Abstract

This chapter surveys methodologies employed in the study of management ideas. It emphasizes the field's rich variety of data collection, measurement, and inferential strategies. To map this landscape, the authors group studies by the number of cases they examine, from large N event history analyses based on archival data to ethnographies of a single organization. They give particular attention to bibliometrics and discourse analysis because these methods grapple with the interpretive and communicative processes that are central to management ideas and because techniques for capturing and analysing text are currently being revolutionized across the social sciences.

Keywords

discourse analysis, computer assisted content analysis, bibliometric studies, event history analysis, interviews, rhetoric, management ideas, research methods

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CHAPTER 4

METHODS FOR THE STUDY OF MANAGEMENT IDEAS

David Strang and Christian Wittrock

Introduction

In 1955, Peter Blau published his PhD dissertation as *Dynamics of Bureaucracy*, an instant classic that put Max Weber's ideal type to empirical test in a study of two employment agencies. Blau observed workplace interactions on a daily basis for three months and followed up by interviewing each employee in his or her home. The study analysed patterns of cooperation and competition among case workers who relied on each other for assistance while hiding new vacancies from their colleagues under stacks of papers. *Dynamics of Bureaucracy* laid the groundwork for sociological exchange theory and helped foster the empirical analysis of organizational behaviour.

Ten years later, Blau returned to the subject of Weberian bureaucracy with the goal of investigating the relationship between structure and performance. As he recalls in an academic memoir, 'It dawned on me that data on all these considerations can be obtained from records and informants and do not require surveys of all or even a sample of members of the organization, let alone direct observation for months of every kind of group of officials' (Blau 1995: 11). Brief site visits to 156 personnel agencies obtained structural profiles from archival records and agency personnel. Blau et al. (1966) and related articles examined functional interdependencies between size, administrative intensity, formalization, professionalization and the like, and helped give rise to the quantitative analysis of organizational structure.

This tale of two studies reminds us of some fundamental methodological truths. First, there is a trade-off between breadth and depth. Few cases, many attributes; many cases, few attributes. Observation schemes which involve months of direct observation can be applied to a small sample at best, but these are apprehended as multi-layered social worlds. Data collection techniques that require hours of the investigator's time can be applied to hundreds of cases and can be captured with a moderate level of complexity. Data acquisition that occupies nanoseconds can be applied to millions of instances, but nothing other than values on a limited menu of variables is known.

Innovations in research methodology seek to relax this trade-off, capturing larger slices of the social world at lower cost. The workhorse of quantitative research in the social sciences, regression analysis, was introduced as a way of identifying simple functional relationships more economically than could be done via tabular cross-classification (for penetrating critiques of the assumptions and explanatory merit of regression analysis, see Abbott, 1988 and Freedman, 1991). The current explosion of interest in automated text analysis is premised on the notion that machine learning can extract intelligible patterns comparable (or superior) to those identified by knowledgeable human coders, while handling orders of magnitude larger numbers of cases.

Second, Blau's two studies teach us that every way of seeing is simultaneously a way of not seeing. Research methods provide partial insight into an always more complex reality, much like the blind men who each grab a part of an elephant and variously judge it to be like a tree, a snake, a rug, and a spear. Blau (1955) examined interactions within work groups while Blau et al (1966) inspected variation in formal structure. The worlds uncovered by the two projects are complementary; the work groups were embedded in organizational structures while the agencies were composed of flesh-and-blood human beings (surprise!). Too often, trade-offs based on research design are mistaken for ontological commitments.

While it has very general applicability, we recount the tale of Blau's two studies here because methodological complementarities are critical to research on management ideas. The *OED* defines 'idea' as 'any product of mental apprehension or activity, existing in the mind as an object of knowledge of thought'. But mental constructs cannot be directly observed, and must be put into action—operationally or discursively—to be impactful (Sturdy and Fleming, 2003). Scholars measure not ideas themselves but policies, techniques, and behaviours that are informed by those ideas, and by investigating the communicative acts—the sayings and the writings—whereby ideas are pointed to, advocated, and opposed. There is no 'one best way' to accomplish this; instead, we have a menu of methodologies that help bring into focus the many ways that ideas enter into talk and action.

This chapter's first major section surveys some central research strategies in the field. To map this complex landscape in a simple but robust way, we group studies by the number of cases they investigate. The second major section focuses on methodologies employed in bibliometric and discursive analyses of (largely written) text. These deserve special attention for two reasons: because they grapple with the interpretive and communicative processes that are central to management ideas and because techniques for capturing and analysing discourse are currently being revolutionized.

Methodology and Sample Size

We organize methodological choices and their implications by classifying studies by the number of cases they investigate (in common parlance, their 'N'). For heuristic purposes four such categories are distinguished here: Large N, Moderate N, Small N, and Case Studies (a fifth category, Very Large N, may emerge in future work, but is not currently well populated). Characteristic data sources, analytic techniques, and exemplary studies linked to each category are discussed below.

Table 4.1 provides a summary. We should note at the outset that the notion of a 'case' hides ambiguity. For example, in Table 4.1 we classify Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999) as a Large N study because it content-analyses hundreds of articles; the study could alternatively be viewed as a Small N comparison of four techniques (job enrichment, quality circles, TQM, and re-engineering). See Ragin and Becker (1992) and Ragin (2008) for extended discussion, and Strang and Siler (2017) for a related scheme that maps methodological shifts in organization studies over fifty years.

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Large N Research

In research on management ideas, 'Large N' studies generally examine policies, techniques, and structures of a sample of organizations large enough to sustain multivariate models (there is no absolute minimum, but 100 cases are 'barely enough'). Management ideas are both dependent and independent variables here—the organizational practices that researchers seek to explain embody ideas about how to organize, and the explanations feature characteristics of those ideas as contextual or conditioning factors.

A central research design studies the spread of management practices within an organizational population. Event history analysis (EHA) is the technique of choice when attention centres on adoption timing. EHA handles the core methodological challenges of temporal analysis: censoring (the fact that many cases do not adopt during the study's observation period, and may never adopt) and time-varying covariates (the values of causal factors change over time). It also provides a natural framework for the investigation of diffusion processes whereby each event influences subsequent behaviour (Strang and Tuma, 1993), a central mechanism in social network and institutional accounts of organizational change. However, diffusion research is often criticized from a 'translation' perspective for treating diffusing practices as stable and invariant; a fair point, but one that highlights the value of complementary methodological strategies that can be applied at different levels of N.

Tolbert and Zucker (1983) provide a pioneering EHA of civil service reform. Management ideas enter the study in two ways. First, civil service reform—where organizations are staffed by officials appointed based on their technical expertise and insulated from partisan pressures—embodies the project of *organizational rationalization* in general and Weberian bureaucracy in particular. Second, Tolbert and Zucker develop a content analysis of temporally varying patterns of discourse that they link to patterns of adoption. An early period of contestation over the merits of personnel reform is associated with adoption by cities plagued with the problems that civil service reform sought to address. A later era, when civil service procedures became uncontroversial, is associated with widespread adoption disconnected from city characteristics. Tolbert and Zucker's temporally sensitive analysis concretizes the process by which a controversial management idea becomes taken-for-granted and captures the implications of this ideational shift for organizational action.

Davis and Greve's (1997) study of the diffusion of two organizational responses to hostile takeovers—the poison pill and the golden parachute—provides a second exemplary analysis of practice adoption. They note that while economic theory recommends golden parachutes (generous termination packages for executives triggered by a takeover bid) as remedies against managerial self-interest, organizational participants and investors regarded them as giveaways while viewing poison pills as legitimate defences against corporate raiders. Davis and Greve show that poison pills spread rapidly through the thin ties of board interlocks while golden parachutes spread more slowly via the thicker medium of local business communities. Once again, cross-sectional and temporal variation in organizational adoption points to the power of management ideas.

The abandonment of organizational practices is less often studied. This is in part due to measurement difficulties; organizations publicize the often-fashionable practices they adopt while abandonment may be a non-event where techniques quietly fall into disuse. In one of the few studies of both processes, Burns and Wholey (1993) find that abandonment is less driven by organizational and inter-organizational factors than adoption is. There are similarly few studies of intra-organizational diffusion (though see Kostova and Roth, 2002; Strang and Jung, 2009) due to the difficulty of obtaining detailed data on diffusion trajectories within the firm.

Analyses of practice variation shift attention from the timing of adoption to the content of adopted techniques. For example, Westphal et al. (1997) examine hospital usage of twenty practices associated with TQM such as 'periodic assessment of community needs', 'formation of project teams to improve quality', 'senior management training in TQM principles and methods', 'use of brainstorming', and 'use of scatter diagrams'. Similarly, Strang and Bradburn (2001) examine the appearance of twenty provisions in health maintenance organization (HMO) enabling laws, such as whether HMOs are required to have open enrolment periods and whether they must include consumer representatives on their governing boards. And Fiss et al. (2012) code thirteen features of golden parachute contracts (such as whether they include stock options).

Studies of practice variation compare the usage profile of focal organizations to typical patterns within a reference group. Westphal et al. (1997) measure the similarity of each hospital's practices to that of the medical community as a whole, finding that 'conformity' is positively linked to regulatory compliance but negatively linked to organizational efficiency. Strang and Bradburn (1993) show that states in the USA converge on a modal set of legal provisions that was advocated by a national regulatory body, while a small number of politically charged provisions exhibit variation linked to the strength of mobilized actors such as physicians' associations. Likewise, Fiss et al. (2012) demonstrate that more visible firms have less extensive golden parachute provisions that correspond closely to community norms.

Large N research is generally based on archival data generated by regulatory agencies, professional associations, trade groups, and public interest organizations. For example, Davis and Greve (1997) acquired the dates of poison pill and golden parachute adoption from the Investor Responsibility Research Center and proxy statements; corporate interlocks from Standard and Poor's Directory of Corporations, Executives and Directors; and covariates like market value and market-to-book ratio from Standard and Poor's Compustat database. Westphal et al.'s (1997) study of TQM practices utilized data collected by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, Health Care Investment Analysts, and the American Hospital Association. Investigators also utilize ABI/Inform and similar business press compendia to form measures of discourse (as we discuss in more detail below), national statistical bureaus for demographic and socio-economic indicators; and corporate communications such as annual reports and press releases.

In addition to archival sources, many Large N studies draw on organizational surveys—some conducted by third parties and others by the researcher. Outstanding examples of the latter include Osterman's (1994, 2000) telephone surveys of 'high performance' innovations such as quality circles and self-directed teams; Dobbin et al.'s (1993) survey of personnel practices; and Baron et al.'s (1996) study of organizational templates in the high-tech industry. Multi-wave data collection efforts include Lawler and associates' surveys of the *Fortune 1000* regarding their use of human resource and workplace practices, conducted at three-year intervals from the 1980s (see for example Lawler et al 2001) as well as Bain Consulting's biennial inquiry into the use of management tools by their clients and several instruments developed by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound, 2016).

While repeated surveys are becoming more common, it remains a challenge to chart the trajectory of management ideas over time by asking organizations about their practices. One difficulty is a lack of conceptual standardization; when different surveys define practices in disparate ways, the joint picture they present may be incoherent (Nijholt and Benders, 2010). A second limitation is that most surveys focus on 'hot' innovations whose popularity is rising while detailed information about usage during fashion downswings is sparse. A third and perhaps most serious problem is reliance on a single respondent per organization whose identity and knowledge base is generally unknown to the researcher (Marsden et al., 2006). The potential for slippage or distortion is well illustrated by Gray (1993): 60 per cent of respondents to his mail survey indicated that their firms employed quality circles, but follow-up interviews found that only one in eight firms actually had an operating QC programme. An innovative strategy that addresses these shortcomings is provided by Easton and Jarrell (1998), who collected full organizational histories through extended interviews with centrally placed managers.

Moderate N Studies

A second type of analysis works with a moderate N, generally more than 10 and substantially less than 100. Unlike Large N studies, this number of cases is small enough to permit insight into the subjective orientations of actors, a central concern of much work on management ideas. Moderate N studies are at the same time large enough to permit classification of cases into subgroups, though they are generally unable to sustain the multi-causal models and statistical tests that we see in Large N research. The primary data collection technique in Moderate N studies is the interview, which fosters a fluid exploration of meanings.

One research stream within this group examines the strategies and subjective understandings of carriers of management ideas such as consultants. Heusinkveld and Benders (2005) interviewed a sample of forty consultants who had published on popular management techniques to explore obstacles to the commodification of emerging management ideas, discovering much supply-side conflict over turf. Likewise, Heusinkveld et al. (2013) studied thirty-two consultants who worked with a management idea that was seen as ‘old news’. Interviews and publications showed that consultants did not simply abandon the concept, but instead struggled to maintain its viability by streamlining, standardizing, refocusing, and broadening the idea and its implementation. Likewise, Kitay and Wright (2007) conducted fifty-eight interviews to investigate the relationship between consulting rhetoric and occupational roles, identity building, and professional pressures.

Other Moderate N research focuses on managers and workers who are active idea producers as well as audiences for external knowledge carriers. Wilhelm and Bort (2013) conducted interviews with thirteen executives to understand how they talk about management concepts, unearthing four interpretive patterns: as a way of learning from the experiences of others; as a tool that could be used to control organizational change; as a source of external legitimacy; and as collective sense-making. Sturdy et al. (2015) present interview-based research in twenty-five organizations that identifies the emerging phenomenon of 'consultant managers', while Knights and McCabe (2000) examined orientations towards teamworking through interviews with thirty managers and thirty shop floor employees. Similarly, some studies investigate how presentations of management ideas are received by audiences. Clark and Greatbatch (2011) asked subjects to rate video-taped extracts of sixteen speeches delivered by seven management gurus and found that perceptions of charisma were based on presentational delivery rather than content. Groß et al. (2015) conducted interviews with sixty-five managers attending guru seminars to probe how listeners interpreted the presentations, noting that some audience members distanced themselves from the guru's message while others were captivated.

Small N Studies

A third category of studies examines the adoption and use of management ideas among a small comparison set (most commonly two to four). This research design often takes industries, nation-states, or other groupings as cases, gaining insight into macro-structural variability while abstracting away from the specific policies and practices of individual organizations. Small N studies are able to explore how management ideas are produced and used with a wider range of evidence than Moderate or Large N research can, since they forgo consistent measurement at the level of defined units of analysis. It is important to note, however, that these studies work with extensive information on each case; they are differently organized but not intrinsically less complex than large N research.

Robert Cole's (1989) study of small-group work practices in American, Japanese, and Swedish industry provides an exemplar. The structure of these activities differs across the three nations, from Japan's foremen-led quality control circles to autonomous work groups in Sweden and management-led quality circles of the USA, yet they reflect common ideational elements (participation, commitment, autonomy). Cole highlights the national infrastructures that promote organizational change and the key roles of leading corporations and national unions. For example, quality control circles in Japan were sponsored by a national association of scientists and engineers which worked in partnership with industry leaders to produce a vibrant movement. Sweden's autonomous work groups were similarly supported by major firms like Volvo, faltering when corporate interest waned. In the USA, market competition between consultants who struggled to control a weak national association impeded the spread of best practices and helped make quality circles a fad.

Guillén's *Models of Management* (1994) provides a second exemplar, one that studies three families of management ideas and associated practices in four countries. The research uses a combination of organizational surveys, business press discourse, and historical narrative to characterize the reception of scientific management, human relations, and structural analysis in the USA, Germany, Spain, and Great Britain. For example, American and British firms applied human relations techniques extensively while Germany and Spain did not, although the ideology or ideas associated with human relations had considerable currency in (Catholic) Spain. Guillén argues that the diffusion of management idea families depended on a similar pattern of structural change in organizational populations across the four cases, while the identity of key advocates (such as leading firms, the state, and social scientists) varied from country to country.

Small N studies can also take individual companies as their units. A good example is Marchington et al.'s (1994) examination of attitudes towards employee involvement programmes in six firms. While based on employee surveys, these are used to explore contextual factors rather than to develop a model of individual attitudinal variation (as a Large N study might do). Marchington et al. find that programmes were generally well received in three companies that were financially successful and which gave unions and workers a voice, while there was little buy-in when employee involvement was implemented in a top-down manner to achieve cost savings. Similarly, Zbaracki's (1998) study of five organizations details how managers initially approached TQM with hesitation, only to become full-blown advocates after the decision to adopt was made.

Finally, some Small N studies examine the production of management discourse. Clark and Greatbatch (2004) researched the making of six bestsellers by interviewing the many contributors to their production. Beginning with authors, they used a snowball sampling strategy that included ghost-writers, editors, and other stakeholders. Similarly, Nijholt et al. (2014) interviewed ten editors to learn how management ideas come to be discussed in the business press.. They show how editors function as gatekeepers in the diffusion of management ideas, applying selection criterion or norms of newsworthiness such as 'Novelty', 'Controversy', 'Unusual', 'Prominence', and 'Proximity'.

Case Studies

Finally, Case Studies (in our usage) examine an N of one. Like Small N studies, they draw on multiple methods and sources of evidence to develop sophisticated interpretations and causal accounts. They differ in forgoing structured comparison in favour of gaining a more phenomenological insight into the phenomenon of interest by focusing on a single instance. In one exemplary study, Kunda's *Engineering Culture* (1992), the construction of organizational identity and membership commitment in a high-tech company is examined. His ethnographic research shows how framings of appropriate action ('Do what's right') blur the boundaries between the self and the organization. This construction of identity is received in quite different ways by employees depending on their status and expected future with the firm. Kunda is particularly successful in capturing the ambivalence with which the company's 'strong culture' of commitment is greeted by members of the organization, as an ideal, a fact of life, and a problematic slogan.

Strang's *Learning by Example* (2010) examines the benchmarking programme of an elite bank to observe concrete processes of inter-organizational learning and diffusion. The study inverts the usual structure of diffusion analysis, investigating the adoption of many practices by a single organization rather than one practice by many organizations. Data sources include interviews; questionnaires sent to benchmarking teams and to a random sample of employees; observation of quality improvement efforts; inspection of benchmarking reports and corporate policies; and implementation records drawn from organizational archives. Strang finds that the bank emulated prestigious firms outside the financial services industry while giving limited attention to competitors, consultants, and academics. The study also shows that management ideas were selected and modified at every stage; the lessons of external site visits were reworked by benchmarkers into politically viable proposals targeted at the firm's management team while policies formally adopted by executives were altered in the course of implementation.

Some case studies examine organizational fields rather than single firms. An exemplar is Barley and Kunda's (1992) inquiry into the rise and fall of 'conceptions of control' such as industrial betterment, scientific management, and systems analysis. The case here is corporate (organizational) America, approached as a discursive community. Barley and Kunda argue that discourse oscillates between rational and normative concepts in connection with long waves of technological change, a theme further developed by Bodrožić and Adler (2018).

Bibliometric Studies and Discourse Analysis

Bibliometric Research

Bibliometric studies map interest in management ideas over time by counting numbers of publications on a given topic as well as classifying these into various categories. Publication counts are generally normalized by the number of publications per year, though the number of pages may also be used as corrective measure (Shenhav, 1995). Calhoun et al. (2011) uses citation counts of Senge's 'The Fifth Discipline' to trace attention to the concept of the learning organization over a sixteen-year period. While most bibliometric research examines one or a few management ideas, Carson et al. (2000) study sixteen, Thawesaengskulthai and Tannock (2008) twelve, and Pascale (1990) examines twenty-seven. A recent paper by Abrahamson and colleagues (2015) ups the ante by investigating more than 500 management ideas.

Early uses of bibliometric data documented the bell-shaped publication curves of ideas like Quality Circles, Total Quality Management, and Business Process Re-engineering (e.g. Kieser, 1997; Pascale, 1990). This observation led to theorizing about management idea lifecycles and helped inspire the notion of managerial fashion (Abrahamson, 1996). Abrahamson and Eisenman (2008) show how rapid swings of interest in specific techniques relate to longer-term movements in underlying models of organizational change. Carson et al. (2000) link variation in sixteen fashions to features like implementation difficulty and find increasingly short lifecycles over time. By contrast, Strang (2010) and Thawesaengskulthai and Tannock (2008) identify management techniques that do not follow a boom-and-bust pattern. For example, the number of articles per year on benchmarking rises to a moderate level and then plateau, perhaps because the technique was used in support of multiple fashionable practices (TQM, re-engineering, knowledge management) rather than being hyped as a stand-alone solution (see also Benders et al. in this volume).

Bibliometric article counting often utilizes ABI/Inform Global and the Business Periodicals Index along with other databases such as the Dutch ‘OnLine Contents’, Ingenta, and BIDS. Some studies have a narrower scope in targeting specific journals. For example, Walgenbach and Beck (2002) trace the institutionalization of the quality movement in Germany through analysis of 1,515 articles appearing in a single journal. Madsen (2016) suggests that Google Trends can directly capture interest in management ideas by assessing Internet search frequencies. The use of online sources such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn remains largely unexplored in work on management ideas, but are increasingly used in big data diffusion research (Strang and Patterson, 2016; see also Barros and Rüling in this volume).

Search strategies in bibliometric research often rely on a thesaurus supplied by the database provider. But when they do so, they monitor what a coder (rather than the author) later decided should count as an instance of the idea in question. Abstracts are also often produced by the database provider or journal, and it is not always feasible to separate them from those written by authors. Additionally, in searches using online interfaces it is often unclear if one is tapping into key words and abstracts supplied by the author or a (machine) coder. One solution is to search on title or full-text only, but this often leaves the researcher with a slimmer sample. Benders et al. (2007) provide a helpful discussion of these issues.

The use of print media indicators as a proxy for popularity and/or the wider implementation of management ideas is often criticized. Clark (2004) points out that bibliographic research addresses the production of management ideas more than their consumption. However, bibliometric studies have added considerably to our understanding of the diffusion of management ideas and can address research questions that other modes of research are not well suited to answer. Bibliometric measures are more temporally fine-grained than repeated surveys and provide insight not only into patterns of attention but to shifts in interpretation.

With growing computational power and the increasing availability of large text corpora, new approaches to studying discourse are mushrooming. Probabilistic Topic Modelling (Blei, 2012; Mohr and Bogdanov, 2013) and other supervised and unsupervised techniques have attracted much interest across the social sciences. Scholars are increasingly exploring automated readings of texts (Jockers, 2014) and advanced ways of processing corpora (Gries and Stefanowitsch, 2010). We believe that such approaches will increasingly enter management research (for one application, see Strang and Dokshin, forthcoming).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis extends bibliometric research by focusing on the content of textual communications and the rhetorical strategies by which authors make ‘the case’ for management ideas. These studies are often based on close reading of large text corpora (e.g. Giroux and Taylor, 2002; Røvik, 1998, 2002, 2007) as well as explicit measurement strategies. In one exemplary study, Giroux (2006) demonstrates the ambiguous character of management rhetoric by identifying multiple inconsistent definitions of ‘quality.’ In another, Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999) utilize computer assisted text analysis to investigate the shifting claims made about quality circles. They employ the Harvard III Psychosocial Dictionary to identify terms related to positive and negative evaluations as well as emotions and thought. Abrahamson and Fairchild show that the upswing of quality circle discourse was characterized by highly optimistic language connected to emotions while the downswing appears characterized by a more reasoned and negative critique.

Some research examines communication and influence across discursive communities. Barley et al. (1988) investigate the relation between practitioner and academic notions of culture. They use surveys, expert judgements, cluster analysis, and content analysis to show that academic conceptions of culture move towards those of practitioners rather than the other way around. Edelman et al. (2001) show how managerial discourse influences juristic discourse in the area of diversity and civil rights, and Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) detail broad shifts in managerial discourse from the 1950s to the 1990s in France. Similarly, Hirsch (1986) utilizes a content analysis of journal articles to demonstrate dramatic shifts in the framing of hostile takeovers from deviant violations to normalized corporate contests. Walgenbach and Beck (2002) demonstrate that interest in quality management was at first restricted to specialists, then became a topic for broader management, and lastly became a topic for academics. Scarbrough and Swan (2001) compare the discourses surrounding the learning organization and knowledge management, identifying substantial differences in themes as well as connections to the seemingly more distant idea of business process re-engineering.

Other studies have documented how management discourse migrates geographically and occupationally (Benders and Van Bijsterveld, 2000; Engwall and Pahlberg, 2001). Strang and Kim (2005) consider the two-way diffusion of management ideas between Japan and the USA, emphasizing how the meaning of management ideas shifts in translation. For example, Japanese firms interpreted Taylorism as a means of building worker skills and strengthening a pre-industrial sense of community—meanings directly opposed to the Taylorist project in the USA. Americans returned the favour by turning Japanese Quality Control Circles that centred on foremen-led workplace improvements into Quality Circles that made suggestions to management.

One common framework for the analysis of discourse is Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 1993, 2005), utilized in studies such as McPhail and Adams (2016), Thomas et al. (2013), and Sidani and Showail (2013). CDA combines a model of mutual influence between discourse and society, a Foucauldian understanding of power, and an elaborate toolbox allowing a detailed linguistic analysis. CDA is one of many branches of discourse analysis, each with their own tools, approaches, and theoretical backbone (see e.g. Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Andersen, 2003; Howarth, 2000). Other frameworks that have been applied to management ideas include Furusten's (1999) 'ethnographic approach to texts'; Andersen's (2009) Luhmann-inspired discourse analysis; Czarniawska-Joerges' (1990) metaphor theory-based study; Jackson's (2001) application of Fantasy Theme Analysis; and Discursive Devices (Mueller and Whittle, 2011; Whittle et al., 2008). Despite this variety, most discourse analysis scholars argue that the way ideas are propagated has important consequences for organizational life in general, and for power structures and the well-being of organizational members in particular. The implicit assumption is that careful reading of a text can reveal the intentions of its producers and the power structures that lie hidden behind them. In short, there is much more to texts than what they communicate on the surface (Ricoeur, 1981).

Conclusion

Research on management ideas is a thriving field. It is a challenging one as well, because ideas cannot be directly observed but must be studied through their embodiment in labels, techniques, policies, claims-making, and the like. Ideas can be mighty weapons, but to become powerful they must be put into talk and action (see also the chapters by Reed and by Salles-Djelic, this volume). As our mapping of methodological approaches illustrates, researchers have pursued this quarry in many ways, from quantitative studies of formal adoption to interview-based analyses of actor meanings to broad-gauged historical comparisons, and from bibliometric article counts to investigations of the rhetorical tactics of management gurus. This variety of methodological strategies is one of the field's strengths.

All methodologies are both a way of seeing and a way of not seeing. For example, event history studies of organizational adoption generally treat diffusing techniques as static and homogeneous across organizations, assumptions that scholars working within a translation perspective critique as ignoring the interpretive work of organizational actors that reshapes techniques as they move. This is more a research design issue than a theoretical debate. Large N studies focus on the big picture of causal mechanisms and historical change while sacrificing attention to local modification and framing; Small N studies of translation do the reverse. The solution is not to argue about which simplification is better, but to conduct both sorts of studies and bring them into dialogue. As the parable of the blind men suggests, it is vital for those in contact with different parts of the elephant to communicate and learn from each other. Indeed, this is one of the aims of this handbook.

While management researchers have made considerable progress in delineating and investigating management ideas, they can benefit from greater interchange with disciplines at the forefront of the cultural, cognitive, and computational turns. Relatively few management scholars have drawn explicitly on cognitive psychology and linguistics (though see D'Andreta et al., 2016; DiMaggio, 1997; Swan, 1997; Van Rossem et al., 2015). Likewise, computational tools that identify textual patterns in large corpora are only just beginning to be applied in organizational research. These emerging lines of theory, data, and method offer rich opportunities for students of management ideas.

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Table 4.1. Study classification, characteristic data sources, analytic techniques, and exemplary studies

Number of cases	Focal outcomes	Main data sources	Analytic technique	Exemplary studies
Large N	Timing of adoption and variable content of management ideas/practices	Legal/regulatory records Organization surveys	Various forms of regression analysis including event history analysis	Davis and Greve (1997) Westphal et al. (1997)
Large N	Shifts over time in the interpretation and interpreters of management ideas	Bibliometric databases	Portrayal of trends, various forms of regression and cluster analysis	Barley et al. (1988) Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999)
Moderate N	Use and modification of management ideas	Interviews	Categorization into subtypes	Heusinkveld and Benders (2005) Wilhelm and Bort (2013)
Moderate N	Propagation of management ideas	Texts, speeches	Discourse analysis Conversation analysis	Clark and Greatbatch (2011)
Small N	Development of management ideas across organizational fields (often, national business communities)	Organizational surveys, bibliometrics, historical narrative	Qualitative comparison	Cole (1989) Guillén (1994)

Case Study	Reception and use of management ideas in a single organization	Surveys, interviews, archival records, participant observation	Mixed qualitative/quantitative account	Kunda (1992) Strang (2010)
Case Study	Mapping of management ideas/discourses over time in a single organizational field	Organizational surveys, bibliometrics, historical narrative	Mixed qualitative/quantitative account	Barley and Kunda (1992)