

STUDYING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE LEADERSHIP AS A SUBFIELD

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Abstract

Organizational change scholars frequently engage with academic disciplines such as economics and sociology as well as fields of study such as leadership studies and human resource management studies. Whilst, there has been considerable interest in interrelationships between academic disciplines, interrelationships between management fields of study referred to here as subfields are rarely discussed. As the organization of subfields is significant to studying organizational change, I reflect upon my own learning and frustrations in studying organizational change leadership as a subfield. I suggest that the 1950s hopes for convergent management sciences may still influence thinking about fields and subfields. I highlight the confusing semantics of management subfields and offer quantification through co-citation analysis as one possible way forward. I candidly reflect upon the challenges researching a relevant practitioner orientated subfield raises and also the joy of crossing boundaries between fields. In conclusion, I use the metaphor of a bridge to convey my own learning about interrelationships between the fields of organizational change studies and leadership studies.

Keywords: Organizational change studies, leadership studies, subfield, academic discipline

Introduction

Organizational change is the field of study which fascinates me. Over the past decade, I have become increasingly interested in organizational change leadership which I regard as a subfield particularly informed through interrelationships between organizational change studies and leadership studies. As notions of leading change and change leadership have caught the societal and organizational imagination this focus has been fruitful (see Burnes et al, 2016; By et al, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Hughes, 2016a; Hughes, 2016b), but equally, it has been frustrating. I have had to meaningfully engage with two different fields of study informing organizational change leadership; organizational change studies and leadership studies. Each field of study is informed by very different literature and academics in each field favour very different theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Despite the prevalence of subfields in management and organization studies (MOS), I believe we do not fully understand their organization and operation. I believe these interrelationships are central to what we do and how we do it. They are acknowledged in the *Journal of Change Management* aims, which refer to the ‘complex and multidisciplinary’ field of organizational change. If you look to academic professional groupings such as the strategic interest groups of the *European Academy of Management*, the special interest groups of the *British Academy of Management* or the divisions and interest groups of the *Academy of Management*, these groupings and their conference tracks frequently reflect interrelationships between fields of study in MOS. The academic infrastructure both informal and formal organization of MOS suggests that possibly only I have a problem in conceptualizing such interrelationships. However, in reflecting upon organizational change leadership as a subfield I am going to argue that our understandings and misunderstandings of MOS interrelationships matter in terms of how we study and research organizational change. I will draw upon the fields of organizational change studies and leadership studies informing the subfield of organizational

change leadership for illustrative purposes, although I believe that my concerns have wider applicability for anyone researching MOS subfields.

Imagine that you are researching organizational change leadership, you undertake a preliminary review of the literature and it quickly becomes apparent each separate field of study has generated large volumes of literature (Thomas and Hardy 2011 and Anderson and Sun 2017). It also becomes apparent in this instance that the subfield of organizational change leadership has been particularly influenced by practitioner literature. When Parry (2011, p. 57) reviewed the status of leadership and organizational change in *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership* he concluded that.

Leadership and organizational change are inextricably intertwined. However, 'organizational change' has become an interest for organizational consultants more so than for empirical researchers. There are many more books and articles on practitioner or conceptual scholarship than on theoretical or empirical scholarship. Much of the practitioner work is case study-based, and anecdotal and not rigorous in its conduct.

Whilst, there is a wealth of guidance on literature reviewing (see, for example, Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016 and Wallace and Wray, 2016), the issue here is how do we deal with interrelationships between two fields of study? Do you place equal emphasis on leadership studies literature and organizational change studies literature? Can you place equal emphasis, given that most academics specialize through focussing on a particular field of study as opposed to multiple fields of study? In terms of research design, how do you deal with similarities and differences in the favoured research designs of organizational change studies and leadership studies? How do you deal with the different disciplinary influences upon each field of study? For example, psychology as an academic discipline has had a profound influence upon leadership studies and how leadership is researched (Fairhurst, 2008). Do you

embrace favoured paradigms of leadership studies or organizational change studies in your research design? In terms of disseminating your research, is your audience leadership academics and practitioners with an emphasis on leaders and leadership or organizational change academics and practitioners with an emphasis on organizational change? Earlier questions about literature, research design, and paradigm preferences will also influence how your research is perceived and evaluated, welcome to my world.

In reflecting on organizational change leadership as a subfield I am unable/unwilling to offer best practice into researching management subfields, because of the differences in paradigms and disciplines and emphases upon rigour and/or relevance influencing a subfield there cannot be one best way. Equally the awkward questions just posed cannot be definitively answered. Instead, I am going to share my own experiences and reflect on my own attempts to conceptualize an MOS subfield, in this case, organizational change leadership, concluding with four different ways in which I now conceptualize specifically organizational change leadership and more generally MOS subfields.

Path-upsetting approaches which highlight the prevalence of MOS assumptions, rather than path following approaches (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, 2013) increasingly appeal to me. Today I believe that most MOS academics work with an assumption that we conceptually understand interrelationships between MOS fields of study. I believe this assumption enables MOS research, scholarship, teaching, and consultancy to take place. This assumption probably informs submissions to MOS academic journals and Editors probably draw upon reviewers from different MOS fields of study when reviewing a paper focussed upon an MOS subfield, but do we really conceptually understand the organization and operation of MOS subfields? I fear that assuming such understanding exists reassures, yet simultaneously negates the need to critically reflect upon the organization and operation of MOS subfields.

I have organized my reflections around six themes, which provide the structure for what follows. Firstly, I revisit the false promise of convergent management science in the 1950s as I believe these aspirations still today influence MOS in general and researching management subfields in particular. Secondly, I draw attention to the confusing semantics informing and misinforming management subfields. Thirdly, I introduce the possibilities of quantification through co-citation analysis as an objective means of studying management subfields. Fourthly, I highlight the anomalies I encountered when researching a relevant but not rigorous, practitioner orientated subfield? Fifthly, I share the joy of crossing boundaries in my own work and the potential of boundary crossing to inform MOS. Finally, I conclude by critically reflecting upon my own learning in terms of conceptualizing organizational change leadership as an MOS subfield through the use of the metaphor of a bridge.

The false promise of convergent management sciences

Organizational change leadership as previously acknowledged is an applied subfield which generates considerable interest amongst practitioners (Parry, 2011). However, in seeking to understand the academic operation and organization of this progressive subfield I found myself going backward rather than forwards, in order to understand the early hopes for management science in the 1950s and the aspirations for management science to become a convergent academic discipline. I believe that these hopes and aspirations about the organization of knowledge about management still remain influential. The physicist Kuhn (1962) helped us to understand the role that convergence and consensus played in the development of physics as an academic discipline and more generally offered a blueprint for the social organization of disciplines. Cole (1983) has referred to a 'hierarchy of sciences', which is helpful when thinking about reputational competition in universities. Convergence and consensus offered a way forward in the 1950s for newly emerging management science to climb the 'hierarchy of sciences' in order to become an academic discipline. However, we

know that management science did not follow this script and instead of convergence what has evolved is a patchwork of divergent fields of study often characterized by dissensus rather than consensus. When Whitley (1984) studied the intellectual and social organization of the sciences he famously described management as a ‘fragmented adhocracy’. Engwall (1995) revisited this conceptualization through reviewing the first eight volumes of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* and Scandinavian doctoral dissertations coming to a similar conclusion to Whitley (1984). Again the *Journal of Change Management* aims, in referring to the ‘complex and multidisciplinary’ field of organizational change appear to speak to such dissensus and the need to avoid one best way organizational change practices, but equally one best way accounts of studying organizational change leadership.

In researching organizational change leadership as a subfield or any other subfield there is an understandable appeal in aspiring to convergence and consensus, in a manner similar to the early aspirations for management science. For example, House and Aditya (1997) in their influential review of the history of the social scientific study of leadership explicitly aimed to demonstrate the development of knowledge concerning leadership as being truly cumulative. Recently Barends et al. (2014) have critically questioned whether organization change management’s prescriptions were based on solid and convergent evidence? Convergence and consensus potentially help to scope a literature review, select a favoured theoretical framework, choose a popular research design and enable a coherent and consistent write-up. However, for myself, I share Whitley (1984) and Engwall’s (1995) perception of MOS as a fragmented adhocracy, with implications for the organization and operation of MOS subfields. In researching organizational change leadership as a subfield I believe that acknowledging divergence, dissensus and diversity are integral to understanding the organization and operation of this subfield, surfacing the existence of competing and at times contradictory explanations of organizational change leadership. Divergence for myself is

about acknowledging the existence of a plurality of research designs, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies. Dissensus is about acknowledging the contradictions inherent within competing explanations of organizational change and leadership, rather than seeking to create an artificial consensus. Diversity is about acknowledging the existence of explanations informing this subfield beyond the prevalent Anglo-American ones. This is particularly important when researching organizational change leadership as a subfield as its literature has critically been described as primarily Anglo-American (Brocklehurst et al., 2010). In essence, if we ever reach a convergent consensus in our studies of organizational change leadership I believe we will have failed to fully understand the phenomenon that we are studying.

The confusing semantics of management subfields

As I believed that a legacy of management science convergence and consensus aspirations potentially misinformed research into management subfields I turned to the literature for guidance. Leahey and Reikowsky (2008, p. 437) in their study of specialization and collaboration patterns amongst sociologists candidly acknowledged that ‘in this article, we use the terms subfields, sub-disciplines, and specialty areas interchangeably.’ One of the most insightful papers I encountered was the educational researcher Becher’s (1990) *The counter-culture of specialisation*. In his introduction, he highlighted the different labels he had found being used; segments, sub-disciplines, specialisms, schools, and sects. Each of these labels could be applied to MOS subfields, although this range of potentially applicable labels confuses rather than clarifies understanding. Similarly, when Crane (1972) referred to ‘chapels’ and Vogel (2012) to ‘invisible colleges’ they appeared to be referring to something similar to my interest in subfields. The term ‘subfield’ is only one of many which could be used to refer to interrelationships between two MOS fields of study. MOS references to subfields were evident although without the term being defined (see March, 1996;

Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009; Vogel and Güttel, 2013). This was probably sensible given the slipperiness of this concept which I was beginning to appreciate.

In my own attempts to understand the organization and operation of a subfield, I tend to think in terms of three levels of study, although without privileging higher levels over lower levels (see Figure 1).

Academic Disciplines	e.g. Psychology, Political Science	e.g. History, Sociology
Fields of Study	Organizational change studies	Leadership studies
Subfield	Organizational change leadership	

Figure 1 – Levels of study: Disciplines, fields, and subfields

Figure 1 reflects my attempt to make sense of competing and at times contradictory explanations of organizational change leadership informing this subfield and I believe that thinking in terms of these levels of study may help others researching MOS subfields.

Understanding organizational change leadership is informed by fields of study in this instance organizational change studies and leadership studies and these fields will be informed by academic disciplines such as psychology, political science, history, and sociology. The academic disciplines and fields of study informing a subfield are informed by varied paradigms, philosophies, and perspectives which result in competing and at times contradictory explanations of organizational change leadership. I appreciate that Figure 1 complicates, rather than simplifies our studies, but it has helped me to begin to understand how the organization and operation of an MOS subfield might work. When I turned to the MOS literature for further guidance/encouragement, I empathized with Daft and Lewin’s (2008) suggestion that relationships amongst MOS academic sub-communities were too

complex to understand or explain. I will briefly share further insights I gained from the literature.

In my desire to understand interrelationships informing subfields the literature on interrelationships between academic disciplines potentially offered insights. There has certainly been encouragement from Journal Editors to transcend the boundaries surrounding our specialisms. Holt and den Hond (2013) emphasized that it was comparing, contrasting and challenging which made the field of organization studies interesting and vivid exposing those working in the field to sources of new theorizing (see also Clark and Wright, 2009).

Özbilgin (2014) expressed concern that attempts to transcend narrow disciplinary and theoretical silos had only partly been successful and encouraged attempts to bridge such disciplinary silos. Gatrell and Breslin (2017) encouraged contributions with an interdisciplinary reach as increasingly complex research challenges required solutions which cut across disciplinary boundaries. However, transcending boundaries is not without risk. A study of 900 research centre based scientists in terms of the impact of interdisciplinarity on their careers, found that these scientists typically published fewer papers, but that they did benefit from increased citations (Leahey et al., 2017).

Trowler's (2014) focus whilst broader than MOS, informed my thinking, explaining interdisciplinarity and its slight variant transdisciplinarity as problem-solving approaches which avoid the constraints of particular disciplines. Whereas multidisciplinarity was concerned with conjoining two or more disciplines in a well-defined way. Thinking in terms of interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity was helpful in that the fields of organizational change studies and leadership studies could be conceptualized as conjoined (interdisciplinarity) or working in parallel (multidisciplinarity). Örtenblad (2010) highlighted the prevalence of 'odd couples' in MOS such as knowledge management, learning

organization, organization culture, and corporate governance. The notion of an odd couple seemed very applicable to my interest in organizational change leadership as a subfield. Örtenblad (2010) identified three approaches towards these odd couples fragmentary, wholeness and interpretive approaches (interpretive is a hybrid of the first two). The wholeness approach to an odd couple highlights two components of a label creating meaning which is more than the sum of the parts. Whereas, the fragmentary approach emphasized separateness, the components of an odd couple were seen as disconnected parts. Again this helped me to think about organizational change leadership as a subfield informed by two separate fields (fragmentary) or as two fields being connected (wholeness). I return to these very different conceptualizations of a subfield in the conclusions.

I suspect that MOS fields of study are sometimes assumed to operate as junior versions of academic disciplines. This would allow debates about interdisciplinarity to be applied to interrelationships between MOS fields as discussed here. However, the danger is that convergence requirements of disciplines (Kuhn, 1962) may be privileged over the divergence, dissensus, and diversity of MOS fields (Whitley, 1984; Engwall 1995). Another danger is that we begin to think about fields of study as aspiring to become academic disciplines (please see Riggio, 2011 for an account of what leadership studies would have to do to become an academic discipline).

The possibilities of quantification

A potential way forward in researching management subfields was quantification through bibliometrics and co-citation analysis. As a non-quantitative researcher, I didn't follow this path, but it appears potentially to offer a systematic means to understand interrelationships informing certain subfields. Vogel's (2012) account of 'invisible colleges', fascinated me in making visible the invisible workings of MOS subfields. He acknowledged the centrality of

invisible colleges in MOS in terms of the social organization of fields and in terms of intellectual development, setting research agendas and conferring reputations ‘...an invisible college is a network of communication relations among scholars who share an interest in a particular area of research’ (Vogel, 2012, p. 1017). Whilst, the language is different Vogel (2012) potentially offered a means to understand the organization of scholars interested in organizational change leadership, referred to in this paper as a subfield.

Vogel (2012) cited Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) acknowledgment of the numerous and often contradictory ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological orientations of MOS. He feared that given such peculiarities there were doubts about the homogeneity of invisible college characteristics across fields, although he was able to highlight characteristics of invisible colleges in MOS. Firstly, they were numerous and varied. Secondly, their boundaries were ill-defined. Thirdly, the invisible colleges overlapped considerably due to shifting and blurring boundaries. Fourthly, they exhibited a considerable degree of fluidity. This account of invisible colleges resonated with my own frustrations in seeking to conceptualize organizational change leadership as a subfield.

Vogel (2012, p.1021) in seeking to make invisible colleges visible, followed Crane’s (1972) quantification approach ‘...bibliometric methods indicate the existence of invisible colleges by detecting clusters of highly cited works on which subsequent research builds’. Vogel (2012) in undertaking his analysis focussed only on ‘top-tier’ MOS journals enabling him to identify patterns of invisible college evolution. He was also able to highlight three patterns of specialization constitutive of invisible colleges in MOS. Subject-based colleges focused on a specific object of study, this was the closest to my interest in organizational change leadership as a subfield. Theory-based colleges were preoccupied with theoretical perspectives and methods-based colleges pursued particular methodological approaches.

However, Vogel's (2012) analysis which covered three decades of MOS citations was disappointing for me in revealing neither organizational change nor leadership as invisible colleges. Vogel's (2012) analysis was concerned with the quantities of citations, but also with the quality of citations. The implication was that despite the volume of what has been written about organizational change studies and leadership studies this did not equate to a discernible invisible college of organizational change leadership, or even either field of study being identified as an MOS invisible college.

Batistič et al. (2017) followed up Vogel's (2012) study of invisible colleges focussing upon co-citations specifically within leadership research between 1980 and 2013. The most prominent college was transformational leadership which was one of 24 colleges they identified. Transformational leadership is concerned with the transformation of subordinates (Haslam et al., 2011), rather than my organizational transformation/change interests and to my surprise organizational transformation/change did not feature as one of the 24 colleges they were able to identify. Although they did acknowledge, for example, followership not surfacing in their co-citation analysis which they explained in terms of followership publications being predominantly from recent years. My suspicion is that Parry's (2011) perception of organizational change leadership as practitioner orientated, may explain why it did not feature as one of the 24 colleges, raising questions about how we deal with applied MOS subfields?

Studying a practitioner orientated subfield?

Vogel's (2012) analysis is problematic for anyone specializing in organizational change studies or leadership studies as fields of study, or anyone seeking to understand organizational change leadership as a subfield. Whilst such fields and subfields have considerable relevance for organizations and societies, they suffer in reputational terms.

Another way to think about subfields and invisible colleges is as ‘reputational organizations’. The implication of Vogel’s (2012) analysis was that the reputation of organizational change studies and leadership studies did not compare favourably with the reputations of the invisible colleges his analysis revealed. If you look to the critical literature negative perceptions of organizational change studies (Spicer and Levay, 2013) and leadership studies (Collinson, 2011) are very apparent. The flipside of this is that in terms of ongoing debates about the rigour and relevance of MOS, both fields of study potentially speak to the applied concerns of practitioners and wider societal interests, rather than abstract ontological and epistemological concerns.

MOS subfields may be organized primarily in terms of generating rigorous knowledge or relevant knowledge or a combination of the two (see Vicari, 2013 for an overview of this debate). The dilemma for the researcher is to deal with potential tensions of rigour and relevance which characterize a subfield such as organizational change leadership. Hughes (2016a) recently highlighted and simultaneously critiqued Kotter’s (1996) *Leading Change* describing it as by far the most cited organizational change leadership publication, despite its practitioner orientation and a distinct lack of academic references and empirical evidence. Management researchers have to decide how to deal with such a practitioner orientation in an applied/relevant subfield such as organizational change leadership. For example, Ford and Ford (2012) in their literature review of organizational change leadership consciously excluded such literature. Whereas Nelson-Brantley and Ford (2017) in their recently published conceptual analysis of leading change in nursing chose to include Kotter (1996).

The joy of crossing boundaries

Crossing boundaries is the title of Klein’s (1996, p. 14) account of interdisciplinarity in which she argued that ‘all interdisciplinary work is critical in that it exposes the inadequacies

of the existing organization of knowledge to accomplish given tasks.’ Two decades later the *British Academy* (2016) in their report *Crossing paths* focused on interdisciplinary institutions, careers, education, and application. I hoped that this report might clarify my own thinking. However, in the report the label ‘sub-field’ was used when referring to the research of doctoral students and early career researchers, whereas the label ‘sub-discipline’ was applied to the research of mid-career researchers. Perhaps we initially research subfields and only later graduate to researching sub-disciplines, perhaps I am just experiencing growing pains? More seriously the MOS Editors (Clark and Wright, 2009; Holt and den Hond, 2013; Özbilgin, 2014 and Gatrell and Breslin, 2017) cited earlier, encouraged crossing disciplinary boundaries and I can appreciate how two disciplines such as economics and history in combination inform our understanding of the past and the benefits for MOS of Editors encouraging such interdisciplinarity.

However, the fields of study which interest me; organizational change studies and leadership studies are not academic disciplines and as argued earlier I believe there are dangers in management researchers assuming that MOS fields of study operate and are organized in a similar manner to academic disciplines. I find the absence of inter-field terminology in MOS telling. We default to using interdisciplinary terminology which might not really do justice to the ‘fragmented adhocracy’ (Whitley, 1984; Engwall, 1995) which I believe characterizes MOS or certainly the two fields of study which interest me. Paraphrasing Klein (1996) we need to expose the inadequacies of the existing organization of knowledge in terms of the applicability of interdisciplinarity to MOS. I hope that this paper provokes such a debate.

In researching organizational change leadership I appreciated and consciously chose to cross boundaries demarcating fields of study such as organizational change studies and leadership studies. This was in the belief that researching interrelationships between organizational change studies and leadership studies would potentially advance knowledge, not in the belief

that this would inform the development of these fields into academic disciplines. I tend to test out papers at conferences before submitting to academic journals. Attending the *European Group of Organization Studies* annual conference was enlightening. I presented a paper to a very interesting and engaging organizational change focused stream and we stayed in that stream in the same room for the three days of the conference. The upside of this was that we shared a common experience and we were there for each other as a community of scholars sharing a common focus upon organizational change. However, in another part of that conference, there was a stream working in parallel to us focussed upon leadership and discourse. I really wanted to spend some time in that stream, but crossing boundaries between streams did not appear to be encouraged or enabled in how this particular conference was organized. I realized for myself that my typical engagement with conference streams is fairly promiscuous. I try to attend as many conference paper presentations as possible, whilst not limiting myself to a single MOS field of study. I appreciate that the downside is that I might not reciprocate for somebody who attended my conference paper presentation, but I do find moving between streams intellectually and creatively stimulating.

Despite the challenges and frustrations of studying organizational change leadership as a subfield, it has been a subversive joy to cross the boundaries around organizational change studies and leadership studies. Becher (1990) in his account of the counter culture of specialization argued for the development of integrative and overarching ideas because successful synthesis is more difficult to achieve than effective analysis.

Occupational nomadism of this kind, though it may carry high career risks for the individuals concerned, can help significantly to counteract the tendency for specialisms and disciplines to become intellectually insulated from each other.

(Becher, 1990, p. 344)

In reflecting on the hype and the hope of interdisciplinary management studies, Knights and Willmott (1997) optimistically concluded that for 'defectors' challenging and extending the limits of boundaries was an important part of their identities. I suspect such issues of identity is why I felt compelled to write this personal reflection, even if readers find what I am saying counter-cultural.

Conclusions - Studying organizational change leadership as an MOS subfield

In this reflection, the existence of subfields in MOS has been highlighted although tempered with an acknowledgment of their ill-defined, overlapping and fluid nature. By way of conclusion, I want to critically reflect on what I have learned about conceptualizing the organization and operation of organizational change leadership as a subfield, in the hope that this might have meaning for other organizational change scholars and scholars focussed upon other MOS subfields. As our human thought processes are largely metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) thinking metaphorically about subfields is potentially informative.

Courpasson et al. (2008) imagined MOS scholars inhabiting chapels, whereas for Battilana et al. (2010) they inhabited cottages. More generally bridge based metaphors have previously featured in the MOS literature (see, for example, Weick 2001; Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009 and Özbilgin, 2014).

I found the metaphor of a bridge; effective bridge, no bridge, broken bridge and the bridge of assumptions helpful in beginning to understand differently the interrelationships between two MOS fields in my case organizational change studies and leadership studies. The first and second metaphors (effective bridge, no bridge) offer positive and functional conceptualizations, the third and fourth metaphors (broken bridge and the bridge of assumptions) are critical and confrontational. The caveat here is that we need to achieve a

greater degree of mutual tolerance and extend that tolerance into a deeper understanding of our inherent and necessary differences (Becher, 1990), rather than privileging our own favoured bridge metaphor.

I have a suspicion that many academics work with an unacknowledged effective bridge assumption and may have struggled to understand my preoccupation with the organization and operation of MOS subfields. In the case of organizational change leadership, an effective bridge is assumed to exist between the fields of organizational change studies and leadership studies. This assumption potentially enables research, scholarship, teaching, and consultancy into organizational change leadership to proceed, although this may be at the expense of acknowledging the divergence, dissensus, and diversity characterizing explanations generated within this subfield.

A second way to think about organizational change leadership as a subfield is through the metaphor of no bridge. Either an organizational change studies specialist or a leadership studies specialist can meaningfully research organizational change leadership as a subfield. The notion of crossing boundaries between MOS fields of study is irrelevant as the researcher researches the subfield from the perspective of their specialism. The strength of this way of thinking is that researchers potentially understand the favoured literature, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies within their field of study. The weakness is a tendency for specialisms to become intellectually insulated from each other (Becher, 1990; Özbilgin, 2014).

Broken bridge is more critical in that the need to cross boundaries between fields of study is recognized, but critically regarded as problematic and contested. The contradictory ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological orientations of MOS (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) mean that conceptual bridges between fields of study are unable to

operate as effectively as might be assumed. The strength of this approach to understanding a subfield is the explicit emphasis placed upon divergence, dissensus, and diversity in explaining organizational change leadership. The weakness of such a conceptualization of a subfield is that it is unable to respond to relevance debates (Vicari, 2013) and in the case of organizational change leadership the applied practitioner orientated nature (Parry, 2011) of this subfield.

The bridge of assumptions is the final way of thinking about a subfield and it is the way I currently think about organizational change leadership. Whereas effective bridge works with an unacknowledged assumption that organizational change studies and leadership studies jointly and effectively inform understanding about organizational change leadership, the bridge of assumptions seeks to acknowledge and highlight the many assumptions (see Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, 2013) embedded in MOS and which underpin organizational change leadership as a subfield. The more that I studied organizational change leadership as a subfield the more that I realized I was studying a set of dominant societal and organizational assumptions both about organizational change and about leadership. The advantage of this conceptualization is that I am better able to distinguish idealized concepts, from empirical realities (Spector, 2016) which might partially explain why the co-citation analyses of Vogel (2012) and Batistič et al. (2017) did not identify organizational change leadership as an invisible college. However, the disadvantage in such a conceptualization is in carrying out research, scholarship, teaching, and consultancy. How do you design research, teach students and consult when what interests you is currently more of an idealized concept than an empirical reality?

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