et al., 2014). Testing and redefining organizational arrangements is a distinctive form of agency through which actors establish and maintain an organization's value orientation and identity, anchored by specific combinations of orders of worth, even while they modify its conventional form (Cloutier & Langley, 2017; Dansou & Langley, 2012; Gagnon & Séguin, 2010).

In this pattern, critical competence is deployed by individual actors to arbitrate among multiple and often incompatible normative demands on daily practice. Through situated judgments, actors devise ways of making conventions of different generality and scope, namely institutional settings on the one hand and local organization on the other, compatible.

Pattern 6: Bottom-up organization

Pattern 6 studies how organization is constructed at the grassroots level when conventions are absent or incomplete. Actors faced with practical issues identify the normative principles in play, prioritize them or realize compromises, and devise appropriate solutions, with little or no support from rules, hierarchies, or control systems.

For example, in large-scale projects, participants develop shared understandings of the interdependencies between local work and the project's objectives or, in other terms, conventions they can use to justify local decisions in terms of general ends (Gkeredakis, 2014). In the environmentally sensitive marketing systems that supply oil producers with special chemicals, actors from multiple organizations realize temporary compromises between the industrial, market, and ecological order of worth; locally fill out strategies and policies; and maintain collaborations by keeping 'institutional settings at arms' length' (Finch et al., 2017, p. 88). Human resources management practices can be approached as bottom-up, situationally rational, and pragmatic responses to issues of labour management in which HR managers and employees together deploy and hybridize different 'labour conventions' (Brandl, 2022). When the

autonomous construction of coordination solutions at the grassroots level is prevented or impossible, actors may resort to tacit or ‘discreet’ resistance to organizational changes initiated from the top (Fronza & Moriceau, 2008).

In this pattern, critical competence enables actors to envision new practical arrangements for coordinated action, and justification enables them to establish new conventions to locally complement general organizational designs.

Pattern 7: Knowledge differentiation and coordination

This pattern examines problems of coordination as the result of actors’ differentiated information and knowledge. What counts as relevant information for decision making in the eyes of different actors depends on their interests, practices and social connections (Ekbja & Evans, 2009). Here, conventions are required to select admissible information, regulate the use of differentiated forms of knowledge, and reconcile different criteria for evaluating organizational performance.

For example, in a fledgling derivatives market, cultural and normative boundaries separate the definitions of information held by distinct groups of market participants. This prevents commensuration—that is, the comparison of objects according to a common metric (Espeland & Stevens, 1998)—and efficient pricing. Absent a common interest that could anchor a compromise, or an ‘intrusive institutional apparatus [...] and specific organizational activities’ to construct one, the market does not take off (Huault & Rainelli-Weiss, 2011, p. 1398). Institutionally mandated accounting conventions such as triple bottom line reporting, integrated reporting, and fair value accounting are required to promote multi-dimensional views of corporate performance (Annisette & Richardson, 2011; Georgiou, 2018; van Bommel, 2014). Formal structures and policies are required to establish a political process for pricing fair trade commodities that arbitrates among industrial and civic evaluative principles (Reinecke, 2010). However, when power relations condition the construction of compromises and the corresponding conventions, some evaluative principles may dominate the ‘accounts’ of situations and events while others are marginalized and muted (Perkiss & Moerman, 2020).

In this pattern, critical competence allows actors to engage with different forms of information and knowledge, while justification supports the formation of conventions that compromise among the interests of multiple constituencies in decision making, in the form of either institutional rules of the game or elements of organizational design.

Pattern 8: Normative performativity of objects

Pattern 8 deals with the function of material, symbolic, and representational objects—especially the devices that anchor compromises among multiple orders of worth—for coordination. Objects are powerful actants in justification because they contribute and structure information and perform the normative principles that guided their designers.

For example, ideas formalized in symbols and representations, project management policies, and material artifacts contribute to decision making in projects, first by constituting concrete foci of attention for actors, and then by framing interactions according to the normative principles they embody. This occurs to the point where project leaders ‘accept the role dictated by objects’ they designed and promoted in a process of co-definition of ‘leader-object couplings’ (Mailhot et al., 2016, p. 79). The semiotics of objects (e.g., the visuals used in the communications of agencies for the placement of refugee workers) can reframe perceptions of worth (e.g., of refugees as candidates for formal employment) by suggesting concrete contexts, synthesizing multiple orders of worth, and triggering affective responses (Bullinger et al., 2023). Technological platforms for ride-hailing services (Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2019) embody some norms (e.g., efficiency; adaptation of offer to demand) but exclude others (e.g., the civic norms of publicly regulated taxis), miring competing conceptions of urban mobility services in public controversies. Complex socio-technical developments such as artificial intelligence may radically redefine the scope in which non-experts are able to critique organizational action (John-Mathews et al., 2022).

In this pattern, critical competence allows actors to assess the correspondence between their normative orientations and those embodied in objects. In addition, justification results in choices of design, adoption or rejection of the conventions materialized in devices and socio-technical assemblages.

DISCUSSION: AN ECONOMIES OF WORTH AGENDA FOR ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT THEORY

Thus far, we have presented a broad selection of the literature and, by constructing eight distinct patterns, shown its breadth and differentiation. However, we have done little to make sense of the patterns’ emergence. In this section we leverage the idea of translation to interpret the patterns’ breadth and differentiation and consolidate our critical assessment.

Translations: Making sense of the eight patterns

We define translation as a movement of ideas from one social setting to another, based on the sociology of translation (Callon, 1984; Callon & Latour, 1981) and organizational studies of translation (O'Mahoney, 2016; Røvik, 2016; Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). To approach our patterns critically, three features of translation are particularly relevant: *trans-contextualization*; *heterogeneous translation choices*; and *common interests*. Translation requires ideas to be trans-contextualized, that is, dis-embedded from their original context, reconstructed for a target context, and therein re-embedded (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). In the case of a theory, this may involve 'streamlining and/or modifying [the] original theory in order to fit the problems or conceptual tasks' of the target context (Oswick et al., 2011, p. 328). Accordingly, a critical assessment of the literature must consider how effectively the economies of worth have been transported *and* actively adapted (i.e., reconstructed and re-embedded) in organization and management studies.

Trans-contextualization requires translators facing ideas of varying 'translatability'—complex, embedded in a context and explicit to varying degrees (Røvik, 2016)—to perform choices and trade-offs to simultaneously grasp the essentials of idea, source context, and target context. As our review shows, the economies of worth-based literature present different choices in terms of the meanings and uses of the elements of the original theory, and hence heterogeneous translations. Heterogeneous translations can extend the reach of trans-contextualized ideas (Røvik, 2016) and reduce the risk of biases and misunderstandings of the source (O'Mahoney, 2016). Even so, they may diffract the source, creating 'confusion and ambiguity, which may easily constitute a fertile ground for theoretical drift' (Spyridonidis et al., 2016, p. 232). Accordingly, critically assessing our patterns requires analyzing the gains and losses collectively accrued from heterogeneous translations.

Translations are driven by translators' specific interests (Callon & Latour, 1981), in the pursuit of which ideas are mobilized toward different loci of application and their meaning is adapted (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). With plural interests, translation becomes itself a form of compromise-building (Thévenot, 2001a) that may require the action of mediators deploying cultural and symbolic resources (Yang et al., 2021). Our review shows that the eight patterns in the literature develop different research interests and are grounded in different, although partially overlapping, theoretical orientations. To bring them together in an overall critical assessment, a compromise must be constructed,

anchored by a common interest and, as the economies of worth suggest, an appropriate device.

We construct the common interest as the contribution of the literature to organization and management studies, and the device as a conceptual toolkit induced by integrating across the patterns the facets of the economies of worth's elements highlighted by heterogeneous translations. In our view, the conceptual toolkit embodies the collective gains that the literature offers to organization and management studies. We also reflect on aspects of the trans-contextualized theory that have thus far been relatively neglected—that is, what has been lost in translation—and make a case for corresponding theoretical and methodological developments of the conceptual toolkit.

Gains: An economies of worth-based conceptual toolkit

Four concepts which we label *critical embedding*, *justification work*, *conventionalization*, and *composite situations* emerge from the integration of the eight patterns. Together they form a toolkit that represents an effective trans-contextualization of the economies of worth, as they build on the original theory's hypotheses and assumptions and incorporate distinctive and autonomous developments. We outline them in this subsection and turn to their potential for research in the next.

Critical embedding

We define critical embedding as the establishment of multiplex connections with institutional settings, cultural norms, power relations, and the knowledge, values, and projects of multiple communities, which ensures the normative coherence of organizational action. The concept of action embeddedness and its cognitive, cultural, structural and political dimensions is taken from economic sociology (Dequech, 2003; Diaz-Bone, 2018; Granovetter, 1985). We add the qualifier *critical* to signify that, from an economies of worth perspective, the achievement of action embeddedness is predicated on the exercise of critical competence.

The idea of critical embedding is built on the substantial empirical support for critical competence in the reviewed literature, wherein critical competence is detected and consistently analysed with the orders of worth grammar in diverse phenomena, including organizational design (Pattern 1), rhetorical action in leadership contests (Pattern 2), inter-institutional, inter-organizational, and intra-organizational normativity (Patterns 3–6), knowledge management (Pattern 7), and technological design (Pattern

8). These phenomena involve different contexts and multiple scales of organizational action, which the exercise of critical competence connects and renders coherent.

This suggests that, in the organizational domain, critical competence grows into a form of distributed cognition² (Diaz-Bone, 2018; Hutchins, 1995)—that is, critical embedding. Where critical competence enables individuals to orient themselves in the normative uncertainty of their immediate interpersonal and material situations, critical embedding allows organizations to orient themselves in the normative uncertainty of extensive social and technological relations. From this perspective, organizational learning, decisions, and designs coalesce out of critical embedding over networks of situated judgments that can straddle (e.g., in the case of global corporations) multiple layers of politics, policymaking, strategic and operational decisions, and engagements with civil society. Critical embedding provides a focal point for the analysis of how organizations manage their enmeshment in normative multiplexity and the resulting tension between organizational autonomy and social integration.

Justification work

We define justification work (a term originally from Jagd, 2011) as the organizational practices based on justification behaviours. By investigating and developing this concept, the literature establishes justification as a practical engagement (Schatzki, 2001; Thévenot, 2001b) integral to organizational praxes—flows of activities that realize organizational outcomes (Jarzabkowski & Paul Spee, 2009)—by which actors in and around organizations bring to light, exploit, and resolve normative tensions and perform critical embedding.

The literature sets the events of justification—clashes, tests and accords—in concrete, organizationally relevant situations. It also shows that justification is a practice by tracing patterns of activities and results (e.g., Dansou & Langley, 2012; Demers & Gond, 2020; Gond, Barin Cruz, et al., 2016; Reinecke et al., 2017). In addition, justification work is identified as a contributor to normatively and operationally complex organizational praxes such as strategic planning and implementation (Pattern 5, e.g., Denis et al., 2007), marketing (Pattern 6, e.g., Finch et al., 2017), and accounting and financial reporting (Patterns 1, 7, e.g., Annisette & Richardson, 2011; Chenhall et al., 2013; Georgiou, 2018; van Bommel, 2014).

Justification work reframes justification as a specifically organizational phenomenon that requires coordina-

tion and management, absorbs resources, is affected by organizational design, and can develop and evolve. As a strand in organizational praxes, justification work is expected to contribute to outcomes such as organizational integration, decision quality, organizational learning, and employee engagement. The scope, forms, costs and contributions of justification work translate an organization's engagement with normative multiplexity in practical terms.

Conventionalization

We define conventionalization (a label reprised from Beamish & Biggart, 2017) as the construction, selection, combination and replacement of conventions through justification work. The literature identifies conventionalization in symbolic products of design such as organizational architectures, strategic plans, financial and performance reporting standards, brands and personnel policies (Patterns 1, 3, 5–7), as well as in technical artifacts (Pattern 8), aspects of material culture, and conventional wisdom about business and operating models in an industry (Pattern 4). Conventionalization processes comprise multiple situations in which conventions are justified, evaluated and critiqued and which involve different constellations of organizational and extra-organizational actors and multiple issues of power (Pattern 2), legitimacy and professional jurisdiction (Patterns 3–5) and pluralistic knowledge (Pattern 7).

Conventionalization represents a symptom or sign that, on the dimensions and criteria relevant to some stakeholders, organizational performance passes an inflection point, giving rise to contests on the scope and forms of organizational action and the appropriation of results (e.g., when activist investors agitate for change in organizational strategies, operations, capital structure, and governance, either to remedy underperformance, or to capture new opportunities). In other terms, conventionalization signals that the 'organizational framework' (Eymard-Duvernay, 2002, p. 71) of coordinated action is being reinterpreted, remade and critically re-embedded in society by altering conventions such as organizational designs, practices, and contracts.

Composite situations

We use the term composite situation to denote the complex of interlocking situations through which conventionalization develops. The literature indicates that in the empirical domain of organizations the economies of worth's concept of situation becomes broader and articulated to reflect the

²We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this connection.

composite spatial and temporal scales of conventionalization.

Conventionalization occurs in situations on different spatial scales. For example, leadership contests (Pattern 2), public controversies about organizational legitimacy (Pattern 3), and the actions of institutional entrepreneurs (Pattern 4) address conventions with a broader scope of applicability than practices and decision making in specific organizations (Patterns 1, 5–8) and occur in different loci and with different actors. The system of conventions that regulates an organization emerges from the complex of these spatially differentiated situations (e.g., institutional settings and conventionalizing accounts become contextual elements for business models and strategies). Moreover, situations on different scales (e.g., regulation design and local regulation implementation) can act on each other so that the respective conventions mutually adjust through non-deterministic feedback mechanisms (e.g., Anesa et al., 2022; Dahan, 2015).

Similarly, situations encompass composite temporal scales. On a broader scale, such as long-running controversies or the evolution of a fledgling industry, conventionalization is a path-dependent development in which each phase sets the stage for the next (Patterns 3–4, e.g., Kaplan & Murray, 2010; Patriotta et al., 2011). At an intermediate scale, each phase is connoted by instances of justification work (see above). On a minimal scale, cognitive configurations that feed into justification work emerge from intersubjective dynamics (e.g., Miranda et al., 2015).

Thus, conventionalization results from inter-local and inter-temporal exchanges—that is, translations of conventions—across composite situations. Networks of such exchanges are the appropriate unit of analysis to capture the scope and dynamics of specific conventionalization phenomena.

Advancing specific domains with the conceptual toolkit

The conceptual toolkit of critical embedding, justification work, conventionalization, and composite situations can be mobilized to approach broad and topical research domains at the intersection of organizations, socio-technological developments, and moral issues. We consider three such domains that provide salient and general illustrations (summarized in Table 2).

Reconsidering grand challenges

Grand challenges are complex problems of collective action characterized by ‘many interactions and associa-

tions, emergent understandings and nonlinear dynamics’ as well as ‘radical uncertainty [...] multiple criteria of worth, and [...] new concerns’ (Ferraro et al., 2015, p. 364). They require coordination among institutions, organizations and pluralistic stakeholders; rules for interaction; compromise-building processes; and distributed learning (Ferraro et al., 2015). Given these features, a conceptual toolkit based on the economies of worth can help researchers identify and analyse grand challenges.

Recently, the usefulness of the grand challenges concept has been questioned on the grounds of excessive breadth; empirical ambiguity; inconsistency of analytical architectures; and the top-down identification of grand challenges based on specific narratives, theoretical analogies, or ex-ante selection of phenomena (Carton et al., 2023; Seelos et al., 2022). These analytical and empirical problems are being advanced as reasons to ‘retire’ the concept and replace it with a set of principles for organization and management research, including urgency, broad interdisciplinarity, attention to the impacts of organizations on social systems, realism, and relevance for practice (Seelos et al., 2022).

The conceptual toolkit based on the economies of worth can ground the grand challenge concept empirically and analytically through a bottom-up approach. From a perspective based on the economies of worth, grand challenges represent nexuses of conventionalization processes around focal issues characterized by normative multiplicity, extensive composite situations, critical embedding contests for the definition and jurisdiction of uncertain issues, and impacts on multiple organizational praxes—notably, those of strategy—with substantial expenditures of institutional and organizational energy (Gond, Leca, et al., 2023). They can be analysed by focusing on the spatial and temporal distribution of social actions they involve and by evaluating the scope of relevant conventionalization processes through specific questions: What conventions emerge to coordinate institutions and organizations? Which orders of worth are mobilized across composite situations? How are grand challenges incorporated across organizational practices and through the design of new business models? Future studies could exploit multiple data sources to address such questions, such as social media content, conventional media reports, organizational and institutional communications, and multi-disciplinary research findings.

The phenomenological and bottom-up approach of such studies can meet the requirements of principle-based research on grand challenges, namely, attention to the interaction of organizations and social systems, broad empirical scope, and ‘transparency about how we define the boundaries and develop analytical scaffoldings to translate complex social context into concrete phenomena

TABLE 2 Research domains, uses of the conceptual toolkit, and research questions.

Research domain	Uses of the conceptual toolkit	<i>Justification work as...</i>	<i>Conventionalization as...</i>	<i>Composite situations as...</i>	Example research questions	
<i>Grand challenges</i>	<i>Critical embedding as...</i>	A contested object that defines uncertainty and jurisdiction on focal issues	The processes by which the normative aspects of grand challenges are incorporated into organizational action	A symptom or sign of the ongoing construction of grand challenges	Nexuses of conventionalization processes that integrate multiple institutions, organizations and exponents of civil society	What conventions emerge to coordinate organizations and institutions? Which orders of worth are mobilized across composite situations? How are the normative aspects of grand challenges incorporated in organizational praxes and business models?
<i>Technology-enabled social practices and organizational design</i>	An object of management in terms of acceptable extent and configuration	A form of engagement with problems of coordination that management can extend, restrict and trade off against others (planned, familiar)	The consolidation of organizational designs and relations, which can be traded off against fuzzier forms of coordination	The scope of coordinated action that can be redistributed between engagement regimes at a point in time	How is justification work distributed and conducted in technology development and systems design? How does informal collaboration on innovation affect the conventionalization of intellectual property and knowledge appropriability? How can management set the acceptable configuration of critical embedding and scope of justification work?	
<i>Organizational ethics</i>	An exercise of organizational justice that management can enable or undermine	A practice supported by organizational designs and subject to managerial intervention	The realization of organizational justice in terms of forms of coordination and distribution of rewards	The scope of managerial intervention on justification work	What moral-ethical stances does management adopt towards critical embedding? What ethical concepts and assumptions underlie managerial intervention on justification work? What forms of organizational justice does management pursue?	

for investigation' (Seelos et al., 2022, p. 14)—without jettisoning the concept itself.

Connecting technology-enabled social practices and organizational design

Social practices enabled and driven by information technology increasingly impact organizations. For example, practitioners and business media note how information technology, by delocalizing knowledge work and pooling technical infrastructures, redraws and blurs the boundaries of firms (*The Economist*, 2023). We suggest that the connection between technology-enabled social practices and organizational designs is mediated by managerial decisions about the relative scope and distribution of justification and other pragmatic regimes (Thévenot, 2001b). The reviewed literature (e.g., Patterns 1, 7) shows that organizational designs enable justification work and conventionalization. Research could extend to the 'negative' spaces in which organizational designs respond to socio-technological developments by cutting off justification work and conventionalization, replacing them with systems and controls, or complementing them with fuzzier forms of extra-organizational coordination, with consequences for organizational legitimacy, learning, and innovation.

Information technologies can modify the trade-offs of using justification work and conventionalization for decision making, coordination, innovation, or legitimation. For example, the use in decision making of algorithms that are often opaque to human decision makers (Rahman, 2021), who may be unable to judge the appropriateness of their logic (Aversa et al., 2018), may provide computational advantages that offset any improvements in decision quality potentially arising from justification work. Decisions may thus be shifted from the regime of justification to the planned regime of established procedures and devices, while situated judgments on the appropriateness of decisions may be displaced to the remote and more abstract contexts of algorithm design and implementation (John-Mathews et al., 2022), and be affected by their idiosyncratic power dynamics (Barbe et al., 2023). Future research could focus on the location, relevance, and effectiveness of justification work in the context of technology development and systems design.

Furthermore, if technology-enabled work delocalization—that is, work-from-anywhere—reduces the interactions among organizational members that facilitate mutual control and coordination, managers may respond by building up workflow management systems and other controls, with similar shifts from justification to the planned regime. Coworking, which is the conven-

ing of diverse knowledge workers in open and flexibly configurable working spaces (another instance of work delocalization), fosters collaboration and innovation by affording collaborators the spatial proximity and informality (Yacoub & Haefliger, 2022) of the familiar regime. An understudied consequence is the impact of such practices on conventionalization, for example in the area of intellectual property protection, including the nature and secrecy of innovation work crossing organizational boundaries.

As a final example, social media and social software enable broader perspectives and participation in organizational practices ranging from mundane work to strategy formation (Haefliger et al., 2011; Neeley & Leonardi, 2018)—for better or for worse. The accompanying expansion of the scope for social evaluations of organizations (Clemente et al., 2022) could lead to new trade-offs between gaining wide legitimacy and enduring some level of stigma. How can management set an acceptable configuration of critical embedding, fix the corresponding scope of justification work, and retreat from certain engagements?

Expanding organizational ethics

The economies of worth perspective in organization and management studies can support a revised approach to the ethics of organizational practice, that is, 'how [*the corporation*] relates to its stakeholders, how managerial responsibilities are defined, and what ground rules will be used to limit and guide people's behavior' (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 131). A central research theme in this area is the ethics of managerial interventions on justification work and conventionalization and their consequences for organizational justice. Intended as the effective capacity of organizational members to engage in critical embedding and influence organizational coordination and the equitable distribution of rewards, organizational justice is a necessary condition for the conversion of individual creativity and effort to organizational learning (Wilkinson, 1997).

From an economies of worth perspective moral reasoning pervades all organizational decisions and behaviours and is reserved for neither organizational leaders nor special circumstances. Organizational norms result from distributed and open-ended conventionalization processes. Critically competent organizational members mobilize profit and efficiency—which are considered as normative principles on their own, even when they reflect egoistic motives—as easily as other normative principles. Hence, the separation between moral/ethical and instrumental decisions (Freeman, 1994, 2000; Goodpaster,

1991; Sandberg, 2008), or empirical and normative analyses in business ethics (Trevino & Weaver, 1994), or the more fundamental ‘fact–value’ distinction, become radically reconsidered. Expanding prior analyses of business ethics inspired by American pragmatism (Rosenthal & Buchholz, 2000; Wicks & Freeman, 1998), the French pragmatist economies of worth enable the empirical exploration of organizations as producers and reproducers of moral norms.

However, justification work and conventionalization occur in situations and contexts that management can design, tactically alter, and even opportunistically manipulate, which raises the question of the ethical stances of managers and other organizational entrepreneurs. For example, organizational designs can preserve spaces for justification work (e.g., Reinecke, 2010), but also exclude or constrain it (e.g., Barros & Michaud, 2020; Islam et al., 2019). Furthermore, rhetorically and technically skilful actors can leverage organizational designs to perpetuate a dominating position through justification work (e.g., Daudigeos et al., 2021; Gond, Barin Cruz, et al., 2016). Future studies could leverage the conceptual toolkit to explore the ‘moral background’ (Abend, 2014) of managerial interventions, that is, the ethical concepts and assumptions underlying managerial practices that enable or undermine critical embedding, organize justification work, orient conventionalization, and ultimately shape organizational ethics and views of the common good. Researchers could analyse, for example, the reflections of practitioners in interviews, social media, and executives’ memoirs, and the views of managerial interventions held by organizational members in various hierarchical and functional positions. Corporate reorganizations in which ethical guidelines, formal structures, personnel, and work practices are the subject of concurrent and sometimes publicly controversial changes (e.g., recent cases in technology and social media) could provide notable empirical contexts.

Losses and developments

Reconsidering the eight translation patterns, we identified two losses in the translations of the economies of worth, by which we mean two areas in which the trans-contextualization of the original framework to organization and management studies requires further development: bounded rationality and methods. We consider these losses in translation as opportunities to consolidate the conceptual toolkit that translations have thus far gained and increase its potential.

Bounded rationality

Bounded rationality is part of both the original and the target context of the economies of worth: It is a focus of the French economics of conventions (Eymard-Duvernay, 2002; Thévenot, 2003) and an assumption that underlies multiple domains of organization and management theory, including the Carnegie School behavioural theory of the firm, institutional theory, and theories of political decision making (Argote & Greve, 2007). We argue that the connections between the economies of worth and bounded rationality have been severed in dis-embedding the framework from its original context and have not been recreated when re-embedding it in the target context.

When rationality is referenced in the reviewed literature it is seldom, if at all, as bounded rationality. There is also no suggestion that critical competence may be complementary to other cognitive capacities such as procedural rationality (Simon, 1955). Instead, the literature sometimes refers to plural competing normative *rationalities* and juxtaposes them not to bounded rationality but to a strategic, optimizing, and morally unconscious *economic* rationality. These representations capture normative multiplexity and pick up the critique of economic rationality from which bounded rationality originates (Simon, 1955). However, they also constitute terminological and conceptual drift.

We argue that an important task for the translators of the economies of worth is to recreate the connection with bounded rationality by developing theoretical and empirical accounts of how intersubjective behaviours, organizational praxes, and collective decision making are governed by a complex of procedural rationality and critical competence. For example, the formation of conventions such as strategy plans (Denis et al., 2007), project plans (Gkeredakis, 2014), socio-material assemblages (Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2019), and accounting formats (van Bommel, 2014) cannot be explained exclusively in terms of critical competence and justification worth. It also requires procedurally rational search and design (see, e.g., Baumann et al., 2019; Ethiraj & Levinthal, 2004). Research into conventionalization requires an integrated view of how reasons of appropriateness and reasons of consequences blend in complex processes from which emerge ‘normatively oriented intervention[s]’ on material needs and constraints (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000).

Methodological development

Methodological development in the reviewed literature lags theoretical gains, specifically when it comes to capturing the multiple scales and interconnections of composite

situations. This represents a loss in the translation of the economies of worth—not in the sense that something has been left behind, but in that of limited adaptation to the target context.

The reviewed literature has in fact considerably developed the operationalization of the orders of worth and of justification, including semantic tests to detect the orders of worth and identify justifications and critiques in organizational discourse (Demers & Gond, 2020; Patriotta et al., 2011), methods to pick up tests of worth as empirically observable decisions or actions (Cloutier & Langley, 2017; Dionne et al., 2019), and methods to capture the semiotics of the objects involved in justification (Bullinger et al., 2023). But methodological development could be pushed further to support the analysis of justification work and conventionalization dynamics in complex contexts, across multiple levels of analysis, over different timeframes, and with different foci of attention (Gond, Leca, et al., 2023). This would be important for research based on the economies of worth in general and essential for research topics like grand challenges, socio-technological developments, and organizational ethics. Here, the ability to scale up analyses across broad social contexts; detect emergent patterns and feedback loops; and relate the outcomes of justification work to the conditions set by organizational designs, technologies, and managerial action is critical.

Future studies could expand the range of methodological strategies by collecting written and verbal as well as visual and behavioural data on situated interactions; observing situations as they develop (as opposed to reconstructing them, retrospectively); and following their evolution over extended timeframes (Gond, Leca, et al., 2023). Additionally, they could apply configurational—that is, pattern-detecting—and integrating review research (Kunisch et al., 2023) to synthesize research in multiple contexts and situation types (e.g., on grand challenges); computational approaches to analyse large volumes of semantic data and extensive social networks (e.g., for social evaluations); and simulation and experimental approaches to examine justification work under varying contextual conditions (e.g., algorithms, managerial interventions).

Limitations and perspectives for future reviews

Like any review exercise (Gond, Cabantous, et al., 2016), our analysis remains bounded by several limitations that should now be discussed. First, our review focussed on English articles, even though organization and management scholars who use the economies of worth also publish in other languages, particularly French and German. We acknowledge that, had we included such studies in our selection, the results of the review may have been

more differentiated or nuanced. We suggest that our critical approach be extended in future reviews to refine our findings by developing comparative analyses of how the economies of worth have been appropriated by organization and management scholars in various linguistic communities.

Second, we did not examine economies of worth studies of organization and management in sociology and economics. Nonetheless, we have acknowledged the pragmatic-conventionalist perspective in economic sociology (see, e.g., Diaz-Bone, 2018; Lazega & Favereau, 2002) by referencing specific concepts such as conventions, as well as interests such as bounded rationality and action embeddedness, throughout this review. We advocate a closer rapprochement with this field in future analyses.

Third and finally, our critical approach is itself a translation of the economies of worth, whose key features we have abstracted from their original context and pressed into service as a critical yardstick, and of the reviewed literature, which we have assembled, categorized, interpreted, and for which we have constructed new research avenues and developmental tasks. Although we believe that our translations are justified for the purposes of this study, such operations are inherently performative (Gond, Mena, et al., 2023) and open to critique. Our hope is that our reviewing exercise will stimulate creative appropriations of, and multiple forms of engagement with, the economies of worth in organization and management studies, notably by expanding the boundaries of the field in relation to the analysis of grand challenges, technological transformation, and organizational ethics.

CONCLUSIONS

The economies of worth and organization and management studies have served each other well. The original theory has received substantial empirical support from a wide range of applications in the target domain. Organization and management studies have gained a distinctive perspective on multiple organizational phenomena arising from normative multiplexity. Even so, the translations of the economies of worth have yet to achieve their collective potential. By integrating them, new concepts emerge that researchers can use to engage with increasingly important phenomena. We advocate extensive empirical application and further theoretical and methodological development of the new concepts by organization and management scholars at large.


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