

# ‘Inter-Bridging’ Bridges and Bridging as Metaphors for ‘syn-integrality’ in Organization Studies and Practice

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**Abstract:** By interpreting the bridge as a relational metaphor, and reflecting an inter-relational ‘space between’ of positions, the paper contributes to a different view of integrating pluralism in organization studies. Following an embodied realism, first bridges and bridging are presented as phenomena, media and metaphors for connecting and separating. Showing their ambivalent character the role of bridges as metaphors and metaphors as bridges are discussed in relation to organisation studies and as transition zones for paradigms. Based on an integrative orientation, mediating qualities of bridges and bridging are outlined for gaining a decentered, but interconnected understanding of organising. The final part discusses some implications for organization studies.

**Keywords:** bridges, bridging, embodied realism, integral, metaphor, relational.

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Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. *What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end...* (Nietzsche, 2006, Prologue §4)

## Introduction

Metaphors using the notion of bridges and bridging have found some favour in recent organisational research (Risberg and Elsmore, 2011). In a broad sense, bridges can be understood as forms of transferring and mediating movements across space, time, contents and contexts. Metaphorically, they are two-way vehicles of transport simultaneously connecting and disconnecting, embedding and disembedding people as well as concepts and issues. Hence they are an apt means of approaching or analysing multifaceted and controversial topics; specifically, as the openness to two opposite sites or directions is a constituent feature of all bridges.

As a consequence, the field of management and organization studies (MOS) can benefit significantly from the metaphor of the bridge and the notion and motion of bridging particularly with regard to the field's often noted state of fragmentation. As with other branches of the social sciences, MOS is characterised by various main- and side-streams that flow through often discontinuous whirls of fragmentation. Accordingly, there is persistent burgeoning of pluralisations with regard to views, concepts, styles, theories and paradigms that exist side-by-side or which compete with each other. This pluralizing process has been pervasive in organization studies for several decades (Knudsen, 2003; Willmott, 2008). The permanent proliferation of positions impairs the emergence of a commonly accepted integrated body of knowledge. As Okhuysen and Bonardi note there is a tendency in MOS research "to create isolated silos of knowledge that reflect specialization" (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011, 6). Yet this contested multiplying of positions also stimulates many fruitful insights that otherwise might not be gained.

Included in the divisive pluralism-integration discourse are debates, for example, between the proponents of incommensurability or combination, between isolationists or integrationists positions (Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Kelemen, 2007; Scherer and Steinmann, 1999) and between paradigmatic and meta-paradigmatic perspectives (Hassard & Cox, 2013), which, all too often, are not resulting in the development of research collaborations or communications.

Corresponding to the pluralisation also a fragmentation of knowledge and related lack of integrative research has been frequently acknowledged in the social sciences over the years (Goertzen, 2008). Already four decades ago, Whitley commented on the, "highly divided and fragmented nature of much contemporary research" (Whitley, 1976, pp. 480-481). More recently, authors have noted the fragmented nature of research in organisation and management studies (Donaldson, 1998; Thomas, 2003). This fragmentation not only hinders research through academic siloing and lack of communication but impacts on how organisations and communities address their multiple challenges (Bhandar, 2010). Fragmentation in science is an unintended outcome of two basic and valid motivations: The first is the goal of greater specialisation and detailing of knowledge. The second is to retain, what Stiglitz (2000) refers to as, "the localisation of knowledge." Where specialisation is quests after an ever more detailed causative understanding of phenomena and, hence, is accompanied by instrumental, technical and methodological specificity, localisation is associated with the respect for local ontologies and the recognition of

unique qualities of each subject of study. While these are worthy motivations, when not complemented by integrative ends, they can result in problematic forms of fragmentation.

Hence, the modern and postmodern currents within MOS, as well as social studies in general, are characterized by a prevailing mixture of concerted positivist specialisation and postmodern localisation of MOS knowledge. These are based on and bound to particularised ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, orientations and reductionisms. Facing this situation, it is contested whether MOS can be enriched by further de-differentiating and disentangled pluralising or deconstructionist approaches without complementary forms of integration (Küpers and Edwards, 2008). Under these circumstances the current status of MOS requires new ideas on how different schools of thought can be juxtapositioned and/or interrelated more creatively.

Working at the interstitial boundaries of these integrating and pluralising forces, this paper outlines a 'third way'. Taking the bridge as a metaphor and symbol of the constitution of relations and enabler of possible 'meetings,' the following argues for an integral pluralism in organization studies. Based on a post-dualistic, holonic approach (Edwards, 2005, 2009), we will outline specific integrative, or what might be called 'syn-integral,' qualities of bridges as mediating new possibilities for connecting MOS research paradigms and literatures. Following integral pluralism (Bhaskar, 1987; Dallmayr, 2010), by syn-integral we mean the synthesising of integrative connections to accommodate the diversity of perspectives towards a research topic.

Against this backdrop, the paper will be structured in the following way. Firstly, bridges and bridging are presented as phenomena, media and metaphors for connecting and separating. Showing their ambivalent character, the role of bridges as metaphors and metaphors as bridges are then discussed in relation to organisation studies. Following a holonic approach that takes part and wholes together, and a 'syn-integral' interpretation, perspectives on 'inter-bridging' and movable bridges are then described for gaining a decentered processual understanding. Finally, some implications for organization studies and conclusions are offered.

## **Bridges/Bridging as Metaphors for Connecting and Separating**

In the first place, a bridge is a construction, something that is purposefully built and which can be perceived not only as a continuation of a road but as a place serving a special purpose on the road. It is continuing a path across that which divides. By changing the road or the landscape it produces a specific place and emplacement. While bridges call to mind divisions, they also allow divided sides to be seen as connected. In its figurative sense, the bridge attracts, connects, unites, and thereby creates a feeling of relatedness. This linking can also be fragile in character as bridges can be flimsy, temporary and act as points of division. In addition to connecting separated phenomena, due to practical needs and social functions, bridges also obtain specific cultural and aesthetical values. Thus, as an appearance it manifests not only as an artefact, but is encumbered with symbolic meanings and aesthetical qualities (cf. Simmel, 1994). Becoming a placed and visually perceivable image of time and space, bridges hence make the intangible accessible. However, perceiving a bridge always shows the division that it bridges. This interdependency of functions and forms may explain the power that bridges and bridging evoke as media and metaphors, expressed in such a way that they can be even felt on an embodied level.

As an embodied experience, bridges can be perceived and interpreted differently however. Depending on whether they are seen from afar, when reaching or leaving, standing on, or being under or moving on it, on foot or in a car or a train, they open different horizons. Various inter-related senses, who 'make sense' (Küpers, 2013) participate in sensual and aesthetic perceptions of a bridge. Experiencing bridges in an embodied way not only provides a passage-way but are part of being in an embodied place. According to Heidegger (1993), bridges are places that permit to experience the uniqueness and unity of space. They allow us to feel that we belong and can enter as well as how to dwell and live in a placed world, while also initiate different socio-cultural patterns, forming a specific locale and create connecting "networks of long-distance traffic, paced and calculated for maximum yield" (Heidegger, 1993, 354).

However, this archetypical, somewhat adoring interpretation of pre-modern bridges by Simmel and Heidegger can be insufficiently interpreted as not covering further possible forms and functions for our contemporary world. Their metaphor and interpretations of the bouldered bridge can be misunderstood as romantic image of crossing comfortably small rivers or streams.<sup>4</sup>

Today, large railway bridges, highway viaducts or huge suspension bridges break the landscape not only horizontally, but also vertically. On modern bridges humans are often lifted out of the landscape, separating them from it, and thus alter perceptions. Accordingly, bridges in our post-industrial times can also be seen as a metaphor of an ever increasing and pervasive mobility or the perplexity of different conditions of mobile possibilities (Strohmayer, 2010). This "inter-connected nomadism" functions then as a means of developing multiple and transverse ways of bridged thinking and living. In this respect, the internet represents a kind of 'cyber-bridge,' which connects 'real-virtual.' For example, crossing via hyperlinks as virtual bridges creates an entry into home- or webpages, which are powerful electronic worlds in their own right. In the absence of direct, but vicarious experiences within virtual organizing, images and metaphors become particularly influential by structuring the reality of virtuality (Schultze and Orlikowski, 2001). The simultaneity of separation and/or connection (Kolb, 2008; Kolb et al., 2012)<sup>5</sup> and extended understanding of bridges as metaphors are a crucial for the study of organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger has been accused of being provincial and even reactionary in his choice of the old country bridge that "brings wagons and horse teams to the surrounding villages." But Heidegger also referred to a highway bridge "as is tied into the network of long distance traffic, paced and calculated for maximum yield," thereby not only disclosing the haste and efficiency of the essence of technology, but also exceeding that imposition in the way it brings into presence (cf. Heidegger 2001, pp. 152-153).

<sup>5</sup> Kolb defines connectivity as 'the mechanisms, processes, systems and relationships that link individuals and collectives (e.g. groups, organizations, cultures, societies) by facilitating material, informational and/or social exchange. It includes geo-physical (e.g. space, time and location), technological (e.g. information technologies and their applications) as well as social interactions and artefacts.' (Kolb, 2008, p. 128). As Kolb (2008) has outlined, especially the concept of connectivity is being increasingly used as a metaphor for intra- and inter-organizational interactions. He shows, that 'connecting' and 'disconnecting' suggest an underlying theoretical duality, which can be described across multiple dimensions. According to Kolb the specific attributes which constitute the qualities of connectivity – namely latent potentiality, temporal intermittency, actor agency and unknowable pervasiveness – also explain why this metaphor has an appealing resonance with contemporary organisational life.

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## Bridge as Metaphor – Metaphor as Bridge

Referring to the Greek origin “*metaphorikos*” – from the Greek roots “meta-,” (beyond, across) and “pherein” (carrying over, or bearing), i.e. meaning transportation – metaphors are marking and making movements visible. Basically, metaphors are ways in which terms that originally apply to one domain are projected onto another domain in order to structure experience in a new way or to create an extended awareness.

Metaphors can be seen as part of developing a symbolic understanding (Cassirer, 1955) and vehicle for meaningful organising and communication in and with the world. In particular, drawing upon symbolic constructs helps to approach the relationship between subjective and objective worlds. As part of analogical reasoning, metaphorical thinking is a basic mode of symbolism that is a creative form effectuated through using and crossing of images. Metaphors give form to and transform or generate as well as mediate new meanings. As structuring and creative forming they constitute a capability for processing, comprehending and expressing embodied experiences.

Furthermore, a metaphor is a way of seeing a thing *as if* it were something else, thereby providing a bridge between two dissimilar domains (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Consequently, metaphors can enable bridging between abstract constructs and concrete things (Ortony, 1979) and between the familiar to the unknown (Hawkes, 1972). Likewise, bridges allow transverse movements from one distinct area to another. This refers to a crossing that relates to a fundamental spatial navigating in the world in which we live. By synthetically relating areas that would otherwise be separated, bridges are compelling communication media, philosophically as well as practically and bodily. This is why metaphor and theory building are so closely linked.

Lakoff and Johnson tell us that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thinking and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (1980, p. 3). For them this metaphorical structuring has its basis in experience. “Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 239). According to their ‘experientialism’ (1980) and ‘embodied realism’ (1999), all our abstract conceptualization and reasoning, as well as use of language that is our symbolic expression and interactions are tied intimately to our embodiment. Consequently, our bodily experience and embodied relating are constructing thinking, feeling, interpreting and acting through the bridging transfer of conceptual correspondences from experience to more abstract domains (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

Linked to image-schemes, metaphors are both constitutive of the structure of bodily experience, as well as emerge from the experiential (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).<sup>7</sup> Met-

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and/or social exchange. He shows, that ‘connecting’ and ‘disconnecting’ suggest an underlying theoretical duality, which can be described across multiple dimensions.

<sup>7</sup> Lakoff and Johnson (1999) state that complex or abstract metaphors are primary metaphors that bring two distant domains-source and target-into correspondence with each other. The source domain is usually more physical or concrete, while the target domain tends to be more abstract and complex. Further, the source domain is made up of our fundamental orienting concepts known as image schemata or primary (deep) metaphors. Image schemata are experienced at the corporal level by manipulating objects and moving the body in space and time. A considerable part of our reasoning stems from projecting bodily

aphors refer to an affective state that simultaneously invokes cognition, sensory and aesthetic responses. As one of their functions, an embodied metaphor translates an experienced reality into a perceptible 'object' that has emotive import as well as discursive contents. Additionally, this translational process is inseparable from the creative imagination that poetically co-creates the 'object'. In this way, metaphors mediate novel and even transcending meanings, thus are not reducible to either emotive utterance or rational discourse. Processing a form of emotional and imaginative rationality, metaphors allow bridging the gap between subjectivist and objectivist myths (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 193). Correspondingly, bridges are grounded in embodied experiences of human beings, whose bodily movements are related to the sensed experience of bodily engagement with objects (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). This link to the bodily dimension may explain why bridges are such powerful and political figures of speech, action and interpretation (Winner 1980) as well as for carnal organisation studies and practices (Küpers, 2015).

## Metaphorical Bridges and Bridging in Pluralized Organization Studies

As metaphors generally play a central role in the development of thought and inter-individual sense-making, they provide also organizational members with an essential vehicle for expression and interpretation. They do so in particular in that they help to synthesize and integrate the complexities and ambiguities of organizational experience (Feldman, 1991; Inns and Jones, 1996). Furthermore, they allow the reframing of perceptions to "see the world anew" (Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990, 222). This inherently creative dimension of metaphors and stories may be the reason for the intensive use of metaphors in organization studies and their growing importance to research and theory building (Oswick et al., 2002; Cornellison et al., 2008). Part of the innovative potential of metaphors is that they remain incomplete, as they merely hint, suggest or imply and, by this, open up realms for imagination (Trice and Beyer, 1993, 99).

The use of metaphor in organization studies was initially inspired by the work of Morgan (1980, 1986), helping to overcome the dichotomy of the dominant mechanistic and organic approaches within the functionalist paradigm and revealing the impact of their taken-for-granted metaphors on theorizing. For Morgan (1980, p. 613), "an awareness of the metaphorical nature of theory may help to break down the false and restricting compartmentalization of inquiry and understanding which characterizes the conduct of modern organization theory." Moreover, he believes that the use of metaphor enhances the "capacity for creative yet disciplined thought, in a way that allows us to grasp and deal with the many-sided character of organizational life" (1986, p. 17).

Despite of the impact and potential of metaphorical approaches for MOS, their appropriateness has been contested. Accordingly, Grant and Oswick (1996, pp. 3-6) have pointed out some positive and negative aspects of metaphors. On the one hand, metaphors have a liberating poten-

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and spatial image schemata onto abstract concepts. These image schemata are flexible enough to take on any number of instantiations in different contexts (Johnson 1987, p. 25). According to their embodied realism, "the locus of experience, meaning and thought is the ongoing series of embodied organism-environment interactions that constitute our understandings of the world" (Lakoff and Johnson, 2002, p. 249).

tial, i.e. they help people to see things anew, re-interpret the known and facilitate learning. As such they can foster new experiences, experimenting and diagnosing, thus can serve as a valuable investigative tool. On the other hand, metaphors also have limitations (Morgan 1996, pp. 234-235; Ramos, 1978). For instance, they can be reified and used as ideological distortions, guiding users into biased directions. Particularly, coexisting incompatible metaphors can give rise to incongruences and conflicts among different fields within the discipline and various agencies, employing divergent metaphors for self-understanding, orientation, and direction (Sementelli and Abel, 2007, p. 659). Finally, their inherent ambiguity and imprecision renders it difficult to receive clear or precise results and evaluation of their effects.

Thus, metaphors always represent only “partial truths” (Morgan, 1996, 232), that may be biased or lack rigor, since they neither can be proved nor falsified. Nevertheless, metaphors create important insights into different organizational phenomena as they allow researchers to develop new meanings through an interactive process of ‘seeing-as’ (Cornelissen et al., 2005). For instance, the unique creative potential of metaphorical approaches has been shown in multiple studies on the role of metaphor in facilitating organisational change (Marshak, 1996; Pondy, 1983; Sackmann, 1989). Metaphors enable organisational actors to re-perceive reality in novel ways that can bridge the old state with the new. Or they are providing a bridge from the “familiar to the strange” (Pondy, 1983, p. 163), respectively to use something relatively unfamiliar. To take another example, ideas or images from evolutionary biology may spark new ways of thinking about something familiar like business strategy (von Ghyczy 2003, p. 89). Metaphors are highly relevant for change and movement in organisational settings as they influence social actors’ mind sets, in terms of how and which thoughts, feelings and actions occur. In this regard, Heracleous and Jacobs (2006) pointed out that bridges serve as orientational metaphor. They revealed that spatial proximity symbolizes organizational relatedness or directional uniformity represents coherence as well as similarity in spatial level stands for a sense of belongingness or solid physical connections functions as symbol for smooth organizational relations. As bridges and bridging are related to such spatio-temporal dimensions and dynamics they offer a rich metaphorical linkage that is relevant for interpreting organisational life-worlds.

Metaphors mediate space both through imagery and the manners of reality-changing processing by changing language and recontextualising events (Waistell, 2006, 2007). In particular, bridges and bridging can be regarded as metaphorical mediators. Relationally, mediation is what stands, comes or moves between things that are seemingly otherwise separated or opposed. As metaphorical mediators, bridges are not only a static ‘betweenness,’ but are always already ‘go-betweenes’ that is in movement. Therefore, the crossing-over of bridges and bridging refers to an intermediary function, which relates dynamically between contents and worlds. Consequently, bridges serve as a milieu or mid-place of communication (Serres, 1982). Ultimately, there is no message or communication possible without such a middling context or channel. In any dialogue there must be some form of contact, which enables the communication to take place. This can be material, for example a meeting-place, a postal service or a techno- and socio-material network as well as in immaterial forms as a discourse with rules. The middle or in-between can also be a combination of material presence and immaterial spheres, like a conference, which is literally a bringing or carrying together both at once. Thus, all the work of communication is a sort of bridge-work, made for the spanning of gaps or traversal of *stances* and distances. However, intermediated communications may also mean mistelling, mishearing, and misapprehending. These

cases refer to mediations or practices of mediators in which biases, errors and distortions occupy, overrun or obliterate, thus rendering various interferences.

With new techniques and/or media of communicational bridges, organizational members are faced with a world without addresses that correspond to unique and determinate sets of coordinates in the physical world (Serres, 1994, pp. 205-206). Correspondingly, it makes more sense to look out for the bridge between two ends within a continuum, than to singular poles. The mediating qualities of bridges and bridging as generative metaphors yield new perceptions, interpretations, explanations and inventions in organisational practice (Schön, 1979, p. 259). In this way they are offering alternative ways of looking at an existing situation or possible conceptualisations.

During the last decades many researchers have been debating intensely whether the coexistence of many research paradigms has been beneficial or detrimental to the development of MOS. While the debate between proponents of unification or pluralism is not settled, there are disadvantages to an ongoing non-integral pluralisation. In particular, the field of pluralised organization studies is facing traps of specialisation and fragmentation (Knudsen, 2003, pp. 263-264). The *specialization trap* is a situation, where the further elaboration of dominant research programs suppresses the search for heterodox explanations. This strategy of exploitation provides faster and safer returns on efforts than the exploration of entirely new and hence uncertain areas. As a consequence, exploratory activities are rather scarce. In the long run, this limits a discipline's potential to adapt to new and unpredictable situations and developments. The *fragmentation trap* is, in contrast, characterized by a constant search for and creation of new theories, methods and research topics rather than elaborating or extending existing ones. As a consequence, the pace of development is too fast to evaluate each contribution properly and to integrate new positions into coherent knowledge structures. Manifold activities of exploration may then lead to an arbitrary, haphazard accumulation of knowledge. Accordingly, new contributions are not integrated with the existing knowledge, as their relationship to other theories is not clearly connected or assessed. This undermines the potential to use existing positions for the development of innovative engagement and contributions.

This problematic status of theory calls for an integral reasoning and frameworks for bridging various positions in a more comprehensive way (Küpers and Edwards, 2008). When disjointed divisions and contestations prevail, generative metaphors, such as bridges and bridging as metaphorizing activity, are helpful for enhancing a development towards integration. The following outlines some perspectives on how bridges can be transition zones for connecting paradigms from an integral pluralist or syn-integral orientation.

## **Bridges as Transition Zones for Paradigms**

We have argued that any attempt to develop integrated perspectives has to deal with the problem of pluralism in MOS. Adopting a meta-perspective (Dewulf et al., 2009) is one important aspect for addressing this issue. As Goia and Pitre remark: "Comparing and contrasting diverse paradigms is difficult when confined within one paradigm; looking from a meta-level, however, can allow simultaneous consideration of multiple paradigms and their transition zones" (Goia & Pitre, 1990, p. 595).



The postmodern distrust of meta-positions is understandable given the problematic assumptions that often accompany such views, but the point put forward by Gioia and Pitre is different. Their assumptions are of valuing pluralism or taking diverse meta-level positions and of retaining marginal views (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Questioning the assumption that there are no connections between paradigms can open up re-searching for multiple overlapping or connecting areas (Gioia and Pitre 1990, p. 592; Schulz and Hatch, 1996, p. 534). Such approaches would not try to fuse or merge, but to relate and negotiate between conflicting positions. They concern for example objectivist and subjectivist approaches or positivistic and anti-/post-positivistic orientations in organization research.

The adoption of a meta-paradigmatic perspective has three important implications (Dewulf et al., 2009, p. 180). First of all, it values separate paradigms as independent, yet fruitful and coherent perspectives. Second, the simultaneous consideration of more than one perspective offers chances for mutual learning, especially by revealing tensions as well as analogies, thus fostering new research questions. Third, concentrating on the permeability of paradigmatic borders and zones of transition can be detected, where different elements might be combined or reconfigured towards rendering novel insights or findings. An illustration of this threefold use of the bridging metaphor can be found in the work of Aram and Salipante and their article on “bridging scholarship in management” (Aram & Salipante, 2003). First they consider separate and contrasting research perspectives of the “particular and the general,” “experience and theory,” “the implicit and the explicit,” and “induction and deduction” (2003, p. 189). Second they develop new research questions and learning opportunities and explore “the potential for a philosophy of science and a process of inquiry that crosses epistemological lines by synthesizing [separate epistemologies]” (2003, p. 189). Third they develop bridging themes that retain but also reconfigure conceptual elements to develop new insights and “new communities of knowing toward the production of relevant and rigorous management knowledge” (2003, p. 189).

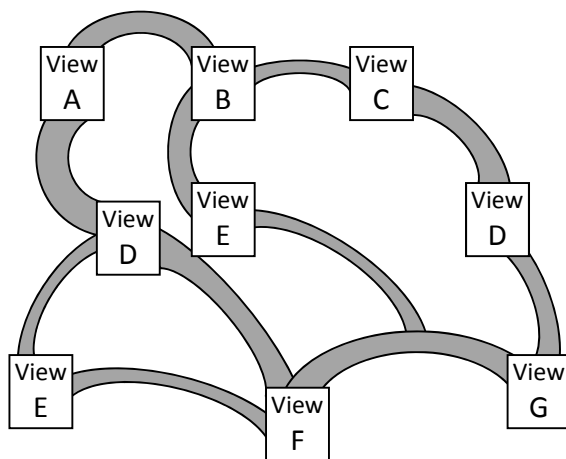
In order to (re-)construct such transitional zones, we propose an integral pluralism framework as a bridging concept. By this we mean, a bridging in which different elements or positions are not reduced or subsumed into each other. Rather, they are seen as contributing their own insights to a more comprehensive understanding. This integral orientation permits bridging between paradigms as well as between micro-, meso- and macro-levels of analysis and their interplay. In this sense, bridging is a meta-theoretical integration practice that mediates between theories, concepts, findings, and interpretations. Consequently, integral bridging can link seemingly contradictory, opposed or divergent positions and perspectives by creating more comprehensive and revealing understandings. For example, Gioia and Pitre offer a kind of proto-integral bridging of the gap between the interpretivist and functionalist paradigms by stating: “In the interpretive paradigm, which presumes a subjective reality, we saw that theoretical discourse often takes place in terms of structuring. If any bridge is to be drawn with functionalism, which presumes an objective reality and, thus, objective social structures, some connection must be made between these concepts” (Gioia and Pitre, 1990, p. 592).

## **Holonic and ‘Syn-integral’ Bridges/Bridging**

As has been argued, the bridge/bridging metaphor can serve as a powerful embodied tool for a more integrated understanding of pluralised organisation theory and practice. Building on this

idea, we now outline some post-dualistic perspectives on understanding bridges and bridging. First, we describe specific holonic and synthesising qualities of bridges and bridging as inter-relational practices. In our view, a holonic understanding is helpful for seeing how dualistic perspectives and approaches are partial or at least limiting in their impact. Specifically, a holonic perspective is one that adopts a systems view of nested relationships between the system's elements (Checkland, 1988). In other words, holons are constitutive 'entities' that are both wholes and parts of bigger wholes at the same time (Koestler, 1967). This means that holons are simultaneously autonomous and dependent, as they are characterized by differentiation (generation of variety) and integration (generation of coherence). This permits both analytic and synthetic approaches to be taken towards understanding organisational phenomena. Accordingly, a holarchical system refers to a nested hierarchy/heterarchy of holons (Edwards, 2005). As a form of organising, such holarchical order is especially relevant for the increasing number of decentralized, self-organising processes and its theorising.

A holonic understanding of bridges and bridging is useful for the non-reductive integration of different conceptual lenses. Such approach enables portraying complex realities and relationships involved in bridging diverse phenomena and dimensions in organisation theory and practice. Methodologically, using a holonic orientation and its integrative potential, demands a comprehensive multi-level analysis that takes subjective, inter-subjective and objective dimensions of bridging into account. Interrelating different and specific, but interconnected, processes of interior and exterior as well as individual and collective dimensions, accommodates relevant perspectives of what an 'appropriate' integrative bridging requires. Such orientation provides a base for understanding the syn-integral qualities of bridges as mediating and dynamically synthesising various theoretical and methodological perspectives in MOS. This syn-integral orientation contributes to overcoming the isolation of opposed positions as well as the prevailing practical and methodological reductionism (Küpers and Edwards, 2008).



As shown in Figure 1, we suggest that the metaphors of bridges and bridging can communicate synintegral meanings that are increasingly relevant for MOS as they contribute to overcoming the isolation of opposed or compartmentalized positioning, because bridging connotes connection without subsuming one locality into another. Figure 1 depicts how bridges form networks of connection and connecting patterns between views (Cilliers, 2001).

**Figure 1: Bridges as links in a syn-integral network of connections.**

In this way, syn-integral approaches correspond to the need for overcoming 'dichotomous thinking' with its formation of 'false binary oppositions' (Tsoukas, 2000) and its either/or logic, for example when coping with change (Beech and Cairns, 2001). A syn-integral orientation con-

siders ways on how relational dimensions are ‘in sync’ to each other, including divergent and convergent dynamics. Correspondingly, syn-integrality exhibits a potential to explore inter-relational and transformational processes with their dynamically interwoven individual and collective agents and agencies in organisational life-worlds.<sup>8</sup>

Close to this syn-tegrality is the cybernetic model of ‘syntegrity’ (Beer, 1994), which refers to a form of non-hierarchical problem solving in teams particularly through informal talk and facilitation. However, ‘syn-integral’ bridging, as suggested here, goes beyond the group-level and focus on problem-solving, as it tries overcoming the limits of the underlying cybernetic system approach. Nevertheless, a ‘syn-integral’ approach agrees with the basic Gestalt-idea of synergy. For such Gestalt-approach the properties of a whole are greater than and distinct from the added or combined features of the parts.

‘Syn-integrality’ resonates in particular with the idea of ‘tensegrity’ as this concept refers to the integrity of structures as being based in a synergy between the inseparable and balanced components of tension and compression (Fuller and Applewhite, 1975). Accordingly, a ‘syn-integral’ orientation follows Buckminster Fuller’s architectonic principle of efficiency in the construction of design of things. ‘Syn-tegration’ achieves maximum stability, robustness, and quality of outputs with a minimum of inputs, thus doing more with less. Instead of using compression, ‘syn-integral’ bridging achieves stability by the distribution and concurrent application of tension and pressure on the entire bridge and in relation between its poles. Thus, the integrity of the structure is determined by the distributed tensile stress of the entire system. This tensile integrity or in short ‘tensegrity’ is summarized as “a structural-relationship principle in which structural shape is guaranteed by the finitely closed, comprehensively continuous, tensional behaviours of the system and not by the discontinuous and exclusively local compressional member behaviours” (Fuller & Applewhite, 1975, p. 372).

‘Tensegrity’ has many suggestive implications for more effective configurations (Judge, 1979). Such tensile structures make explicit the value of having discontinuous or antagonistic relations between concepts embedded in a continuous mutually supportive network of relationships. As dynamic figurations they reveal how an appropriate combination of properly positioned elements can give rise to a totally unsuspected structure of stability. Interestingly facilitating communication between all parties involved in these structural configurations is not the only way forward, even if it seems feasible in practice. Furthermore, tensegrity suggest that much may be accomplished by ensuring a supportive relationship with neighbouring nodes. This can be accomplished provided that a position is challenged by appropriate opposing nodes. Remarkable these tensile structures have empty centres. Correspondingly, every point is visible and connectable from every other, suggesting a desirable form of transparency. Critically, this raises questions about and inhowfar it is desirable to whom, and in what sense. For example, open offices,

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<sup>8</sup> To understand what ‘syn-integral’ and ‘syn-tegral’ bridging in particular means it can be critically contrasted to *synergetics*, which represents an interdisciplinary science explaining the formation and self-organization of patterns and structures in open systems far from thermodynamic equilibrium (Haken, 2004). In contrast to this system approach for which self-organization means that a complex system achieves its spatial structure and/or functions without specific interference from agents outside the system, ‘syntegral’ orientation includes the possibility of active agency. Although being part of a holonic embedding system, individual and collective agents can be bridges and actively bridge between elements.

in which everyone is constantly visible to everyone else, may lead to a panopticonism (Bart, 2005). For a tensegrity-oriented approach the centre is a virtual one, rather than being occupied by some dominant body, individual, concept or value. Furthermore, such structures also imply a range of global transformations through which the set of concepts or policies can grow to encompass greater variety.

While tensegrity – the simultaneous occurrence of tension and pressure – can be observed in nature, applying the principles to social systems, like organizations, may lead to a ‘synergistic tensegrity’ or ‘syntegrity.’ Such integrity, as being ‘in tensile sync’ enables an optimum cross-linking between parts, e.g. members of a team, who are sharing knowledge.

Moreover, an optimum-orientation towards syn-integral connectivity includes also disconnectivities, for example interruptive agentic acts in mediated work (Wajcman and Rose, 2011). Thus it considers conflictual dis-connection within the inter-relational spheres in which they occur. Therefore syn-integral bridging does not follow the ideas of a metaphysical harmony, nor an underlying unity-oriented ideal(ism). Rather, it embraces demands of diversity, complexities, intricacies and ambiguities of bounded organizational realities as well as its theoretical and empirical investigations. Such an orientation towards integral passages in the spirit of ‘syn-integral ity’ allows not only dealing with conflicts, dilemmas, paradoxes and pathologies of organization in a creative way. It also contributes to a more comprehensive rendering of individual, group-related and organizational sur-plus within a ‘bounded integrality’ (Deeg et al., 2010).

Taken all together, a holonic and syn-integral bridge-building represents an adequate meta-theoretical and practical approach for recognizing and dealing with multiple perspectives, while being open for productive irritations, and creative responses. Furthermore, it enables a more effective and sustainable ‘trafficking,’ in that it provides a base for meaningful communications and bridging between various interdependent realities in organisations and beyond.

## **Bridges and Bridging the In-between... Bridges on the Move**

Based on the outlined integral, holonic and syn-integral orientation, the following analyzes some perspectives on the role of an inter-relational ‘space in-between’ (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000). **On the one hand**, integral and syn-integral qualities of bridges and bridging are themselves mediating in-betweens. In this way, bridges not only bridge between, but also create an *in-between*. This in-between can be interpreted as a bridging milieu, a sphere and process in and through which the bridging takes place. Applied to organisational theory and practice, this in-between as bridge is co-constituting and entailing as well as enabling to inter-relate multiple realities and individual and collective dimensions in organisational life-worlds. This liminal bridging *moves* between concepts, categories and paradigms of thought and forms of practice not ‘in’ them (Chia, 1996, p. 142). It is this relational realm of in-between, with its gaps or interstices and therein unfolding ‘in-tensions’ (Cooper and Law, 1995), which is the medium for meaningful syn-integral theories of organisations. Moreover, the in-between – interpreted as ongoing processes of becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) – serves as the source for creative and social experiences and realities. By recognizing the primacy of relational processes, these become ‘form-in-media’ (Küpers, 2011), in which bridges are continuously co-created and changed in the course of being built and functioning.

Corresponding to these perspectives on the in-between, the metaphors of movable bridges and flowing bridging can be used for illustration. These process-oriented images refer to alternative forms/media-connections in that they reveal or re-present organizational processes as relational, emergent patterns of association, accomplished performances or as ongoing movements (Putnam and Boys, 2006; Taylor and van Every, 2000). For thinking of bridges and bridging as moving media, ferries come to mind that, while serving as moveable transport vehicles, often replace stable bridges. Or we could think of air-bridges that function as movable connectors for passengers.

Following Deleuze and Guattari (1980), emerging 'rhizomatic bridges' can be thought of that allow multiple horizontal and mutual connections that are growing into swinging radial ways. Importantly, a rhizome-bridge has no beginning or end, but is always in the middle, between things. With these qualities, any point of a bridging rhizome can be connected to any other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 7). Thus, rhizomatics reinterprets bridges as dynamic, heterogeneous and non-dichotomous, open-ended places, pathways and lines of flight that is de-territorialized structures, through which nomadic movements can take place (Chia, 1999).

When engaging with metaphors of moveable bridges it may make bodies, feelings and thinking move, thus serving as media for reflecting 'beings' and facilitating different forms of becoming, that is, unfolding, emergence and transformation (Tsoukas, 1991). As being inter-relational milieus and processes, bridges and bridging moves are spheres and practices of transition. Bridges become living third spaces, inter-places and zones of "interplay" (Schultz & Hatch, 1996) in contrast to being static positional or instrumental resources. Accordingly, as spatial and temporal in-between, bridges and bridging serve not only for coming from one point to another, but help to overcome thinking in points at all. Subversively, they are inviting, guiding, going to, and dealing with post-dichotomous in-betweens of theorising and practicing organisation. When in-between spaces of bridges are those, 'where differences unfold differences, in-between, inside-outside, formal-informal, old-new etc.' (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006, p. 154) occur, then considering requisite suitable levels of connectivities<sup>9</sup> and bordering or borderland strategies suggests metaphorical borderlands, particularly for reconnecting of theory and practice (Tyler, 2009),<sup>10</sup> open up for more creative forms of organising.

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<sup>9</sup>“Requisite connectivity is the state of having robust and reliable communication and/or transportation media/modes, with operable alternative work-around options, so that contact may be initiated or maintained at the rate, richness and intensity that we desire for a given task or social outcome” (Kolb, Collins and Lind 2008, p. 182). Accordingly, requisite connectivity refers to a threshold state of having an appropriate level of connectivity, one which enables effective performance of a given task or social outcome. It marks a middle ground and can be distinguished from states of too little or too much connectivity. At the one extreme is a state of hypo-connectivity, where there is insufficient connectivity for the demands of the situation. For example, in distributed teams when teleconferencing facilities are not available, and/or time differences and geographical distance make face-to-face contact problematic, a team may report suffering from hypo-connectivity. The other extreme is a state of hyper-connectivity, in which high levels of connectivity are detrimental to performance. As such, effective and efficient performance requires that individuals, teams and organizations achieve and maintain a state of requisite connectivity, while avoiding the pitfalls of the two counterproductive states of hypo-connectivity and hyper-connectivity.

<sup>10</sup> Instead of using binary, two-shore-oriented metaphor of gaps and bridges, Tyler (2009) suggests metaphorical borderlands particularly for reconnecting of theory and practice. Following Anzaldúa (1987), the concept of a borderland refers to a psycho-social territory, which span and include the boundary, thus

Such a radical understanding of the relationality of bridges as dynamic connectivity helps understanding practices of organising as decentred inter-relationships. Interpreting organizational phenomena as dynamic constellations of relationships allows us to see that they cannot be substantively fixed. Organisational spaces are connected via shifting clusters of variable elements throughout a non-centred, configured lattice. This distributed mesh processes what could be called ‘inter-bridging’ that is moving in dynamic sets of forms and relations within an ‘inter-world’ as a shared ‘inter-mundane’ place (Merleau-Ponty 1995, p. 269). In turn these formations and relationships are situated within and influenced by powerful historical, embodied, emotional, cognitive, social, and structural dimensions.

Conceptually and practically, such ‘inter-bridging’ provides renewed possibilities for developing richer, more contextured understandings and transformative enactments of holonic and syn-integral processes in organisations.

## Implications for Organization Studies

The integral and syn-integral metaphor of bridges/bridging challenges the commonly assumed status of incommensurability among MOS research paradigms. It enables perspectives of interplay and connectivity that transcend the incommensurability argument. Opposing approaches can be considered by juxtaposing them which illustrates their representational nature and logic. By encompassing various research directions, a syn-integral approach, as outlined before, provides a more accommodating framework that corresponds and helps to respond better to the plurality and complexities of organizational phenomena, including discontinuities (Deeg, 2009). In this regard, syn-integral thinking may reveal connections of seemingly disparate, but interdependent facets of issues under study. The syn-integral nature of bridging metaphors offers pathways for overcoming binary arguments in which ‘either-or’-antinomies foster sub-complex black-or-white views. Instead, a post-binary syn-integral approach sees opposite orientations as co-determined, as mutual, complementary and interconnected positions. A re-examining and questioning of fundamental assumptions of various practices and theories from a syn-integral perspective, enhances forms of unfoldment and learning that elevates theory-building. This in turn may protect researchers from becoming trapped within an isolationist view or a limited range of conceptual possibilities. The very move of crossing diverse boundaries represents is an actual practice of (meta-)theoretical bridging. By unearthing connections and establishing new ones (Molz and

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helping (a *mestiza-consciousness*) to dissolve, rather than overcome dualities. For a borderland perspective “the bridge is replaced by buoyancy, by flow” (Tyler, 2009, p. 533). In this borderland contradictions are sustained and become a creative force for new connections between people and ideas. Furthermore, the borderlands metaphor possesses creates and atmosphere and has the “power of sustainable engagement, a mixing and a blending that results in the emergence of novelty” (Tyler, 2009, p. 532).

<sup>11</sup> Instead of using binary, two-shore-oriented metaphor of gaps and bridges, Tyler (2009) suggests metaphorical borderlands particularly for reconnecting of theory and practice. Following Anzaldúa (1987) the concept of a borderland refers to a psycho-social territory, which span and include the boundary, thus helping (a *mestiza-consciousness*) to dissolve, rather than overcome dualities. For a borderland perspective “the bridge is replaced by buoyancy, by flow” (Tyler, 2009, p. 533). In this borderland contradictions are sustained and become a creative force for new connections and sustainable engagement between people and ideas.

Edwards, 2015), this bridging endeavour show inter- and transdisciplinary ways to cross, thus to advance creative pathways.

Radicalising the idea of an “inter-disciplinology” (Bahm, 1980) that crosses disciplines and forms of knowledge, such bridge-crossing requires the cultivation of a relational taking of perspective. Such “inter-perspectivity” (Giri 2002, p. 106) is using an inter-relational approach, that includes and interrelates multiple perspectives. To cross boundaries does not mean to espouse a single encompassing truth, to fix the one, supposed best (meta-)orientation or methodology, nor to justify the dominance of a certain worldview. Rather, an integral meta-theoretical research recognizes and values, different levels, pluralism and diversity. Due to its inclusive character, various paradigms, theories, methodologies and insights can then find their place in a broader scheme. Importantly, an integrated meta-theoretical bridging view does not promote eclecticism, but favours a nested holarchy of knowledge. With its meta-paradigmatic orientation and holarchical knowledge, an integrated modelling encourages awareness of theoretical and methodological alternatives. Integral bridging facilitates discourses and/or inquiries and interplays across paradigms, hence fostering greater understanding within pluralist and even paradoxical organizational contexts (Lewis and Kelemen 2002, p. 258). At the same time, bridging between shared patterns and platforms for communication contributes to developing constructive, useful and emancipatory knowledge (Molz and Edwards, 2015). Eventually, such bridging may also help to close gaps between academic research and organizational practice (e.g. Saari, 2007; Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009).

## Conclusions

This paper argues that the bridge/bridging metaphor is a source of multifunctional and generative ideas for investigating organisational life-worlds. With their special syn-integral characteristics that allow traversing not only streams and obstacles, but also polarities and abysses, bridges are well suited to interpreting and dealing with contexts and theories of organisation that are marked by division, oppositeness, isolations or fissures. Traditionally, bridges were not used for staying or living on them, as they functioned only for a purposeful crossing over. Yet, in a reinterpreted sense, bridges are not only for traversing but also serve to overcome barriers and boundaries. They offer possibilities for redirecting the pathways and going towards, living in and dealing with the in-between. Thus, from a holonic and synintegral perspective, bridging modes are vital activities and places for learning about different ways of seeing. Bridges are eminent tropes for transformative process because they highlight dynamic forms of relationalities and movements, which also implies a fundamental fragility and requires malleability. This means that bridges need to be sensible to vibrations and to operate with an oscillatory instability as they are endangered by great commotions. Accordingly, the process of actual bridging is a vibrant, unstable, constantly challenging, and delicate work in progress.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This became evident in the opening of the high-tech Millennium Bridge in London, which traverses the River Thames from the Tate Modern to St. Paul’s Cathedral by which pedestrians generated lateral and reinforcing momentum called “synchronous lateral excitation” (Cassidy, 2009) causing the bridge to shake and swing. Thousands of people lined up to walk across the new structure, which consisted of a narrow aluminum footbridge surrounded by steel balustrades projecting out at obtuse angles. Within minutes of the official opening, the footway started to tilt and sway alarmingly, forcing some of the pedestrians to cling to the side rails. Some reported feeling seasick. The authorities shut the bridge, claiming

A key point in our discussion has been that metaphors integrate reason and imagination and so are useful for meta-theoretical bridging. Combining postmodern fragmentation and hermeneutic integration (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000), metaphors of bridges and bridging provide researchers with the means for building boundary crossing coherence. Yet, this coherence is not found ‘out there,’ waiting to be discovered, but requires an active engagement of a responsive creation and fluid responsiveness (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2008). Similar to the construction of bridges, which may be provoked by troubling water for laying crossable fundamentals, the invention and use of metaphor and metaphorising demands deliberate and coordinated work.

Even more, this effort requires often collaboration from more than one end to another, i.e. being simultaneous, determined from either sides or poles and of the in-between. While bridges are constituted by different components, these bridge-elements may not fit into a coherent whole by themselves. Likewise, ‘syn-integral ity’ is not solely an emergent phenomenon, but results from composite and coordinated endeavours in conceptualising, designing and enacting, though this sometimes includes unfinished ‘bridges to nowhere,’ which may have their own unexpected values.<sup>13</sup>

We foresee in future MOS integrative research an increasing use and significance of bridges and bridging in our current times in which conventional orientations, paradigms and approaches are becoming more diverse and fragmented. Bauman (2000, p. 5) has said that “between the overall order and every one of the agencies, vehicles and stratagems of purposeful action there is a cleavage – a perpetually widening gap with no bridge in sight.”

The need for new kind of bridges will become more important as not only do identities are getting more fluid, but also as social relationships become transitory, generating anxieties and insecurities, while facing liquefaction as disembedding without re-embedding. In an increasingly liquefied world, unpredicted and unprecedented settings, risks and dilemmatic challenges are emerging that are calling for moving beyond social and economic polarization. This can then

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that too many people were using it. The next day, the bridge reopened with strict limits on the number of pedestrians, but it began to shake again. Two days after it had opened, with the source of the wobble still a mystery, the bridge was closed for an indefinite period. Some commentators suspected the bridge’s foundations, others an unusual air pattern. The real problem was that the designers of the bridge ... had not taken into account how the footway would react to all the pedestrians walking on it. When a person walks, lifting and dropping each foot in turn, he or she produces a slight sideways force. If hundreds of people are walking in a confined space, and some happen to walk in step, they can generate enough lateral momentum to move a footbridge—just a little. Once the footway starts swaying, however subtly, more and more pedestrians adjust their gait to get comfortable, stepping to and fro in synch. As a positive-feedback loop develops between the bridge’s swing and the pedestrians’ stride, the sideways forces can increase dramatically and the bridge can lurch violently. The investigating engineers termed this process Cassidy compares this fragility of the bridge to a rational irrationality, explaining why capitalism is crash-prone.

<sup>13</sup> Not all efforts of bridging come to a satisfying end as there are not only unfinished bridges, but also bridges to nowhere, i.e. bridges without purpose to connect and thus leading to nowhere. Yet some of those non-/post-functional bridges to nowhere became an iconic symbol and thus a new, rather idealistic function. One example for this is the ‘Bridge to Nowhere’ spanning the Mangapurua Gorge in Whanganui National Park, which became iconic for New Zealand adventure tourism and is now a major visitor destination.



lead towards new vantage-points of insights and nomadic journeys towards shores of experiences in unknown lands. Hopefully, the outlined syn-integral or pluralistic integration and the associated metaphors of bridges and bridging contribute to develop more integrative forms of theorising of and practicing in organisations and crossings the divides between them.

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