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Dialogue Devices:
Bridging between “Mode 1” and “Mode 2” Knowledge Production

Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between organization theory and organizational practice. We discuss how scholars and practitioners can come together in a joint knowledge production dialogue. We concentrate on the methodological approach of Giddens because it offers the building block how to handle the often criticized trade-off between rigor and relevance: the notion of “double hermeneutic”. We use double hermeneutic for discussing joint knowledge production between scholars and practitioners. Our aim is to operationalize it into “dialogue devices”. They serve as helpful guidelines for facilitating the mutual dialogue. Dialogue devices are the result of a Mode 1.5 of knowledge production and mediate between both perspectives, without giving up the critical position of scholars. We also explain why management fashions can be used as a guide for intervening to start this dialogue process.

1. Introduction
Practitioners seem to favor a different kind of literature than organization scholars do (e.g. Daft/Lewin 1990, 1993; Dubin 1976; Pfeffer 1997; Thomas/Tymon 1982; 1989; Trice/Beyer 1982). On the one hand, managers and consultants do not consider theoretical texts to be very useful for practical application. The body of knowledge published in academic journals has practically no audience in business or government. On the other hand, scholars tend to conduct research based on questions sparked off by previous research rather than on questions raised by organizational practice. These research questions are carefully carried out with methodological rigor. However, the applied methods are far from being uniform. Rather there is a diversity of paradigms in organization theory (e.g. Clegg/Hardy/Nord 1996). Whether such diversity is to be lamented (e.g. Donaldson, 1995; McKelvey, 1997; Pfeffer 1997) or welcomed (e.g. Gioia/Pitre 1990; Hassard 1991; Van Maanen 1995), one cannot deny that it is an integral part of organization theory itself. For practitioners this diversity has become one of the major obstacles in coming to terms with the scientific literature. It is at the same time one of the reasons why management sciences are much more subject to fashions and trends than is economics (e.g. Donaldson 1995; Pfeffer 1997).

How do we have to interpret this development? Do we need better strategies for knowledge transfer from organization theory to organizational practice? This refers to the traditional Mode 1 of knowledge production and transfer (Gibbons et al. 1994). Or do we have to consider that the process of knowledge production has to change? This refers to the new Mode 2 of a joint knowledge production (ibid.). Mode 2 integrates knowledge production and transfer in a process that brings organization theory and practitioners together.

Our purpose is to develop a research approach that fosters the mutual dialogue between scholars and practitioners. With reference to Huff (2000), we plead for a Mode 1.5 of knowledge production. It suggests a suitable form of collaboration between organization theory and organizational practice. However, Huff (2000), as well as Gibbons et al. (1994:162), leave two
questions unsolved: What are the methodological foundations of Mode 1.5 respectively Mode 2 knowledge production? What kind of mediators could be used to engage practitioners in management research? The aim of our paper is to answer these two questions. The paper is structured as follows. In the second section, we distinguish - following Gibbons et al. (1994) - between Mode 1 and Mode 2 of knowledge production in the field of science. Transferring these insights to management research, we introduce Huff’s Mode 1.5 agenda for facilitating a knowledge production dialogue between organization theory and organizational practice. In section three we discuss methodological foundations of a knowledge production dialogue in a Mode 1.5. We concentrate on the methodological approach by Giddens (1979, 1984): the notion of “double hermeneutic”. However, Giddens does not discuss any methods how to engage practitioners in management research. In order to bridge this gap, we propose dialogue devices in section four. Dialogue devices are the result of a Mode 1.5 of knowledge production and mediate between organizations theory and organizational practice, without giving up the critical position of scholars. We work out their main characteristics, lay open their development and compare dialogue devices with models, frameworks, language games and management fashions. In section 5, we demonstrate this Mode 1.5 dialogue briefly by portraying a case example. Finally, we draw some conclusions.

2. Organization Theory and Organizational Practice: Joint Production of Knowledge

In the field of science, there is empirical evidence that the generation of new knowledge occurs more and more as a result of the joint efforts between scholars and practitioners. According to the influential study conducted by Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994), the scientific community no longer owns a monopoly on the production of knowledge. The authors observe a shift from Mode 1 to a Mode 2 of knowledge production.

Mode 1 represents the conventional form of knowledge production. Problems are defined in an academic context by the members of the scientific community. Research is disciplined and takes place within scientific teams, which are homogenous concerning their background and experiences. Criteria on quality control are defined exclusively within the scientific community. As a consequence, questions concerning the diffusion of newly generated knowledge and its context of applicability are often ignored. There is little dialogue between scientists and the designated applicants of the knowledge. This kind of knowledge production is called monological. It aims at an audience within the scientific community while practitioners play the role of applicants, not of co-producers.

Mode 2, in contrast, is a different style of knowledge production. It is typified as the interactive production of knowledge within the context of application. Gibbons et al. (1994: 167) define the context of application as problem solving and the generation of knowledge organized around a particular application. It is not merely applied research or development. Rather, it includes the milieu of interests, institutions and practices which impinge upon the problem to be solved. Hence, two implications can be drawn: First, Mode 2 is a joint knowledge production. The growing number of knowledge producers in the field of academic research together with the growing amount of knowledge produced and used by practitioners, lead the two sides to work together. Knowledge is produced by continuous negotiation and will not come forth unless and until the interests of various actors are taken into account. The traditional applicants of the knowledge become active agents in the definition and solution of problems. Second, the production of knowledge in a Mode 2 manner will no longer take place in
disciplinary, but rather in transdisciplinary surroundings. Transdisciplinarity consists of more than assembling a diverse range of specialists to work on problems in teams. Both characteristics qualify Mode 2 as a specific form of knowledge production in which enquiry is guided by consensus. In Mode 2, the consensus is conditioned by the context of application and evolves along with it (Gibbons et al. 1994:4). Knowledge is validated in use. Thereby, the diffusion of the results is initially accomplished in the process of their production. Scientific work will increasingly be carried out by temporary teams consisting of academic researchers, private laboratories and small hi-tech or consulting companies. Knowledge is created in a socially distributed process and in collaboration with its future users.

Gibbons et al. (1994:154) state that Mode 1 will become incorporated within the larger system of Mode 2. Although their analysis refers mostly to natural sciences, their findings could become relevant for management and organization research for two reasons: firstly, as can be seen in the current debate on the resource- and knowledge-based view of strategy, the production of knowledge plays a central role in companies in order to generate sustainable competitive advantages (e.g. Grant 1996; Nonaka/Takeuchi 1995). Knowledge is not only produced in Mode 1 settings but also within companies as they become “knowledge creating companies”. Secondly, to that extent, organization and management sciences have to reflect the increasing importance of this Mode 2 knowledge production and its consequences for business schools.

In her 1999 presidential address to the Academy of Management Anne Huff (2000) argues that knowledge production has moved beyond the boundaries of the university. Mode 1 knowledge production is too slow, too inward looking and gives priority to pedigrees. It is important to meet the Mode 2 producers where they work and where the new knowledge is needed. However, Huff argues that a transition from Mode 1 to Mode 2 is not without problems: on the one hand, academics who contribute to Mode 2 projects typically move away from Mode 1 disciplines and practices. They can no longer benefit from strengths of Mode 1, namely established procedures and clear quality standards. On the other hand, Huff (2000:292) characterizes the methods of Mode 2 knowledge production as appearing to be “too pragmatic ... [tending] to make big bets on the basis of limited evidence”. She is afraid of a dialogue on the basis of “throw it on the wall and see if it sticks” (ibid.). The limitations of both Mode 1 and Mode 2 lead her to suggest the Mode 1.5 of knowledge production which is not a transition between Mode 1 and Mode 2. Rather, she views it as a position “above” these two modes. In her opinion, business schools cannot dominate in Mode 2 but they can help drive the development of a Mode 1.5 agenda that attempts to redress the limitations of both modes of knowledge production. The issues of importance to Mode 1.5 typically will arise in actual practice and will be defined in conversation with practitioners. Academic skills will be useful in developing definitions and suggesting generalizable frameworks for further sensemaking.

Initially, as a first result, the relationship between organization theory and organizational practice should be neither separate production of knowledge in a Mode 1 manner nor a totally joint production of knowledge in a Mode 2 manner. Following Huff’s Mode 1.5, we plead for facilitating a knowledge production dialogue which allows for collaboration between organization theory and organizational practice. However, two questions are unsolved in Huff (2000) as well as in Gibbons et al. (1994:162): (1) What are the methodological foundations of Mode 1.5 knowledge production? (2) What kind of mediators could be used to engage practitioners in management research? Answering the former question is undertaken in section three, while the latter question is discussed in section four.
3. The Methodological Foundation of a Knowledge Production Dialogue in a Mode 1.5

Three methodological approaches, strong link and weak link analysis (Mayer 1993); Coomb’s dilemma (Cicourel 1964; Coombs 1953), and double hermeneutic (Giddens 1979, 1984) serve as a methodological foundation for the Mode 1.5 knowledge production dialogue.

(1) The economist Thomas Mayer (1993) criticizes the distinction between formalist, theoretic models and empirical observations, especially in economics. Theoretic models are confined to a narrow set of key variables, focusing attention on the strongest part of an argument and then attributing its strength to the entire argument. He calls this “the principle of the strongest link” (Mayer 1993: 57). These strong links are concerned with high-level generalizations and are often introduced in an axiomatic manner. Strong links are the exclusive subject of an extensive analysis. They offer analytical solutions with clear and rigorous results. But often these results are not relevant for practitioners. The strong links in the theoretical models are not necessarily strong links when viewed by the applicants. Meyer argues that only focusing attention on those components of the argument means that little time is spent thinking about the weaker parts of the arguments. If weak links or contextual factors are included at all, they are treated in terms of ad-hoc aspects. Whether or not those weak links may be strong links from a practitioner’s point of view is not questioned in the model. The result is the often-criticized trade-off between “rigor” and “relevance” (e.g. Argyris/Schön 1991: 85).

(2) The ethnomethodologist Aaron Cicourel (1964) has accentuated the problem of discrepancy between the elegance of theories and the relevance of results as being not only one of research methods but also of epistemology. First, Cicourel introduces the so-called “Coomb’s Dilemma” (Coombs 1953). The formulation of theories in social science involves a choice between the reproduction of data in a simple order or the examination whether this data follow a simple order. For reasons of an apparent exactitude many scientists choose the first alternative. As a result, they produce outcomes that only belong in a rudimentary way to the context of the practical problem. Second, Cicourel (1964: 14) argues that rigorous measurement cannot be obtained in sociology for properties of social process. The precise measurement of social process first requires the study of the problem of meaning in everyday life. It presupposes a bounded network of shared meaning. The physical scientist defines his or her observation field alone, but in the social sciences the arena of discourse usually begins with the subjects’ pre-selected and pre-interpreted cultural meaning. Yet, the structures of these common-sense courses of action are notions which the scientist often takes for granted and treats as self-evident. But they are exactly the notions which the sociologist must analyze and study empirically if he or she desires rigorous measurement.

(3) Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) also articulates the problem in terms of epistemology. Like Cicourel, he points out that the interpretations of the scientists are based on the pre-interpretative meaning of the subjects investigated. He terms it “double hermeneutic”. Double hermeneutic is defined as “the intersection of two frames of meaning as a logically necessary part of social science, the meaningful social world as constituted by lay actors and the meta-languages invented by social scientists” (Giddens 1984:374). With the term “double hermeneutic”, Giddens indicates that, in the social sciences, the problem of a hermeneutic-understanding interpretation is encountered twice. As with the natural sciences, the data has to be interpreted according to the existing theories. But contrary to natural sciences, the social sciences have to additionally take into consideration that the collecting of data is based upon interpretations of the person surveyed. This requires the reconstruction of the socially con-
structed reality from the perspective of the participants. Hence, there are always two interpretations involved. On the one hand, the interpretation of the scientific observer derives from an explanatory perspective from the outside. On the other hand, the interpretation of the participant derives from the respective survey and he or she tries to match the interpretation of everyday practice from his or her perspective from the inside.

Giddens mediates between the perspectives of the scientific observer and the participating practitioner: “two types of methodological bracketing are possible” (1984:288). He makes a clear distinction between the strategic analysis (1979:81; 1984:288: “analysis of strategic conduct”) and the structural analysis (1976:153; 1984:288: “institutional analysis”), which can be applied to one and the same subject of research. Thanks to the strategic analysis from the perspective of the participant, scholars obtain access to the subject matter of the actors' knowledge (“discursive and practical consciousness”, 1984:288). The major concern thereby is the reconstruction of the perspective of practice. Strategic analysis does not go beyond everyday knowledge, and therefore will not yield critical insights that would uncover unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action. For this reason, strategic analysis has to be complemented with structural analysis. Its function is to claim the perspective of a critical observer in order to uncover the aforementioned unintended side effects that are not visible from within practice. Such an observer's perspective is applied to the object of research with the explanatory scientific intentions. In contrast to the concept of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), Giddens is able to escape the “methodologically shocking consequences” (Habermas 1984:111) of concepts which only take into account the participant’s perspective. Once the unintended consequences of the laymen’s decisions are pointed out to them, they gain a new perspective on everyday practical issues. In dialogue with organization theory, they can generate such critical knowledge.

Hence, double hermeneutics offers an explanation how to handle the often criticized trade-off between rigor and relevance. The duality of the observer’s perspective (structural analysis) and the participant’s perspective (strategic analysis) guarantees to maintain a critical distance to the field of practice. Theory does not intermingle with the object of its findings. On the other hand, such an approach ensures that the theoretical models are not only confined to the analysis of the strong links, but also create a sensitivity for the possibility of weak links to become strong links. It suggests a possible form of collaboration between organization theory and organizational practice: the more illuminating are “discoveries” in social science for the practitioners, the more likely are they incorporated into action and do thereby become principles of social life (Giddens 1984:351). It implies to discontinue the contradiction between scientific interpretations and everyday interpretations. Giddens’ considerations offer a methodological explanation for the relationship between the observer’s perspective and the participant’s perspective in Mode 1.5 knowledge production. However, he does not discuss any practical methods how to engage practitioners in management research. In order to bridge this gap, we propose dialogue devices in the next section.
4. Joint Dialogues: Operationalizing the Notion of Double Hermeneutics into Dialogue Devices

The notion of double hermeneutics offer the theoretical building block of a Mode 1.5 agenda. On the one hand, the issues of importance to Mode 1.5 typically will arise in actual practice and will be defined in conversation with practitioners. On the other hand, academic skills will be useful in developing definitions and suggesting generalizable maps for further sensemaking. This is summarized in figure 1.

In this section we introduce dialogue devices to bridge between these two requirements. We start with defining dialogue devices, working out their main characteristics and laying the foundation for why it is helpful to apply dialogue devices in order to foster the mutual dialogue between scholars and practitioners. Afterwards, we compare dialogue devices with similar concepts: frameworks, language games, and management fashions.

Dialogue devices are theoretically based reference anchors, offering precise terminology with regards to specific contents. They serve as a guideline for (mediating) the dialogue between organization theory and managing practitioners. They support scholars in using several levels of abstractions about the same subject for different situations. Thus, they are a vehicle for transferring theoretical insights without using theoretical language. Accordingly, dialogue devices earn their merit if they are used and enriched by practitioners. Dialogue devices help practitioners to analyze their problems more systematically, without having to cope with the entire range of theories. At the same time, practitioners play an important role in criticizing as well as in providing and enriching the ideas that scholars develop. If successful, theories become a touchstone for whether they are suited to offer new and relevant insights.

The aim of dialogue devices is to offer consistent theoretical support. Although they use a precise terminology, dialogue devices neither establish causal laws or regularities nor reduce theory building based on empirically observed patterns. Nor do they offer “blueprints”, “one-best-way”-recipes or provide legitimacy for managers. Instead, dialogue devices are developed by argumentation processes to consider propositions and to come to an agreement (Scherer/Dowling 1995: 234). They provide new patterns of perception that can be discussed and debated. Dialogue devices can be used to uncover maps that were taken for granted. They help to reveal unintended consequences of action, because they can encourage altering theoretical thinking in ways that challenge the underlying accepted models. As patterns of orientation for understanding complex situations, the topics they offer are not fixed but could change over time. Therefore, dialogue devices are always under construction because these argumentation processes are a like a spiral that generates its own further agenda (Huff 2000).

Dialogue devices are used in a process of knowledge production and involve both, contribution to practice and contribution to theory. In this respect, dialogue devices differ from frameworks, language games, management fashions as the following discussion shows.
(1) **Models and dialogue devices:** dialogue devices bridge two explanatory systems since they result from the interplay of different abstract (deductively established) models with (inductively determined) context specific examinations of entrepreneurial life experiences. Scholars follow the theoretically guided observer’s perspective. They help to translate and integrate models or “grand theories” (Abraham 1982: 10), e.g. decision theory, economics, or evolutionary theory, into reference anchors on a “middle abstraction level” (Merton 1957). Models are valuable to ensure logical consistency and to explore the interaction of a limited number of variables (Friedman 1953). They focus on a few strong links: each model abstracts the complexity to isolate a few key variables, which are highly sensitive to the assumptions underlying them (Porter 1991). Whether these variables embody all the variables of interest applied to complex practical situations is of minor importance. That is why weak links have to be taken into account. As participants, the practitioners espouse their everyday experiences and their inside knowledge of an organizational setting into explicitly formulated problems. They demonstrate what kind of categories they use. These problems then serve to focus the scholars’ sensitivity for the relevant links which are not considered by rigorous models. Those links become part of theoretical model building while the operationalized strong links become part of understanding organizational problems.

(2) **Frameworks and dialogue devices:** the term framework is introduced by Porter (1991). Frameworks are quite similar to dialogue devices because they also challenge models by highlighting omitted variables and embody theory in the choice of included variables. A famous example of a successful framework is the “five forces” framework for diagnosing industry structure by Porter (1980, 1981). Porter takes up some central characteristics of industrial organization, especially the structure-conduct-performance-paradigm, and applied them in a modified manner to strategic management. His “five forces” framework offers theoretically based structural analyses of problems without having to use theoretical terminology. The main difference is that frameworks are mainly theory driven and have the “goal of informing practice” (Porter 1991:98). In contrast, dialogue devices are used for a joint dialogue between observers and participants. Therefore, the latter always switch between theoretically based strong links and the experiences of the practitioners involved, asking whether or not those experiences may be strong links from a practitioner’s point of view.

(3) **Language games and dialogue devices:** the notion of language games and their relation to organization science and managerial practice is introduced by Astley and Zammuto (1992). They view social science research and practice as “semiautonomous domains” with different language games. Referring to Wittgenstein (1953), language games consider the meaning of words, specified by rules of intelligibility embedded in the institutional context in which language is employed (Astley/Zammuto 1992:444). They draw attention to the importance of specialized forms of discourse in different communities - in this case by organization theory and organizational practice, each of which is characterized by its own set of rules with divergent foci and interests. Although both communities are linked together at an abstract, ideal level, the authors argue that the distance between the two language games is too large to allow organization theory to produce specific tools and techniques that are useful for organizational practice, because of the inherent ambiguity of academic theories. For this reason, organization theory should focus on developing a broad conceptual and symbolic language that shapes practitioners’ perceptions and thoughts, helping them to understand their world. Organization scholars should use dialogue ambiguity to enhance theoretical creativity and “may thus facilitate practice more through process than content” (Astley/Zammuto 1992:455;
As a result, both language games and dialogue devices mediate between organization theory and organizational practice. The main difference, however, is that Astley and Zammuto (1992:456) conceptualize the language game of organization science as “a quasi journalistic role by reporting and communicating interpretations that disseminate throughout the managerial community”. In contrast to dialogue devices, the critical observer’s perspective is given up. If organization theory is called upon to use linguistic ambiguity or even imprecise language, the observer’s perspective intermingles with the participant’s perspective. If conceptual and symbolic modes are mixed together, organization theory loses its heuristic claim to provide precise, consistent terminology and to reveal unintended consequences (e.g. Donaldson 1995). In contrast, translating the notion of the double hermeneutic requires that social sciences offer guidance that surpasses everyday-knowledge. The development of dialogue devices ensures that social sciences do not lose their critical function and become wholly merged with their subject matter.

Management Fashions and Dialogue Devices: management fashions have been defined by Abrahamson (1996:257) in a neutral sense as “relatively transitory collective beliefs”, disseminated by the discourse of a management-fashion-setting community that certain management techniques are both innovations and improvements relative to the state of the art (see also Abrahamson/Fairschild 1999). In his opinion, management fashions do not emerge spontaneously as a result of the inventive behavior of managers. Rather, they are cultural commodities deliberately produced by fashion setters in order to be marketed by fashion followers. The fashion setters shape and focus demand by articulating the particular techniques that fit the types followers prefer.

A reciprocal relation exists between what fashion setters select and what fashion consumers prefer and demand (Blumer 1969). Bringing both sides together is in accordance with analyzing management fashion as an arena. In this respect, Kieser (1997:56f.) views a management fashion as forming an arena in which different groups of participants bustle about. In his analysis, he concentrates on rhetoric as the main fabric of management fashion. A main characteristic of management fashion is that it is based on a few key factors, which are not derived from theoretically established insights but are derived from observable patterns, myths, stories, and successful experiences. These factors are transformed into a handy set of recipes, usually without a thorough discussion of possible trade-offs with other concepts. Kieser (1997:58) criticized these concepts as “a clever mixture of simplicity and ambiguity”. On the one hand, the superiority of the new key factors appears clear and convincing because they rest on stylized examples. On the other hand, the ambiguity increases because there are too many principles introduced at the same time without any further explanation as to their connections and interactions. This explains the main difference between management fashions and dialogue devices, because the latter are theoretically based reference anchors and offer precise terminology.

Although “fads in business practice are a source of puzzlement, amusement and some jealousy for many academics” (Camerer/Knez 1996:107), they can serve as a way of gaining access to valid descriptions, because their existence mirrors unsolved problems in organizational practice. As a kind of robust rhetoric promoting recent and popular trends, concepts and fashions have the ability to capture the managers’ attention and stir them to action (Ecchles/Nohria/Berkley 1992; Jackson 1996). Contrary to theoretical considerations, management
concepts or fashions are relatively quickly available on the market, focusing the practitioners’ demand for new solutions, because they can lend existing issues a sense of urgency. Practitioners use management fads and concepts “as part of their ongoing use of language to coax, inspire, demand, or otherwise produce action in their organizations” (Eccles/Nohria/Berkley 1992:30). These concepts become an integral part of their everyday language because they help framing the way of understanding organizational problems and expressing practical theories in use. They can be used to create a sensitivity that all relevant weak links are taken into consideration and maybe become strong links.

But often management concepts or fads offer inconsistent and incomplete advice: they do not pay attention to unintended side-effects or to possible trade-offs. This leads practitioners down “false trails” (Hilmer/Donaldson 1996). It is in this situation that theoretical analysis can offer the necessary analytical insights. Optimally, academics adapt and apply their theoretical knowledge to practical problems and communicate in a dialogue with the managing practitioners in a Mode 1.5 way. On the one hand, management fashions greatly facilitate the academics’ involvement in this dialogue because they are based on a rhetoric understandable to practitioners. Management fashions can be used as a “guide for intervening” (Abrahamson 1996:275). But, on the other hand, academics have to introduce dialogue devices in such a way that they act in a scientifically informed manner in order to clear up the unintended side-effects and to induce learning processes (on both sides). These devices can work in the way Van Maanen (1995:135) has described the tasks of academics: “The discourse we produce as organization theory has an action component which seeks to induce belief among our readers” ...

[Our work] “is then something of a performance with a persuasive aim. In this sense, when our theories are well received they do practical work. Rather than mirror reality, our theories help generate reality for the readers”. Management fashions motivate people to be interested in new solutions. The implementation of those new solutions should be mediated by dialogue devices to avoid costly trial and error processes.

The following table 1 summarizes the distinctions between the main characteristics of dialogue devices and four other approaches to management research.

5. The Dialogue between Observers and Practitioners: The Gate-Gourmet-Case

The example of Gate Gourmet, the world’s largest airline catering company, outlines how dialogue devices mediate this dialogue between organizational practice and organization theory in a Mode 1.5 way. In this paper, we have to keep the empirical details of the example to a minimum, but we can provide references to those interested in a fuller description (e.g. Osterloh/Frey 2000; Osterloh/Frost 1999; Osterloh/Frost 2000).

From the participant’s perspective, the management fad of business process reengineering (BPR) served as a starting point. It helped Gate Gourmet’s managers to mirror their problems although this concept does lack precise definitions derived from theoretically established insights (Grint/Case 1998). It only offers a handy set of recipes without a thorough discussion of a possible trade-off with other concepts. Therefore, from the observer’s perspective, we developed a dialogue device, called an “organizing map”. We bridged different theories within a
consistently frame, based on decision process theories, resource-based and knowledge-based theories of the firm, and motivation theories. Our aim was to work out a generalizable dialogue device on a middle abstraction level, serving as a theoretically based guideline to analyze Gate Gourmet’s identified practical problems and link them to theoretical insights. It was not necessary for the Gate Gourmet’s managers to cope with the entire range of theories. Our research is neither built on a postmodern variety, nor do we vote for “blueprints”, i.e., designing an optimal organization for each given situation. Our dialogue device offered a scholarly background for the analysis of some strong links regarding the relationship between structure and strategy. During the joint dialogue between both explanatory systems, we mapped the reengineering concept with our dialogue device “organizing map” to analyze the concept’s strengths and weaknesses and to point out the inherent trade-offs on a consistent basis. In a next step, we considered how the dialogue device could be applied to Gate Gourmet’s analyzed problems and espoused experiences. The aim was to work out if we had taken into account all weak links of interest applied to Gate Gourmet’s problems by using a rhetoric suited to their managers. Transferring these dialogue results had on the one hand dramatic “behind the scene effects” for Gate Gourmet’s organization and strategy. On the other hand, we learned from the espoused experiences of Gate Gourmet’s managers. They served as important weak links for further developing our theoretical work and becoming strong links. The interaction between observers and participants is not expected to end in one round of investigation. In the Gate Gourmet case, the dialogue took more than four years: it was a kind of ongoing spiral, generating its own further agenda. Our discussion of this short example is summarized in table 2.

6. Conclusion

Management fashions can offer a valuable bridge between organization theory and organization practice when they are used as a starting point for launching a dialogue. Such fashions excite the practitioners’ interest in the organization subject and are a “door opener”, supporting them to espouse their experiences. But often management concepts or fads offer inconsistent and incomplete advice and do not pay attention to unintended side-effects. In this situation, theoretical analysis can offer the necessary analytical insights. Academics can adapt and apply their theoretical knowledge to practical problems and communicate in a joint dialogue. They should rephrase their theoretic constructs in the form of dialogue devices that prove to be comprehensible in the world of practical application and applicable to the difficulties and questions practitioners are dealing with. These dialogue devices are guidelines or reference anchors, offering precise terminology with regard to specific contents. The more illuminating they are for the practitioners, the more likely they are to be turned into action and thereby become principles of social life. Additionally, scientific modeling is beneficial as scholars learn from the dialogue with practitioners exactly which variables should be treated as strong links or weak links. In this case, management research grounded in practice is not exclusively a “one-way”-research. The construct of dialogue devices offers an explanation on how to enable the new Mode 1.5 of knowledge production involving both, contribution to practice and contribution to theory.
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