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THE PERFORMATIVITY OF THEORIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how organization and management studies have built on and helped advance various streams of research dedicated to the performativity of theory – that is, how theory shapes the patterns of social interactions that constitute social reality. For that purpose, we distinguish two ideal-type positions that form the poles of a continuum of scholarship about theory performativity. These poles consist of approaching either *performativity as a mindset*—an onto-epistemic lens helpful to reconsider the nature or organizational phenomena and management concepts—or of analysing *performativity as a social mechanism* involved in the production and transformation of social reality for actors. By relying on illustrations from recent research, we specify the common core assumptions underlying both perspectives on performativity as well as their distinctive commitments to these assumptions, analytical foci, and contribution to organizational knowledge of performativity. We finally discuss how the insights generated at each pole of this continuum complement each other and can advance organizational and management studies of theory performativity.

Keywords

Performativity, John Austin, Performativity as a Mindset, Performativity as a Social Mechanism

Introduction

The question of how management and organization theories come to matter to managers and organizations generate recurrent concerns that have been discussed under the umbrella of the “rigour-relevance debate” (Carton and Mouricou 2017; Kieser et al. 2015; Seidl and Grossmann-Hensel 2021) or the “academic-practitioner gap” or “divide” (Bartunek and Rynes 2014; Carton and Ungureanu 2018). One fruitful epistemological angle to make sense of such a question consists of approaching the activity of organizational scholars not as “representing neutrally” an external reality, but rather as “intervening actively” within this reality (Hacking 1983; Pickering 1995). Research dedicated to the **performativity of theory** is predicated on this insight and analyses scientific statements as (co-)constitutive of empirical (social) reality.

This chapter explains how organization and management studies can build on the streams of research dedicated to the performativity of theory so as to move beyond a representational stance while building on the rich conceptual roots of the performativity concept. After having positioned organizational studies of performativity in the broader history of performativity studies in social sciences, we distinguish two positions about the performativity of theory: ***performativity as a mindset*** from ***performativity as a social mechanism***. We explain how these positions form a continuum that accounts for the various styles of scholarship investigating the performativity of theory. We finally discuss how these distinct modes of theorizing about performativity can support new research perspectives on the performativity of theories.

The Conceptual Roots of Performativity

John Austin defined in his book *How to Do Things with Words* a performative utterance as one “in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something” (Austin 1962, p. 12; italics in original). For scholars interested in the performativity of theory, it is not without irony that by doing so, he

contributed to *bring into being* the field of studies dedicated to the pragmatic uses of language—i.e. how do ordinary people use language to make things happen in social contexts. Austin illustrated this insight with the case of utterances pronounced during a wedding ceremony (e.g. “I do take this woman [man] to be my lawful wedded wife [husband]”), as “it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (Austin 1962, p. 5). John Searle, himself a student of Austin, further elaborated on this insight to develop the notion of *speech act* and develop a typology of speech acts, whether they are meaningful utterances (*locutionary acts*), whether they express an attitude (*illocutionary acts*), or whether they are brought about by saying something (*perlocutionary acts*) (Searle 1969). This triggered a long-lasting controversy with Derrida (1979), according to whom speech acts are not so much the product of their conditions of utterance (e.g. serious intention of the future married uttering their vows, presence of a priest during the ceremony) than citations that reiterate prior situations for the audience (e.g. knowledge by all the participants that they are attending a wedding ceremony). These debates have improved our understanding of speech utterances and how language can transform the social world.

Moving away from these early philosophical and linguistics debates, the notion of performativity then started a long journey across multiple academic fields, from philosophy to literature studies and the social sciences (Denis 2006; Loxley 2007). The performativity concept has been used and redefined for purposes as diverse as understanding how readers coproduce fiction works in the field of literary critique (Fish 1982), how gender is constituted in feminist scholarship (Butler 1990, 1997), in philosophy to document how knowledge production became focused on a continuous search for efficiency in postmodern societies

(Lyotard 1984), or in sociology to explain how economic theory is involved in the constitution of markets (Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2006).

The import of these various conceptualizations of performativity in organization and management studies produced a vivid but fragmented field of study characterized by competing understandings of performativity. On the one hand, the sustained interest of organizational scholars in the notion performativity is illustrated by the publication of special issues dedicated to this theme (e.g. *Human Relations* 2018 ‘virtual special issue’; *Long Range Planning* 2018; *M@n@gement* 2017; *Organization Studies* 2021). On the other hand, the fragmented nature of the field has been illustrated in a review of the field that identified no less than eight distinct takes on performativity in organizational studies (Gond et al. 2016) – five of them corresponding to straightforward borrowing from foundational perspectives on performativity and regard performativity as *doing things with words* (Austin); *searching for efficiency* (Lyotard); *constituting the self* (Butler, Derrida); *bringing theory into being* (Callon, MacKenzie); or *socio-materiality mattering* (Barad); three corresponding to organizational scholars’ creative re-appropriation of the concept of performativity, and approach performativity as *constitutive communication* (Taylor, Cooren), *enacting routines* (Feldman, D’Adderio), or *making critical theory influential* (Spicer, Alvesson, Kärreman). Table 1 provides an overview of these various perspectives that have nurtured the discussion of performativity in organization and management studies in recent years, and which have been frequently cross-fertilized to advance our understanding of the core phenomenon of one of these eight perspectives—the performativity of theory.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The Performativity of Theory

Central to the organizational scholarship dedicated to performativity is a stream of research dedicated to the organizational life of theories, which analyses “performativity as bringing theory into being” (Gond et al. 2016, p. 447) and is concerned with how theories co-constitute organizational phenomena (see grey-shaded line in Table 1). This specific take on performativity leverages insights from the sociology fields of Science, Technology and Society (STS) studies and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and in particular the works of Barry Barnes (1983), Michel Callon (1998), Bruno Latour (1996) and Donald MacKenzie (2007), to explore the ramifications and implications of the “performativity of economics” thesis, according to which economics, broadly defined, contributes to shaping and constituting economies rather than observing or representing economic activities (Callon 1998, p. 2; see also Muniesa 2014; Muniesa and Callon 2007).

In recent years, students of organization and management studies have extended this line of research, *either* by analysing how economic language and concepts, such as rational choice theory (Cabantous et al. 2010; Cabantous and Gond 2011), transforms organizational and management practices (Ferraro et al. 2005), *or* by focusing their attention on the performativity of organization and management studies itself (Bartunek 2020; Carton 2020). For instance, more attention has been focused on how popular and fashionable notions such as modularity (D’Adderio & Pollock 2014), Michael Porter’s “Creating Shared Value” (Ligonie 2018), or Kim and Mauborgne’s “Blue Ocean Strategy” (Carton 2020) acquired an organizational life of their own and ultimately reshaped organizations (Bartunek 2020). In addition, organizational scholars have debated avidly about whether and how critical rather than mainstream management theories are and/or could be performed (Cabantous et al. 2016; Fleming & Banerjee 2016; Huault et al. 2017; Spicer et al. 2009).

Debates and discussions of theory performativity move away from relying on well-established philosophical traditions to explore organizational or managerial phenomena (Gond

and Cabantous 2015). Rather, they point to a continuous enquiry into whether and how organizational and managerial theorizing transform the world, in ways that cut across ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, and methodological levels and assumptions. Accordingly, similar to their investigation of concepts such as culture (Smircich 1983), organizational scholars have produced distinct types of knowledge about theory performativity, depending on whether and how they use core assumptions inherent to the performativity turn (Muniesa 2014). For some, studying the performativity of theory consists of bringing back “theory” as a key ingredient (e.g. variables, artefacts, representations) of organizational life, and analysing whether and how theories, together with their various producers (e.g. economists, management scholars, consultants) and supports (e.g. models, equations, frameworks), influence organizational life. For others, studying the performativity of theory involves a more radical reconsideration of the representationalist assumptions that underlie most organization theory, and calls for reconstructing new understandings of key concepts such as leadership, entrepreneurship or strategy as co-constituted by theory.

These divergent styles of theorizing have generated distinct forms of knowledge about theory performativity, and nurtured debates and controversies about how to analyse theory performativity, and the value-added of adopting a distinct approach (see: *Human Relations* 69(2) in 2016; more recently in the *Academy of Management Review*: D’Adderio et al. 2019; Garud and Gehman 2019; Shadnam 2019 vs. Marti and Gond 2018, 2019). To clarify the state of affairs in this domain, we offer a new distinction between two ideal-type positions that form the poles of a continuum of scholarship about theory performativity: *performativity as a mindset* and *performativity as a social mechanism*. We first introduce this distinction by specifying the core common underlying assumptions of both approaches but also their distinctive commitments to these assumptions and analytical foci, as well as the types of organizational knowledge of performativity they have produced, using illustrations from

recent research. We then discuss how both positions can inform each other to advance organizational studies of theory performativity.

Distinguishing Two Extremes of a Continuum: *Performativity as a Mindset* and *Performativity as a Social Mechanism*

Contemporary analyses of the performativity of organization and management studies are characterized by a set of common underlying assumptions to which various studies subscribe in distinct ways. One can usefully distinguish between two types of work. On one pole of a continuum, one type of work commits to the ‘spirit’ of performativity at a deeper ontological and epistemological level, and regards it as a breakthrough way of rethinking organizational or managerial phenomena, committing to *performativity as a mindset*. Here, performativity is regarded less as a phenomenon relevant *per se* than an onto-epistemological lens—a researchers’ way of thinking, or *mindset*—useful to reconsider the very nature of any organization or management phenomena (e.g. Cabantous and Sergi 2018). On the opposite pole, other types of work leverage performativity analytical and methodological insights to further our understanding of performativity as being *per se* an organizational and managerial phenomenon. This research develops an analysis of *performativity as a social mechanism* that complements, reconsiders or expands reflexively our conceptualization of organizational theorizing and organizing (e.g. Marti and Gond 2018, 2019). Table 2 provides an overview of these ideal-type positions in the debates about the performativity of theory that we now present by introducing first their common assumptions and their more specific features.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Core common assumptions

The field of research dedicated to the performativity of theories is nurtured by multiple intellectual influences such as actor-network theory (ANT) (Callon 1998, 2016), social studies of sciences (Hacking 1983), pragmatism (Muniesa 2014), Science Technology Society (STS) (Law 2008), or socio-materiality studies (Barad 2007). Performativity studies in management builds on four core common assumptions that capitalize on the long journey and successive translations of this notion in social sciences since Austin's (1962) publication (Gond et al. 2016). At the same time, performativity assumptions mirror four key turns in the social sciences: a *non-representational view on language* (linguistic turn), an *ontology of becoming* (processual turn), an attention to *socio-materiality* (material turn), and an interest in the *actual doings of actors* (practice turn) (Kuhn et al. 2017). First, inherited from the linguistic turn in social science, performativity scholars envision discourses not merely as describing, but rather as constituting external realities (Austin 1962). Departing from representationalism that "takes it for granted that the defining characteristic of science is its production of representations of nature, facts and theories" (Pickering 1994, p. 413), performativity scholars emphasize the constitution of new worlds through their articulation, and thus consider language as being non-representational (Thrift 1999, 2008). For example, by demonstrating how methods of systematic literature review actually shape the fields of study they are supposed to "neutrally describe" by bringing into being new categories organizing the literature and calling for changes in the field's research orientations, Gond et al. (2020) show how such non-representationalist assumptions can help revisit established academic procedures and methods used to review literature systematically.

Second, performativity work is also inspired by the *processual turn* in management that puts the emphasis on evolving phenomena and therefore explicitly incorporates temporal progressions of activities as elements of explanation and understanding (Langley et al. 2013). Even if performativity scholars' perspective on time has often remained implicit,

performativity studies have approached reality as being “a form of becoming” and have explored how processes of becoming unfold over time. Cabantous and Sergi (2018) make this point explicit by referring to “the inherent processuality of performativity” (p. 1229). Focusing on the performativity of theories, Garud and Gehman (2019) similarly suggest metaphorically approaching theory performativity trajectories as “ongoing journeys” continuously instantiated and actualized rather than “destinations”, and accepting the idea of a world always in flux and transformation (see also Garud et al. 2018).

Third, mirroring the *material turn* in social sciences and management (Boxenbaum et al. 2018), performativity scholars have conceptualized theories as relationally connected with assemblages of actors, artefacts and practices (Law 2008), and have thus considered socio-materiality (Barad 2007). Accordingly, the social and the material interact to constitute the reality of everyday life (Orlikowski 2007). For instance, in studying how the strategy concept of Blue Ocean Strategy performed managerial reality, Carton (2020) shows how material devices such as books or practitioner-oriented journals and human beings such as consultants or faculty members played a key role in performing the concept. As Blue Ocean Strategy emerged, material devices such as books, articles or teaching cases framed reality, and enrolled and consolidated other material devices and human beings to make the concept perform a broader scope of reality over time.

Fourth, and finally influenced by the *practice turn* in social sciences (Schatzki et al. 2001), performativity scholars have emphasized the actual doing of actors. Such consideration of reality is at the root of the actor-network theory, the prior intellectual project of Michel Callon (1998), whose seminal study focused on the practices developed by marine biologists, researchers and other actors to halt the decline of the population of scallops in Saint Brieuc Bay (Callon, 1986). Cabantous et al.’s (2010) study of decision analysts illustrates in theory

performativity how actors can develop specific tools (decision trees) that structurally embed the axioms of a theory (rational choice theory) in their consultancy practice.

Overall, these four turns – linguistic, processual, material, and practice turn – constitute the core common assumptions that management and organization researchers make about theory performativity. Together, these assumptions represent an overarching conceptual apparatus that can help shift organization and management studies away from representational assumptions and positivism, investigate the co-constitution of theories and organizations, and approach theory as being actively intervening in the production of organizational phenomena rather than representing them neutrally.

Distinct commitments and analytical foci

However, despite this common core, performativity works diverge with regard to the breadth and depth of their commitment to these four core common assumptions. By delineating differences in these forms of commitments, we can draw two ideal-type positions in current performativity studies (*cf.* Table 1). Scholarly work approaching *performativity as a mindset* is characterized by a strong commitment of researchers to a performative way of thinking that involves embracing most of performativity's core common assumptions. It regards performativity as an actual 'epistemological breakthrough' by acknowledging that a performative take on knowledge leads to a radical reconsideration of the distinction between ontology and epistemology, in line with Barad's (2007) view that:

We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. (Barad 2007, p. 185)

Accordingly, performativity is regarded here as an "onto-epistemological device" that can be used to reconsider how phenomena are actively constituted through socio-material

practices. Like Butler's (1990) radical reconsideration of gender materiality through performative analysis, performativity produces new and unique understandings of organizational and managerial phenomena. For instance, in the discipline of management, this stance on theory performativity questions the culture of strategy to better understand the discipline (Muniesa 2018), it reminds strategists, entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs that business models, opportunities and markets are constitutive arrangements that are subject to change (Garud et al. 2018), and it questions the role played by emotions in linking bodies and work through organizational communication (Kuhn et al. 2017). As the examples above illustrate, central to such a position is the focus on the continuous constitution of organizational or managerial entities, through communication and practices such as keynotes in the case of Steve Job presenting Apple's strategy (Garud et al. 2018), and through the recognition that agency co-constitutes theory. This is evidenced by how Harvard Business School co-constituted the discipline of strategy through the case study method that involves students' classroom role-playing, for instance (Muniesa 2018).

In contrast, scholars interested in *performativity as a social mechanism* usually adopt either a narrower focus on only some of the four underlying core assumptions or combine them through a weaker commitment to their ultimate onto-epistemological implications, as the focus is put on the social mechanisms that performativity unveils. For instance, such studies could integrate the role of materiality and objects or focus on theory as a key entity in their analysis (Cabantous et al. 2010; e.g. Ghoshal 2005) while postulating the relative ontological stability of the entities under study. Rather than radically reconsidering their phenomenon of interest, such analyses correspond to a more traditional "middle-range" theorizing of social life (Merton 1949), aimed at providing heuristic ways of producing knowledge, somewhere between mundane empirical phenomena and grand onto-epistemological assumptions. Research on performativity as a social mechanism nevertheless

remains distinct from mainstream studies of organizational and managerial phenomenon in that it reflexively problematizes the role of knowledge production in its own scholarly production. For instance, as they offer a performative endeavour to literature review and critically assess prior reviews in the corporate social responsibility field, Gond et al. (2020) question assumptions inherent to current methods of aggregating knowledge about academic fields and show how reviewing actually co-constitutes academic fields. In an empirical study on how philosophers have helped blue-collar staff from a recuperated workers cooperative expel their owner and takeover to survive during the Argentinian financial crisis, Esper et al. (2017) shed light on how academics can reflexively support the emergence and growth of alternative organizational forms (see also Leca and Barin-Cruz 2021). Such a position usually uses performativity insights either as a powerful *epistemo-methodological device* to identify limitations of a non-performative take on organizational and managerial phenomena, or as an *epistemological device* to produce knowledge that extends or consolidates theory by specifying phenomenological blind spots (e.g. Marti and Gond 2018).

Producing knowledge “through” vs. “about” performativity

Arguably, these two differentiated positions are likely to result in the production of distinct types of knowledge about the role of theories in organizations and managerial practice, that each presents unique opportunities for contributions and specific challenges (*cf.* Table 1).

First, analyses of *performativity as a mindset* are more concerned with producing knowledge *through* performativity, using the concept of performativity to offer a fresh and unique perspective on contemporary business practices, or revisiting the constitution of a body of practical and managerial knowledge. For instance, Dupret’s (2019) analysis of what is performed by silence within organizations exemplifies the value of adopting a performative mindset to reconsider a neglected phenomenon and recast it as actively producing

organizational reality. By specifying the roles played by various forms of performance in the construction of strategy knowledge and by connecting ideals of strategic management and business education, Muniesa (2018) clarifies how strategy as a body of enacted knowledge instantiates a broader performative cultural condition. Other studies in this stream of research seek to reconstruct the slow constitutions of “actor-network” or “assemblages” connecting multiple human and non-human entities in ways that co-produce and give an academic, organizational and/or managerial life to theory. Cabantous and Gond (2015), for instance, retrace over a long period of time decision theory scholars’ efforts at assembling concepts, symbolic resources, and practical tools to embed a Bayesian understanding of probabilities as “subjective” and “forward-looking” entities – rather than “objective” synthesis of prior occurrences – in management studies has resulted in the production of a research field dedicated to decision analysis.

By contrast, studies of *performativity as a social mechanism* focus on *producing knowledge about performativity*. The focus is placed on the mechanisms through which theories come into being, as different sociological studies have attempted to do (MacKenzie 2006; e.g. MacKenzie and Millo 2003). This line of theorizing is inspired by the Barnesian notion of self-referentiality (Barnes 1983) that aims to explain how social knowledge is “made valid by virtue of being acted upon by the carriers of the knowledge” so that “coming to believe such knowledge creates the referents that make it valid knowledge; for it refers to itself as believed and not to anything independent of itself” (Barnes’ interview in Hwang et al. 2010, p. 607). Scholars of mechanism-focused performativity theory are thus interested in how knowledge constitutes reality by becoming self-referential. For instance, in an empirical study of a local climate adaptation to sea level rise in Australia, Bowden et al. (2021) show how climate change science is translated into a self-referential theory focused on property

prices through two mechanisms of “enablement” and “theorization”, which together undermined the local authorities’ capacity to actually address climate change.

Adopting an encompassing approach to social mechanism that interprets this notion in a constructivist rather than positivist manner after Barnes (1983), studies that focus on knowledge *about* performativity aim at clarifying the nature of the performativity of economic mechanisms (Ferraro et al. 2005; Herrmann-Pillath 2016), or at specifying the multiple boundary conditions that shape performativity by enabling experimentation with theories (Marti and Gond 2018). Other studies have combined the notion of performativity with concepts from other organizational theories (e.g. institutional work, strategy-as-practice) to analyse the activities involved in bringing into being theories, within and through organizations, by inscribing them within artefacts or routines (D’Adderio and Pollock 2014), and/or connecting them to various institutions. This line of research has offered new concepts hybridizing these theories, such as “performativity work” (Beunza and Ferraro 2019)—that is, the activities involved in making performativity happen, or “performative praxis” (Cabantous and Gond 2011), which refers to the practices that contribute to turning a theory into social reality for actors. Organizational scholars have paid special attention to the mechanisms by which actors become cognitively embedded within specific theories—referred to as “conventionalizing” (Cabantous and Gond 2011, p. 579)—through educational institutions such as business schools, in ways that shape their language and mindsets (Ferraro et al. 2005), business practices (Ghoshal 2005), and subsequent decision-making (Jung and Shin 2019).

Both approaches to performativity present specific potential and limitations. Analyses of performativity as a mindset, through their commitment to core performativity assumptions have attracted scholars’ attention to the necessarily timely and spatially *open-ended* nature of performativity studies and theorizing. But even though the mindset stream of studies has developed unique situated understandings and knowledge of how actor-networks or socio-

material assemblage are constituted (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault 2009; Garud et al. 2018), it risks insulating studies of performativity from the rest of organizational scholarship, as the insights produced could be a hard buy for scholars who do not share such assumptions.

By contrast, the middle-range theory-building of works focused on social mechanisms of performativity makes their findings and conceptualizations more easily transferable across distinct conceptual domains. The frameworks produced by Cabantous and Gond (2011), Beunza and Ferraro (2019) or Marti and Gond (2018) can enter into conversation with more established bodies of knowledge on organization and management studies (e.g. institutional theory, strategy-as-practice), but may sometimes risk scarifying part of the transformative potential inherent to the performativity concept.

Performative frictions and in/commensurability

Unsurprisingly, these two distinct scholarly positions on the performativity of theories, *as a mindset* or *as a social mechanism*, have generated tensions and debates, even though they have not been necessarily made as explicit as in this chapter. Some scholars could interpret these positions as irreconcilable, separated by a definitive “epistemological break” (Balibar 1978) (e.g. Garud and Gehman 2019), whereas others regard both approaches as not necessarily incompatible (e.g. Marti and Gond 2019). We found that empirical studies on the performativity of theory published in recent years offer a variety of positions in relation to these ideal-types. Table 3 provides an overview of some of these studies and specifies their position vis-à-vis core assumptions and the concept of social mechanism.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The epistemological tension between both positions is best illustrated by the controversy raised in the *Academy of Management Review* in response to Marti and Gond (2018)

(D'Adderio et al. 2019; Garud and Gehman 2019). In their article, Marti and Gond (2018) envision theory performativity as a distinct social mechanism for which theoretical propositions can be formulated. Analysing the article, Garud and Gehman (2019) recast the approach in terms of social mechanisms as related to Merton's functionalist legacy, and question Marti and Gond's (2018) commitment to three of the four core common assumptions of performativity by arguing that the article relies on a too representational view on language, does not assume an ontology of becoming and fails to take into account a distributed onto-epistemology. For their part, D'Adderio et al. (2019) question the commitment to two of the assumptions: the consideration of socio-materiality by conceptualizing a theory as an objectified, stand-alone entity and the ontology of becoming by characterizing the effects of a theory in terms of linear, sequential process. In their response, Marti and Gond (2019) argue they do not see their model as a *closed* linear representation of Barnesian performativity, but rather as a processual one (see also Cloutier and Langley 2020). In line with Barnes (1983), they reclaim a constructivist interpretation of Merton's mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecies and argue that the social mechanism underlying the theory of self-fulfilment is necessarily part of ongoing journeys, as it operates through cycles triggered by anomalies, in ways that can relate to new, and potentially, folk theories.

Our analysis of publications on the performativity of theories, however, suggests that most scholarship in the domain can be positioned as a continuum between the two ideal ways of engaging with performativity; as Table 3 illustrates, some studies can be regarded as hybrid, assuming implicitly the commensurability of both analytical takes. Indeed, while Glaser (2017) applies a performativity mindset to focus on the process by which organizational actors associated with a theory work with practitioners to influence specific organizational practices, the article also develops social mechanisms through which socio-material assemblages are performed. Likewise, while Carton (2020) uses performativity as a

mindset to take a performativity perspective on strategy concepts, he also details the mechanisms through which the theory produces the assemblages. Finally, Palo et al. (2020) rely on the performativity concept to show how the magic world of Santa is being constructed, but also conceptualize the mechanisms through which the myth is transformed into a model of an imaginary-real world. It is thus possible to view these contrasting ways of approaching the performativity of theory as a continuum by means of hybrid approaches that build on both stances on performativity.

Moving Forward: Combining *Performativity as a Mindset* and *Performativity as a Social Mechanism*?

Arguably, both approaches to the performativity of theory can sensibly contribute to further our understanding of the life of theories within and across organizations. Moving beyond a dichotomic take on performativity mindset and mechanisms prompted by viewing them as inherently incommensurable and inspired by the notion of “metatriangulation” (Lewis and Grimes 1999, p. 677), according to which we can theorize in different ways by exploiting epistemologically distinct and—and potentially distant positions, we now discuss and illustrate possible fruitful interactions between both styles of research to develop future research about the performativity of theory.

By promoting distinctive, yet potentially complementary takes on theory performativity, both perspectives can exercise a welcome influence on the other, allowing them to continuously learn from each other. Mindset studies can learn from social mechanism approaches to performativity about how to reconnect the reality/knowledge they produce through the radical reconsideration of the relationship between phenomena and concepts such as strategy or entrepreneurship through to other notions or concepts upon which established scholarship has some grasp. Furthermore, the risk of *performativity as a mindset* becoming

insulated from the rest of organizational scholarship can be mitigated by the discipline of specifying forms of connections between entities or constructs, that is imposed by the notion of social mechanism, which, even in its most minimalist form, refers to ‘bits of theory about entities at a different level (e.g. individuals) than the main entities being theorized about (e.g. groups), which serve to make the higher-level theory more supple, more accurate, or more general’ (Stinchcombe 1991, p. 367).

By contrast, mechanism-focused performativity scholarship can learn from mindset studies how to extend and deepen their approaches to specific phenomena and extend the generalizability and magnitude of the social mechanisms of performativity, notably by pointing towards unforeseen connections between various forms of performativity-based social mechanisms. For instance, distinct contributions have highlighted the self-referential nature of knowledge involved in Barnesian theory performativity (MacKenzie and Millo 2003), as well as the self-reinforcing nature of this mode of performativity in contrast to cases of counter-performativity in which a theory destroys its verisimilitude by being socially used (MacKenzie 2007), while other analyses insist on the role of experimentations in such a mechanism (Marti and Gond 2018, 2019; Muniesa and Callon 2007). Moving back to the underlying forms of sociomaterial interventions involved in all these mechanisms could help tie these narratives firmly into a more generic mechanism of performativity self-constitution. Here, the mindset spirit can avoid “closing-down” or “packaging” too quickly subtle and complex processual entities into a neat social mechanism, by helping to identify and theorize deeper relationships between social mechanisms (D’Adderio et al. 2019). By allowing such forms of “bridging” between multiple performativity mechanisms (Lewis and Grimes 1999), mindset approaches can help further generalize this approach, while constantly extending the range of phenomena that might be subjected to performativity analysis (see Figure 1). Helping to keep the performativity ontology “flat” (Latour 2005) allows you to “radiate out

horizontally from the single instance in order to trace the network of connections that make it possible” (Seidl and Whittington 2014, p. 2). In so doing, mindset scholarship can improve the understanding of larger phenomena. For instance, Beunza and Ferraro (2019) had to rely on foundational ANT assumptions to account for the micro-political dimensions underlying the social mechanism that cause theories to come into being by developing the complementarity between performativity and institutional work.

Accordingly, the mindset vs. social mechanism distinction sketches a potential division of labour between the theorization of empirically situated social mechanisms, potentially in relation to other established frameworks, and the mindset meta-theorization that could connect different social mechanisms theories, expand their degree of generality and/or reorient them back towards their core foundational assumptions. Both positions could be used in sequence through a research process, or across distinct research projects. As a whole, they would play like a balancing tool, helping theory performativity scholars progress like tightrope walkers, while avoiding too conceptually esoteric analyses and too mechanistic empirical accounts.

Conclusion and Outlook

Through their review of the field of performativity in organization theory, Gond et al. (2016) revealed “a lack of organizational conceptualization of performativity: discussions of how organizations are performed and performativity is organized remain embryonic” (p. 441). Our updated analysis of research dedicated to the *performativity of theory* suggests that this crucial gap in knowledge is being filled, as scholars investigate how economic theories, as well as more specifically managerial concepts (Carton, 2020), alongside academic (Marti and Gond 2018) or folk theories (Palo et al. 2020) are performed, while exploring how authority (Bourgoin et al. 2020), entrepreneurship (Garud et al. 2018), silence (Dupret 2019) or strategy (Muniesa 2018) are performatively organized (see Table 3).

We offer a distinction between *performativity as a mindset* and *performativity as a social mechanism* to make sense of two types of scholarship that rely more or less creatively and faithfully on four core assumptions constituting the performativity idiom in organization theory (see Table 1). Our review suggests that much is yet to be done to empirically account for, conceptualize, and organize the myriads of self-constituting social mechanisms that pertain to theory performativity—from the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1984) to Barnes’ (1983) approach to “bootstrapped inferences”—that could all help clarify some facets of whether and how theory performativity ‘works’ within, through and for organizations. Studies approaching performativity as a mindset, on the other hand, have only started to tap into the radical possibilities offered by the onto-epistemological reconsideration of potentially any organization and management concepts, theories, tools and practices. Beyond the clarification of two styles of performativity scholarship, the underlying mindset *vs.* mechanism tension can be used as a heuristic device to combine productively both takes on performativity, and in a mindful manner, aim to reflexively engage with the analysis of conditions of academic knowledge production in organization and management studies (Figure 1). Future studies could propose new combinations of these approaches to further clarify the organizational life and conditions of theory production, and even use the mirror of performativity scholarship itself to clarify the self-mechanisms that constitute organizational scholarship on performativity—to perpetuate Austin’s provocative spirit.

Cross-References

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Table 1. Eight takes on performativity in organization and management studies

	Organizational perspective on performativity	Conceptual roots	Key insights and themes in organizational analysis	Illustrative OMT paper
Borrowing of foundational perspectives	(1) Performativity as doing things with words	Austin, Searle	Key role of language and speech-act in the constitution of organizational phenomena such as strategy or organizational change.	Ford and Ford (1995); Kornberger and Clegg (2011)
	(2) Performativity as searching for efficiency	Lyotard	Anti-performative stance: Critical management study's (CMS) call to resist the search for efficiency-driving academic knowledge production in post-modern societies.	Cooper and Burrell (1988); Fournier and Grey (2000)
	(3) Performativity as actors constituting the self	Butler, Derrida	Constitution and (re)production of gendered managerial roles and identities in the workplace.	Harding (2004); Tyler and Cohen (2010)
	(4) Performativity as bringing theory into being*	Barnes, Callon, MacKenzie	Role of academics, theories (in particular economics) and expert knowledge in the co-construction of organizational phenomena.	Cabantous and Gond (2011); Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton (2005)
	(5) Performativity as socio-materiality mattering	Barad, Latour	Analysis of the constitution of boundaries between social and material entities through practices and organizations.	Nyberg (2009); Orlikowski and Scott (2014)
Creative re-appropriations	(6) Performativity as constitutive communication (see: Taylor & Van Every, 1999)	Combination of (1) & insights from Latour	Analysis of how organizations and organizational phenomena are constituted and re/produced through communicative events and artefacts.	Cooren (2004); Schoeneborn and Scherer (2012)
	(7) Performativity as the expression of routine (see: Feldman & Pentland, 2003)	Combination of (4) & insights from Latour	Distinction between the ostensive (defined as representations) and performative (expressed in practice) aspects of organizational routines.	D'Adderio (2008)
	(8) Performativity as making critical theory influential (see: Spicer et al., 2009)	Combination of insights from (1), (2) & (3)	Call to move beyond the anti-performative stance of CMS and make critical theory more influential through uses of language and engagement with practitioners.	Wickert and Schaefer (2015)

Source: Simplified and adapted version of Gond et al.'s (2016) Tables, pp. 444, 450 and 454. Please consult the original article for more details on each perspective.

** In this Chapter, we focus on this stream of research, and the recent developments surrounding it, that we capture under the label of "theory performativity".*

Table 2. Contrasting the poles of the performativity as a mindset / performativity as a social mechanism continuum

Characteristics	Performativity as a mindset	Performativity as a social mechanism
Theoretical anchoring	Austin (1962); Actor-Network Theory; Pragmatism; Science Technology Society studies (STS); Socio-materiality	
Common core assumptions	Influence of the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Linguistic turn – non-representational view on language; ▪ Process turn – ontology of becoming; ▪ Material turn – consideration of socio-materiality; ▪ Practice turn – focus on the actual doings of actors. 	
Distinctive assumptions	Performativity as an ' <i>epistemological breakthrough</i> ': Stronger commitment to core assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generalized symmetry; ▪ Relational materiality; ▪ Recognition of ontological variability; ▪ Strong anti-representationalism. 	Performativity as ' <i>mid-range theorizing of social life</i> ': Weaker commitment to core assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consideration of materiality and objects in empirical analysis; ▪ Relative ontological stability; ▪ Weak anti-representationalism.
Analytical focus	Performativity as an <i>onto-epistemological device</i> to reconsider and develop new understandings of concepts and phenomena. Focus on the continuous co-constitution of entities. Co-constitution of agency and theory.	Performativity as an <i>epistemological device</i> to develop theory; an <i>epistemo-methodological device</i> to reconsider established methods. Focus on the role academics and bodies of knowledge in empirical fields. Recognition of theory agency (i.e. actant).
Type of knowledge produced	Reconsideration of organizational phenomena <i>through</i> performativity. <i>Situated theorizing</i> of how socio-material assemblages are re/produced. Interest in open-ended trajectories leading to constitution of entities. Internally consistent yet potentially insulated theorizing.	Unpacking performativity mechanisms to theorize <i>about</i> performativity. <i>Transferable theorizing</i> of phenomena in the form of generalizing frameworks. Interest in mechanisms accounting for self-reinforcement, self-referentiality, and self-constitution. Mid-range theorizing connected to established theories.
Illustrative conceptual developments	Reconsideration and reconceptualization of entrepreneurship as a journey or strategy performativity as a new cultural condition. Analysis of the production of assemblages and/or actor-networks constituting new assumptions or theories (e.g. Bayesian thinking, blue ocean strategy).	Specification of social mechanism and boundary conditions of performativity. Performativity work – institutional work needed to perform theory. Performative praxis mechanisms that explain how theories are brought into being through actors' practices. Inscription of theory into artefacts to change routines.
Illustrative articles	Cabantous and Sergi (2018); Dupret (2019); Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009); Garud et al. (2018); Muniesa (2018).	Beunza and Ferraro (2018); Ferraro et al. (2005); Ghoshal (2005); Herrmann-Pillath (2016); Marti and Gond (2018).

Table 3. Empirical illustrations along the mindset-social mechanism continuum

Articles	Positioning and contribution to theory performativity	Core argument or findings about performativity	Consistency with the core assumptions of performativity	Overall take on performativity
IDEAL-TYPE POSITION: PERFORMATIVITY AS A SOCIAL MECHANISM				
Jung and Shin (2019)	Demonstration of business education as a facilitating mechanism of performativity	The rise of financial economics and agency-theoretic logic in business education changed students' views about diversification	Consideration of materiality and objects; relative ontological stability; weak anti-representationalism	Social mechanism
Marti and Scherer (2016)	Normative framework outlining the impact of theories on social welfare	Theories have a performative effect on public policies		
Beunza and Ferraro (2019)	Suggestion of the concept of <i>performative work</i> , i.e. the institutional work to enable theory translation and its adoption through material devices	Complementarity between performativity and institutional work	Consideration of materiality and objects; relative ontological stability; strong anti-representationalism	
Ligonie (2018)	Conceptualization of <i>forced performativity</i> wherein a concept (Creating Shared Value) performs in a highly infelicitous context	Use of a performativity lens to explore how a theory shaped the strategy of an organization		
Glaser (2017)	Development of the process by which organizational actors associated with a theory work with practitioners to influence specific organizational practices	Organizational actors use design performances to intentionally change routines	Consideration of materiality and objects; relative ontological stability; strong anti-representationalism	Hybrid: 'mechanisms creating socio-material assemblages'
Carton (2020)	Importance of the <i>assemblage</i> in the performativity process of strategy theory developed by gurus (Blue Ocean Strategy).	Theories change the assemblages that change reality and thus enlarge its scope	Generalized symmetry, relational materiality; relative ontological stability; weak anti-representationalism	Hybrid: 'mechanisms producing assemblages'
Palo, Mason and Roscoe (2020)	Introduction of 'translocation'—a new category of speech act, a compendium of imagining, discussing, proposing, negotiating and contracting that transforms myths into an 'imaginary-real world'	Analysis of how actors calculate and organize the socio-material networks of the market, and manage the considerable uncertainty inherent in its operation	Generalized symmetry, relational materiality; recognition of ontological variability; strong anti-representationalism	Hybrid: 'mechanisms of performativity through speech act'
Pälli (2018)	Reliance on the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) approach to unpack the performativity of strategy	Development of a language-based approach to viewing the agency and materiality of strategy	Generalized symmetry, relational materiality; recognition of ontological variability; strong anti-representationalism	Mindset
Bourgoin et al. (2020)	Activation and passivation as key movements in the performativity of authority	Analysis of the socio-material dimension of authority / relational analysis of authority		
Dupret (2019)	<i>Performativity struggles</i> between distinct types of psychiatric knowledge about the role of silence in therapy. Performance of silence through socio-material arrangements	Performative approach to silence in the change process of organization		
Garud et al. (2018)	Necessity to cultivate a <i>performative mindset</i>	Performativity apprehended as ongoing journeys		
IDEAL-TYPE POSITION: PERFORMATIVITY AS A MINDSET				