OVERVIEW

How do we, as management researchers, develop novel theoretical contributions and, thereby, potentially break new ground in management studies? To address this question, we review previous methodological work on theorizing and advance a typology of the reasoning processes that underlie theoretical contributions and significant advances in management studies. This typology consists of various types of analogical and counterfactual reasoning, ranging from focused thought experiments aimed at prodding existing theory in the direction of alternative assumptions, constructs, and hypotheses to more expansive efforts for inducing new theoretical models and alternative explanations. Applying this typology, we detail the mechanisms behind the formation of novel theoretical contributions and illustrate the currency of our typology through a review of 24 major theoretical breakthroughs in management studies. We conclude the paper by discussing the implications of this typology for our collective efforts in building, elaborating, and expanding theory in management studies.

BIOGRAPHY

The main focus of Joep Cornelissen’s research is the role of communication and sensemaking in processes of innovation, entrepreneurship and change, but he also has an interest in questions of reasoning and theory development in organization theory. His papers have been published in Academy of Management Review, Journal of Management Studies, Organization Science and Organization Studies, and he has written a general text on corporate communication (Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice, Sage Publications) which is now in its fourth edition. He is a Council member of the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies, a former General Editor of the Journal of Management Studies (2006-2012) and serves on the editorial boards of the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies and Organization Studies.

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