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## The Role of Dialectical Interrogation in Review Studies: Theorizing from What We See Rather Than What We Have Already Seen

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**ABSTRACT** Review-centric works receive increasing attention for generating insightful contributions to management and organization studies. Despite this, the literature on theory building has taken little note of their place in the theorizing process. This deserves attention, however, given the challenges reviews face in theorizing in the absence of new empirical observations. Accordingly, these works run the risk of merely summarizing ‘what we have already seen’, instead of ‘maximizing what we see’. Drawing on the strategies of theorizing from similarities and theorizing from anomalies, we propose dialectical interrogation as a critical step in theorizing through which review scholars imaginatively engage in a back and forth inquiry between the phenomenal world of a given field and existing theory. By analysing selected review studies from top management journals, we reveal that theorizing outcomes occur through two ways of dialectical interrogation (consolidative and disruptive). We contribute by demonstrating that review scholars can enter into powerful theorizing through the consolidative or disruptive interrogation of the review data with extant theory to detect emergence and novelty alongside puzzles, conflicts and paradoxes. Dialectical interrogation can address the shortcomings of current theorizing in review-centric works and bears potential for advancing theories of management and organization studies.

**Keywords:** meta-analysis, meta-synthesis, review study, synthesis of knowledge, systematic review, theorizing

### INTRODUCTION

Joining up the interim struggles of theorizing is central for theory building (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017). In the process of theorizing, single theorizing outcomes represent

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the struggles that are part of an emerging story and/or are a stimulus to further theorizing (Langley, 1999; Weick, 1989). Review studies play an increasingly important and more vocal part in this story, providing ‘scholars with the problems and puzzles by which the seeds of new theory are sown’ (LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010, p. 507). A review-centric study constitutes a primary research activity in itself in which the state of academic research in a given field is drawn upon to make sense of existing scholarship (Booth et al., 2016; LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010; Rousseau et al., 2008). Review-centric works therefore denote studies that synthesize extant conceptual and empirical research, embracing a specific set of analytical methods in order to theorize from the literature relevant to a field of research. Complementing the repertoire of more traditional empirical or conceptual pieces, review works stem against the tendency to create and reinforce isolated silos of knowledge that reflect specialization (Kilduff et al., 2011; Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011; Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Thompson, 2011).

Despite the apparent agreement that review-centric works contribute to theory development, the literature on theory building in management has taken little note of their place in theorizing (Langley, 1999; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2011; Weick, 1989). We understand theorizing as interim struggles to be the process of theory building in which activities of conceiving and constructing lead to novel theoretical insights or new or refined explanations of a management phenomenon (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015). This literature has generated substantive insights into building theory from empirical evidence (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Weick, 2014), addressing what makes for interesting and impactful theory (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013); however, the role of reviews in the theorizing process is glaringly absent. We seek to address this shortcoming in the theorizing literature in the field of management and organization studies.

The discussion about theorizing from reviews is mostly dominated by the voices of editors, both of review outlets and annual journal issues dedicated to publishing review articles. In the *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Jones and Gatrell (2014, p. 4) provide their editorial perspective that synthesizing a given body of knowledge aids in ‘breaking down interdisciplinary silos and offering alternative outlooks’. Rather than reiterating the state of the art, review studies ‘make significant conceptual contributions, offering a strategic platform for new directions in research and making a difference to how scholars might conceptualise research in their respective fields’ (Gatrell and Breslin, 2017, p. 3). The *Academy of Management Review*’s editorial marking the shift towards inviting review articles alongside traditional conceptual pieces understands reviews as ‘vehicles for theory development’ (LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010, p. 506). Reflecting on the *Journal of Management*’s quarter of a century of bi-annual review issues, Bauer’s (2009) editorial notes these high-impact scholarly surveys move at an astonishing pace and constitute a major resource for advancing new scientific knowledge.

At the same time, these arguments highlighting the benefits acknowledge the challenges of theorizing in review studies by pointing to inherent tensions in that they must ‘advance original thinking that builds on an integration of the literature reviewed’ (van Knippenberg, 2012, p. 186). We define theorizing from reviews as activities of conceiving and constructing out of the phenomenal world – as represented in the review data – with

extant theory to inform subsequent work. Theorizing is therefore potentially more difficult where the intended contribution of these works is predominantly grounded against the backdrop of the reviewed material (LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010). More critically, given that reviews lack new empirical observations, these works run the risk of summarizing 'what we have already seen', while missing their potential to 'maximize what we see' (Weick, 1987, p. 122). Particularly in mature fields of study, review authors grapple with carving out space for a contribution amidst an already crowded field (Patriotta, 2017). Gaining a better understanding of how reviews can address these challenges in the theorizing process therefore demands further consideration.

To address this aim, we unpack the different rationales for a synthesis of knowledge in terms of the state of the field and the type of content being reviewed. Given the aforementioned challenges review-centric works face in theorizing, we follow Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) to highlight the role of dialectical interrogation as a critical step in theorizing. We define dialectical interrogation as imaginatively engaging in a back and forth inquiry between the phenomenal world of a given field and existing theory. It is dialectical in that it involves continuous reflection on a field's dominant position, other stances, and the theory targeted for assumption challenging. We propose that dialectically interrogating a field unfolds via the strategies of theorizing from similarities and theorizing from anomalies. To gain a better understanding of how review-centric studies address the challenges of theorizing, we conducted a literature review in three top-level management journals. Drawing on our analysis of illustrative examples, we shed light on how theorizing outcomes in review studies can occur via consolidative interrogation (consensus-confirming) and disruptive interrogation (consensus-challenging). We demonstrate that scholars can enter into powerful theorizing through the consolidative or disruptive interrogation of the phenomenal world with extant theory to detect emergence and novelty alongside puzzles, conflicts and paradoxes. Our study therefore addresses the shortcomings of current theorizing in review-centric works through dialectical interrogation that we believe bears potential for advancing theories of management and organization studies.

The contributions of this paper are twofold. First, we add on to the broader debate on theory building (Langley, 1999; Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2011; Weick, 1989) to enrich our understanding of theorizing in the absence of new empirical observations. We contribute to work on dialectical interrogation in theory building (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) by specifying consolidative and disruptive interrogation as a means of consensus-confirming and path up-setting synthesis that informs and stimulates future theorizing. Second, this study builds upon methodological advancements in review research (e.g., Rousseau et al., 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003). While scholars thus far have improved discrete methodologies and techniques (e.g., Combs et al., 2019; Hannigan et al., 2019; Hoon, 2013), we offer a more coherent understanding of how reviews can act as vehicles for theory development through the techniques of grounding the project in dialectical interrogation, attending to rationale-methodological fit and paying heed to theorizing from a synthesis of qualitative evidence.

## THEORIZING IN REVIEW-CENTRIC WORKS

### What, Why and When of Review-Centric Works

Review-centric works constitute a critical research activity in their own right and range from literature reviews, conceptual reviews and historical reviews to systematic reviews, realist reviews, and meta-analyses (for an overview see, e.g., Booth et al., 2016; Grant and Booth, 2009). Regarding the latter, review researchers conducting meta-analyses treat study results as primary data to statistically synthesize bodies of empirical findings that are dispersed across time and publications (Carlson and Ji, 2011; Dalton and Dalton, 2008). The synthesis of quantitative work has made widespread use of the meta-analysis techniques initially introduced by Glass (1977). Meta-analysis is a form of aggregated synthesis of pre-existing statistical findings aimed at aggregating the results of studies to predict future outcomes for situations with analogous conditions (Cooper, 2010; Dalton and Dalton, 2008; Glass, 1977). Its goals include estimating the overall strength and direction of an effect or relationship and estimating across-study variance in the distribution of effect-size estimates and the factors that explain such variance (Aguinis et al., 2011; Cortina, 2003). These effect sizes constitute an important indicator of the predictive potential and practical usefulness of a theory (Aguinis et al., 2011).

By ascribing a more interpretive component to synthesis, other review types constitute an inductive form of knowledge synthesis in order to make interpretations, rather than analyses or predictions, across extant studies (Tranfield et al., 2003). Literature reviews, conceptual reviews or historical reviews consist of different types of evidence, with a set of representative conceptual work or empirical studies being evaluated and mapped. Similarly, systematic reviews constitute a replicable, rigorous, and reliable approach for systematically locating, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing evidence from diverse and fragmented fields (Booth et al., 2016; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Tranfield et al., 2003). Amidst this plurality of review types, these works embrace a specific set of analytical methods such as narrative approaches, content analyses, meta-ethnography, and co-citation analyses to synthesize existing knowledge.

Rather than being conducted arbitrarily, there are different assumptions underlying these review-centric works in the relationship to their research field. In the following, we unpack the different rationales for synthesizing in review-centric studies.

### Rationales for Synthesizing Knowledge

*State of the field.* A first rationale for taking stock stems from the stage of development of the field under review (Jones and Gattrell, 2014), varying from nascent, emerging fields to mature, established fields. Nascent topics in management and organizational studies 'have attracted little research or formal theorizing to date, or else they represent new phenomena in the world' (Edmondson and McManus, 2007, p. 1161), as evident, for example, in organizational cognitive neuroscience, critical business ethics or managerial discretion. In contrast, work on organizational identity, sensemaking or the resource based view constitute mature topics as they encompass 'precise models, supported by extensive research on a set of related questions in varied settings' (Edmondson and McManus, 2007, p. 1159).

In *nascent and emerging fields*, reviews seek to catch a research area or content domain in its early stages. These domains have seen rapid growth with scholars introducing new concepts and phenomena as subject matter for a new scientific domain. In these areas, enough is known about a topic to suggest formal hypotheses; however, not enough is known to do so with numbers alone, or at a safe distance from the phenomenon (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Although a phenomenon's core elements are explored, definitional precision of these elements, their specific boundary conditions and a systematic ordering is still lacking (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017). Hence, the development of robust theoretical foundations is only just evolving, thereby leaving a widely dispersed, loosely connected domain of issues in its wake. Consequently, nascent areas of research are often characterized by conceptual confusion that leaves key concepts poorly defined (Suddaby, 2010).

Alongside these new or emergent fields, reviews might aim to explore an established and well-researched area of content. In these *mature fields*, a theory, perspective or concept has been elevated over time to a pre-eminent position with a rich body of work laying its intellectual foundations. Furthermore, mature domains may be characterized by blurred constructs and potentially useful insights that are likely to remain trapped within disciplines. Given its long-term developments, the field may become 'bifurcated by streams of research that progress in parallel based on their different philosophical underpinnings' (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017, p. 68). The central constructs might be misunderstood or interpreted in differing ways over time, thereby becoming a source of conceptual misunderstanding or slippage. When fields converge, definitions and conceptualizations can proliferate, thereby eroding conceptual clarity. Other mature fields, however, possess clear constructs with one philosophical perspective dominating a topic, yet also hindering future developments.

*Type of content.* A second rationale for conducting a review may stem from the specific characteristics of the type of content to be synthesized in the review. The content refers to the conceptual and empirical material representing a field of research (Haneef, 2013). In this rationale, review articles can only rely upon the evidence available from prior qualitative or mixed methods studies (typically a qualitative meta-synthesis) or can entail quantitative data evidence present in a field (typically a meta-analysis).

Areas of research may be dominated by empirical studies offering rich, detailed, and evocative data that shed light on a new phenomenon, especially in nascent fields (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Empirical evidence in these areas may stem from diverse theoretical underpinnings, empirical applications and conceptual understandings, rendering the clear conceptualization and operationalization of a phenomenon critical. Yet measures are typically not discrete enough to distinguish constructs from separate but related ones. Accordingly, reviews can explore the amount of existing *qualitative studies* to draw overall conclusions from many separate investigations addressing related or similar issues.

Review articles can also aim to only aggregate extant *quantitative evidence*. As topics and theories mature and the size of literature grows, a rich body of research evolves that is dominated by quantitative studies testing a theory in a new setting, identifying the boundaries of a theory, or examining influencing mechanisms (Edmondson and

McManus, 2007). Although rigorously explored and tested by many studies, the magnitude of such effects and whether this is consistent across studies and different types of conceptualizations often remain contested. This rationale refers to drawing overall conclusions from many separate investigations which all address related hypotheses (Cortina, 2003; Cooper, 1998; Hunt, 1997).

Overall, differing rationales for conducting a review may stem from the central features of the field that is under synthesis (nascent or mature) and from the type of evidence populating a field (qualitative or quantitative data). Notwithstanding these different assumptions underlying these review-centric works, however, as vehicles for theory development, review-centric efforts face major tensions in theorizing.

### **Challenges for Theorizing from Reviews**

Despite the widespread agreement that review-centric works contribute to theory development (Kilduff et al., 2011; LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010), the literature on theory building in management has taken little note of its place in the theorizing process (Langley, 1999; Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2011; Weick, 1989). Instead, the theorizing literature focuses on what constitutes a contribution to theory (Bartunek et al., 2006; Corley and Gioia, 2011; Helfat, 2007; Sutton and Staw, 1995; Whetten, 1989). More specifically, there is a rich scholarly debate about the array of approaches in theorizing process, such as articulating a theoretical contribution (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997), building more interesting and imaginative theory (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013) and the distinct importance of narrative or storytelling in theorizing (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017).

In conceptualizing the role of review-centric works in the theorizing process, we refer to the notion of theorizing (Weick, 1995). Theorizing encompasses the process of theory building in which activities of conceiving and constructing lead to novel theoretical insights or new or refined explanations of a management phenomenon (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015). In this view, theory is conceptualized as a continuum where single theorizing outcomes represent interim struggles that are part of an emerging story and/or are a stimulus to further theorizing (Langley, 1999; Weick, 1989). Theorizing outcomes in review works stem from the discovery of new arguments, facts, patterns or relationships. These new insights can culminate in a research agenda, taxonomy, conceptual framework or metatheory (Torraco, 2005) which form the basis for alterations of management theory and/or practice (Kilduff et al., 2011; Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011; Thompson, 2011).

At the same time, however, offering new insights (in the present) that stimulate the field (in the future) is challenging in reviews. Developing powerful theorizing outcomes involves what Shepherd and Suddaby (2017, p. 65) call 'skillfully weaving together prior knowledge (i.e., existing literature) and emerging knowledge (i.e., new empirical observations)'. This is particularly difficult as review studies do not engage in collecting original data in real organizations. More critically, as entering the field is not part of a review project, theorizing from these works cannot be grounded in new empirical observations. Consequently, the current understanding of theory building scholars (e.g., Weick, 2014) regarding theorizing as moving 'iteratively between the gaps observed in the phenomenal

world and those observed in the extant literature' (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017, p. 65) does not map neatly onto review studies.

Given that review-centric works are forced to carve their intended theoretical contribution against the backdrop of the reviewed material (LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010), we follow Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) to highlight dialectical interrogation 'of one's own familiar position, other stances, and the domain of literature targeted for assumption challenging' (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, p. 252). Rather than truth-seeking, we understand dialectical interrogation in reviews to mean imaginatively engaging in a back and forth inquiry between the phenomenal world of a given field and existing theory. Critical for developing theorizing outcomes in reviews, this step promotes a logic of using different points of view, opposing assumptions and conflicting stances to produce a theoretical progression. Drawing on the notion of seeking complementarities and dissimilarities in theory building (Ridder et al., 2014), we discuss in the following how the dialectical interrogation of a field can unfold.

### **Theorizing from Similarities**

Theorizing is informed and stimulated by drawing upon similar theoretical perspectives and addressing complementary phenomena (Suddaby et al., 2011). In order to spur on theory building, theorizing from similarities involves detecting streams characterized by the same core logics and conceptually similar phenomena (Peteraf, 2005; Ridder et al., 2014). Reviews can join up complementary theories that share compatible underlying assumptions as they address a similar phenomenon of interest, albeit not the exact same phenomenon (Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011). Consensus-conforming reviews thus unearth the logic a field is rooted in and identify the common core premises underlying a domain (Connor, 1991). This logic specifies the root assumption of a theory (Lengnick-Hall and Wolff, 1999), with reviews uncovering a single 'grand' theoretical perspective (Eisenhardt, 1989). Accordingly, theorizing from similarities in reviews uses the close fit to seek complementarities across theoretical streams, thereby allowing a field to be integrated more fully (Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011).

### **Theorizing from Anomalies**

Furthermore, theorizing in reviews may be enabled by detecting core logics that are in opposition to the domain's dominant assumptions (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). Seeking dissimilarities relies on uncovering distinct theoretical perspectives, often from across multiple disciplines, that may even address distal phenomena of interest (Peteraf, 2005; Ridder et al., 2014; Whetten et al., 2009). Especially in a mature stage, fields may consist of a diverse set of streams of research that are distinct in their premises, objectives, and key concerns (Conner, 1991; Lengnick-Hall and Wolff, 1999) and refer to contradictory assumptions about constructs and the level of relationships (Lengnick-Hall and Wolff, 1999). Given that reviews draw upon a rich body of empirical and conceptual work, they provide a holistic view and can be fruitful for theorizing from anomalies in a given literature field. Actively seeking anomalies is associated with providing counterinstances of a theory that has taken hold in a field (Burawoy, 1991; Sigelkow, 2007). Hence, reviews are well placed to detect dissimilar theoretical conceptions, unearth unexplained,



contradictory or counterintuitive evidence that yields a violation of theory, and challenge current debates and dominant assumptions in the field (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007; Carlile and Christensen, 2004; Gilbert and Christensen, 2005). Through juxtapositions of paradoxical evidence and theory, consensus-challenging reviews alter the kinds of questions scholars will ask and how they might conceptualize research in their respective fields, thereby triggering the building of new theory (Cameron and Quinn, 1988).

Drawing on these strategies of theorizing from similarities and theorizing from anomalies for dialectically interrogating a field, we seek to gain a better understanding of how review-centric studies navigate the challenges of theorizing. To address this aim, we conducted a literature review in dedicated review journals in the field of management and organization studies.

## METHOD

As part of our literature review, we searched in three top-level management journals that are dedicated to review-centric articles or regularly publish these in special issues, namely the *Academy of Management Annals*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, and *Journal of Management*. In line with recent reviews of the literature on theory building (e.g., Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017), we chose the *Academy of Management Annals* and the *Journal of Management* as these are amongst the highest impact journals in the category of 'Management' according to the Web of Knowledge. Both US journals explicitly invite review-centric studies for submissions and publish them on a regular basis, whether annually (*Academy of Management Annals*) or in two special issues a year (*Journal of Management*). Furthermore, we decided to include the *International Journal of Management Reviews* in our list given that this is the leading European general management journal that is primarily devoted to publishing review studies.

As such, all three journals provide insight into the state of the art of review-centric work in broader management research as compared to other more specialized journals (e.g., *Human Resource Management Review*). Moreover, these journals allow us to explore how researchers synthesize a given body of literature and develop theorizing outcomes, as they explicitly feature review articles as compared to journals which only publish these occasionally (e.g., *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*).

In the next step, we selected key articles for our study from the three journals over a five-year period (2012–17). This literature review methodology enabled us to include relevant works that best represent the different rationales for conducting a synthesis of the literature. Using a maximum variation sampling strategy, we sought to identify studies along key dimensions to illustrate the variable features that are useful for documenting uniqueness and the essential shared aspects that are significant for having emerged out of heterogeneity (Patton, 2002). Our selection strategy was guided by the criteria of variation both a) in the state of the field (nascent and mature) and b) across the type of content of empirical evidence (quantitative and qualitative). Both authors searched in the three top-tier journals for extreme examples in order to capture a maximum variation of dialectical interrogation of nascent and mature fields, as well as dialectical interrogation of different types of content in synthesizing research. This maximum variation selection

strategy ensured that we provide the examples that best represent the differences in theorizing from review-centric works. Resulting in a final set of 11 articles, our illustrative examples include variation across consolidative interrogation of nascent fields (3), disruptive interrogation of mature fields (3), consolidative and disruptive interrogation of quantitative and qualitative evidence in nascent fields (3), and consolidative interrogation of quantitative evidence in mature fields (2).

First, reading the abstracts helped us to ensure that these were review-centric articles, leading us to exclude conceptual articles or articles where the findings do not emerge from the analysis of a broad scope of literature (Callahan, 2010). Thereafter, we carefully read the full text of the studies and categorized them according to their underlying rationales regarding the state of the field (nascent vs. mature) and type of content (qualitative vs. quantitative). In addition, we assessed each article for the theorizing strategy underlying the review project (theorizing from similarities vs. theorizing from anomalies). The former entailed analysing the reviews for the extent to which they identify conceptually similar phenomena and common core premises, and highlight overlapping concepts and common factors. Furthermore, we analysed if the reviews refer to distal phenomena of interest, provide counterinstances of an existing theory and present paradoxical, contradictory or counterintuitive evidence.

Aggregating across the reviews for these strategies enabled us to identify their theorizing outcomes (Gioia et al., 2013). In this crucial step in the analysis, we drew on our understanding of dialectical interrogation as imaginatively engaging in a back and forth inquiry between the phenomenal world as represented in the review data and existing theory. More specifically, we coded the theorizing outcomes of each review to the extent to which it is consensus-confirming (e.g., ‘meta-analytic results on post-acquisition performance that confirm the theory of relative standing’), vs. consensus-challenging (e.g., ‘key meta-theoretical principles that change the nature of the paradox construct from an entity-based to a process-based ontology’). By iteratively linking these inductively identified categories back to the theory building literature, we finally labelled these as *consolidative interrogation* and *disruptive interrogation*.

As depicted in Table I, our set of articles offers different examples of consolidative interrogation and disruptive interrogation from the synthesis of a given field.

## **THEORIZING FROM REVIEWS: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES**

### **Reviewing a Nascent Field of Research**

Review-centric studies may address the body of content in a domain where the research area is still nascent. These fields are noisy, messy and full of conceptual ambiguities. The consolidative interrogation of an emergent domain is a means of seeking commonalities and confirming consensus across a multiplicity of disciplinary voices in fragmented fields.

An illustrative example of the consolidative interrogation of an emerging domain of research is the literature review by Bundy et al. (2016). In crisis and crisis management research, a multiplicity of disciplinary voices abounds without any cross-disciplinary theory. Both theoretical and empirical knowledge is promising, but still rare. Instead, this

Table I. Illustrative examples of dialectical interrogation in review-centric works

<i>Dialectical interrogation</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Key studies</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Consolidative interrogation of a nascent field	Seeking commonalities and confirming consensus across a multiplicity of disciplinary voices in fragmented fields	Bundy et al. (2016); Rothman et al. (2017); Shoss (2017)	‘The internal and external perspectives share commonalities in the way they approach crisis management. For example, a key conclusion from both perspectives is that managers’ and stakeholders’ cognitive capabilities are reduced in a crisis. In addition, both perspectives have emphasized the emotional reactions that accompany a crisis, which may induce pessimism, defensiveness, feelings of trauma and betrayal, ignorance, and grief ...’ (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short and Coombs, 2016, p. 16)
Disruptive interrogation of a mature field	Integrating across a vast and diverse body of literature in a mature field, challenging long-standing assumptions and highlighting paradigmatic differences	McCarthy et al. (2017); Ravasi and Canato (2013); Schad et al. (2016)	‘To some degree, these multiple foci have enriched understanding of the overall phenomenon, and we agree with Cortley and colleagues that multiple perspectives represent ‘opportunities for scholars to keep conversations about OI richly contextualized in their ontological assumptions’ ... Multiple perspectives, however, may also create confusion about how to conduct and to assess an OI study, and, as Brown recently lamented, ‘there is little evidence that authors are becoming sufficiently broadminded to see beyond their own narrow paradigmatic assumptions’ ...’ (Ravasi and Canato, 2013, p. 195)
Quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence	Interrogating the available body of empirical work to confirm or challenge consensus in the initial trajectory of a domain of empirical research	Butler et al. (2016); Van de Voorde et al. (2012); Wangrow et al. (2015)	‘In the present paper, a comparison of different methods adopted by published studies over the last twenty years helped us to outline and discuss paradigmatic assumptions that underlie different bodies of research’ (Ravasi and Canato, 2013, p. 195)  ‘In this context, it is incumbent on the academic community to research, share – and, perhaps most importantly, to critique – the underpinning assumptions and research findings related to what we term ‘organizational cognitive neuroscience’ (OCN). To this end, the present review brings together contemporary empirical research findings to contribute to the consolidation of the OCN field at this stage of its development’ (Butler et al., 2016, p. 543)  ‘In order best to consolidate the OCN field, we argue that more basic science research is needed within and beyond the three clusters of ‘economics, marketing and organizational behaviour. This review has revealed that, while there is clearly significant interest, there remains less empirical research. ... However, the current situation reveals that the other fields of management and organization studies offer significant new terrain for OCN discoveries’ (Butler et al., 2016, pp. 555–6)

Table I. *Continued*

<i>Dialectical interrogation</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Key studies</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Quantitative em- pirical evidence	Interrogating domains of re- search that have advanced over decades to contain a leading theory that is un- derpinned by a rich body of empirical knowledge to consolidate results across differing interpretations and distinct disciplines and find theoretical consensus	Bilgili et al. (2016); Mackey et al. (2017)	<p>‘Organizational cognitive neuroscience is a brave new world of research opportunities, as the frontier of human neuroscience is crossed in the context of management and organizations’ (Butler et al., 2016, p. 556)</p> <p>‘Although numerous theoretical frameworks have been used in abusive supervision research, there has been little direct theoretical guidance for this sometimes disjointed and empirically driven stream of research (Tepper, 2007). ... Thus, moving forward, we recommend researchers testing justice theory in abusive supervision research recognize the central role that perceptions of injustice play in influencing perceptions of abusive supervision’ (Mackey et al., 2017, p. 1954)</p> <p>‘Furthermore, although Tepper (2007) and Martinko et al. (2013) provided qualitative reviews of the literature, no empirical summation specific to abusive supervision has been conducted. Thus, a meta-analysis can make a significant contribution to our understanding of the abusive supervision process, the magnitude of the associations with outcome variables, the empirical impact of design and sample choices, and can help identify areas where more research is needed to increase our understanding of this phenomenon’ (Mackey et al., 2017, p. 1941)</p>

nascent domain lacks conceptual maturity with many of its conclusions and prescriptions derived from case studies or anecdotal evidence. By narratively analysing a selected set of studies on crises and crisis management, Bundy et al. (2016) identify common core concepts and develop a framework that integrates two conceptually similar perspectives across three primary stages of research on the crisis process. This framework directs theorizing in crisis research towards synthesizing the two complementary internal and external perspectives and conducting multilevel research on crises and crisis management. More specifically, it can inform theorizing on the individual, organizational and environmental level factors influencing crisis and the crisis management process, leading the authors to conclude that 'future research should consider more complex theoretical and empirical models in which multiple factors are considered together' (Bundy et al., 2016, p. 21).

A further illustrative example for consolidative interrogation of a nascent field is the study on job security research by Shoss (2017). A clear case for taking stock of the field is made given the conceptual ambiguities, measurement confounds as well as the lack of an overarching framework. By narratively reviewing the body of evidence on job insecurity, Shoss (2017) explores the emerging state of research regarding the antecedents and mechanisms that are theorized to influence job insecurity. The author generates a conceptual framework that not only indicates the antecedents, outcomes, and moderators of job insecurity, but also proposes four mechanisms through which job insecurity affects outcomes. A clear conceptualization of job insecurity and a consensus around construct measurement are provided as well as a framework that informs theorizing on additional moderating effects and offers future researchers a unifying measurement agenda of job insecurity. More specifically, the proposed overarching mechanisms (e.g., stress, social exchange, job preservation motivation, and proactive coping) address complementary phenomena in theorizing on the yet unexplored outcomes of job insecurity.

In a final example of consolidative interrogation of a growing body of research around ambivalence, Rothman et al. (2017) conduct a synthesis of this area of interest that crosses multiple management disciplines such as organizational behaviour, organizational theory and strategy. Despite progress in understanding what causes ambivalence, the authors maintain that research on the effects of ambivalence in organizations remains siloed. Drawing on a traditional literature review, Rothman et al. (2017) pull together research from a variety of fields and narratively analyse these fragmented works to provide key definitions of the different forms of ambivalence, its antecedents and effects. Demonstrating that the myriad negative and positive outcomes of ambivalence can be consolidated around two key dimensions on the effects of ambivalence, theorizing can be informed through mapping these outcomes. This consensus-establishing typology clears the path for theorizing on how the dimensions interrelate, the mechanisms that can lead to the more positive sides of these dimensions and the effects of ambivalence.

### **Reviewing a Mature Field of Research**

Reviews may integrate across a vast and diverse body of literature in a mature field. In these developed areas, the focus is no longer on forging a definition or on key constructs. Our analysis reveals that reviews also challenge the long-standing assumptions that have

taken hold in a body of solid theories. Furthermore, review-centric works disruptively interrogate a mature field's underlying paradigmatic differences to expand to new theoretical lenses, levels and ontologies.

An illustrative example of this disruptive interrogation is McCarthy et al.'s (2017) review on applicant reactions to selection procedures. The authors address a mature field that 'boasts solid theories, rigorous methods, comprehensive measurement tools, and a pool of studies large enough for meta-analytic reviews' (McCarthy et al., 2017, p. 2). Their review indicates how this field has already moved forward and benefited from novel, dissimilar theoretical lenses, changes in recruiting technologies and a focus on internationalization and boundary conditions. The authors offer a conceptual framework as the basis for a more nuanced understanding of the core mechanisms underlying applicant reactions as well as of the established and proposed relationships among variables. Akin to theorizing from anomalies, their extended framework offers a set of assumption challenging future research questions that incorporate new antecedents, outcomes and boundary conditions. This includes the expansion of the theoretical lens, thereby encouraging researchers to explore the distinct theories and theoretical mechanisms underlying the relationship between applicant reactions and key variables.

To stem against conceptual drift, Ravasi and Canato (2013) disruptively interrogate the concept of identity that has amassed growing attention within the last 25 years. In their systematic review, the authors unpack the different paradigmatic premises that have evolved within this field, thereby bringing researchers to use the same label while referring to different facets of organizational identity. To prevent further conceptual proliferation, the authors aim at uncovering the plurality in professed ontological and epistemological assumptions and methodological choices in past organizational identity research. By conducting a content analysis, Ravasi and Canato (2013) generate a framework that not only highlights the methodological opportunities that are central for organizational identity research but also interrogates their paradigmatic differences and their implications for methodological choices. Differentiating between the ontological (i.e., the nature of organizational identity) and epistemological (i.e., the nature of knowledge about organizational identity) assumptions, their framework offers a broader assessment of identity theory that can stimulate path-upsetting work on issues of organizational identity.

A third illustrative example is Schad et al.'s (2016) systematic review of paradox, a field that has diversified over the last 25 years. In the body of work drawing on a paradox lens, scholars offer definitions, constructs and relationships to build theory on paradox, which Schad et al. (2016) argue belies the complexity of the phenomena. At the same time, researchers have explored paradoxical relationships applied to specific phenomena or conceptualize paradoxes as a meta-theory. Based on six key themes that represent the building blocks of a meta-theory of paradox, a future research agenda is offered that can stimulate theorizing on relationships, individual approaches and dynamics. More importantly, the identified key meta-theoretical principles challenge the established camps within the mature field insofar as they seek to move towards a meta-theory of paradox and encourage an ontological shift that changes the nature of the paradox construct (i.e., from an entity-based to a process-based ontology).

## Reviewing Empirical Evidence

In reviews that focus predominantly on the available body of empirical work, review articles can use their synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative evidence to engage in both the consolidative and disruptive interrogation of a given field of research. Our analysis reveals that even at a stage in which a series of academic work emerges that is producing a growing body of empirical evidence, reviews can confirm or challenge the initial trajectory of a field. In the latter consensus-challenging mode, reviews draw on distal perspectives that upset the path-bounded nature of addressing a phenomenon.

A noteworthy example of disruptively interrogating the initial trajectory of a domain of empirical research is Van de Voorde et al.'s (2012) systematic review on employee well-being in the HRM-organizational performance link. In order to unravel the two competing views inherent in this field and explore whether there is more empirical support for a 'mutual gains' or 'conflicting outcomes' view, the authors systematically review the body of empirical work in this domain. Given the enormous variation in measures used, a frequency analysis that counts the positive, negative or not significant effects is conducted to explore the relationships between HRM and three well-being types. Van de Voorde et al. (2012) advance a theoretical understanding of the two competing perspectives that depends on the type of employee well-being studied in the HRM-organizational performance link. At the same time, this review study advocates a balanced approach that combines the two main perspectives, thereby moving this domain to a higher level of abstraction. Van de Voorde et al. (2012) redirect future research projects regarding performance and employee wellbeing into investigating the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspectives simultaneously.

A further illustrative example is the study by Butler et al. (2016) that interrogates the diverse, young body of evidence linking human biology and management and organization studies. According to the authors, this domain is in 'an exploratory phase of its emergence and diffusion' (Butler et al., 2016, p. 554), focusing on the role of mental processes in explaining human behaviour and effectiveness. Via a systematic review, the authors solely synthesize empirical work 'because it is here that data are being produced which are driving the theoretical understanding' of organizational cognitive neuroscience (Butler et al., 2016, p. 543). By narratively analysing these studies, the authors reveal three clusters of activity, covering the fields of social cognitive neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and management and organizations. Among these clusters, Butler et al. (2016) identify a plurality of research methods that have taken root. Given the short life of the field, the authors view this domain as 'a brave new world of research opportunities' (Butler et al., 2016, p. 556). Identifying the clusters can inform theorizing on the biological mechanisms that mediate choice and decision-making along with their neuroscientific methodologies. Hence, reviewing empirical work from these distal fields provides the impetus for a research agenda that disrupts the current trajectory to focus on more basic science research within and beyond the three clusters. In addition, their review redirects future research to move beyond the traditional modalities of measuring effects on behaviour.

In contrast, as an example of interrogating empirical evidence in a consensus-seeking mode, Wangrow et al. (2015) review empirical evidence regarding how research has

advanced in the nascent field of managerial discretion. Their aim is to improve the operationalization of the managerial discretion construct. In order to assess construct validity and the measurement of managerial discretion, the authors conduct a literature review and examine the articles that operationalize and test managerial discretion. Wangrow et al. (2015) narratively categorize the findings of past research that has empirically tested managerial discretion to identify commonalities amongst the antecedents, moderating and mediating factors, and consequences along with their positive or negative effects for managerial discretion. By organizing past empirical evidence into a framework, this review establishes a consensus about more discrete measures that discriminate the construct from closely related antecedents. The framework can stimulate theorizing around the executive characteristics and internal factors affecting the level of discretion (Wangrow et al., 2015).

Review projects focusing on the available empirical evidence can also be a means to interrogate domains of research that have advanced over decades to contain a leading theory that is underpinned by a rich body of empirical knowledge. Here, our analysis shows that predominantly quantitative studies test the antecedents and outcomes of certain constructs as well as mediating or moderating effects with the aim of consolidating results across differing interpretations and distinct disciplines and finding theoretical consensus.

An illustrative example of this consolidative interrogation of quantitative evidence is Bilgili et al.'s (2016) review of post-acquisition performance. While this area of research is characterized by a large body of knowledge, the empirical evidence still remains inconclusive as to the extent to which various factors affect post-acquisition performance. The authors conduct a meta-analysis to quantitatively synthesize the findings of published and unpublished studies on the effect of antecedent factors on executive turnover and post-acquisition performance. More interestingly, Bilgili et al. (2016) transform the meta-analytic results into a correlation matrix and apply structural equation modelling. By examining these proposed links in a mediation model, they determine the best estimate of the relationships among antecedents, executive turnover and post-acquisition performance. Bilgili et al.'s meta-analysis provides empirical generalizations for the observed relations over distinct disciplines and across a large number of primary studies, thereby generating more sound conclusions than from isolated studies alone. More specifically, the study informs theorizing by directing future researchers into the mediating effects of executive turnover towards the relationships between the antecedent factors and post-acquisition performance. Furthermore, the meta-analytic results are consensus confirming for the theory of relative standing, thereby stimulating future theorizing on explaining the high turnover rates of acquired executives post-acquisition.

Consolidative interrogation of a mature body of empirical evidence is also evident in Mackey et al.'s (2017) review. They address the domain of abusive supervision research that has expanded rapidly since the last major review, that is, a qualitative review by Tepper (2000). This area of research reflects a somewhat disjointed and empirically driven research stream with little theoretical guidance and is marked by various adaptations of the way the abusive supervision measure is used (e.g., number of items, anchor scale points) and respondents' cultures have affected the results obtained. The authors, therefore, revisit the way the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision



and justice perceptions was empirically tested. By meta-analysing the correlations of a comprehensive set of studies, Mackey et al. (2017) demonstrate the numerous ways in which Tepper's (2000) measure of abusive supervision has been adapted in research so far. Furthermore, the study consolidates the evidence on the role of justice perceptions in influencing employees' attitudinal and behavioural outcomes associated with perceptions of supervisory abuse. Their meta-analysis stimulates future research that tests justice theory to confirm the role of injustice in influencing perceptions of abusive supervision. Moreover, through consolidating the prior conceptualization and operationalization of variables in abusive supervision research, their review allows scholars to more constructively replicate and extend prior work. Finally, Mackey et al. (2017) establish a consensus around lines of theorizing for a conceptualization of justice and social exchange theories in future research.

## **DISCUSSION**

Thus far, we have argued that review studies play an important role in the interim struggles of theorizing along the continuum of developing theory (Langley, 1999; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015; Weick, 1989). Yet, given the challenges that review-centric works face, they run the risk of summarizing 'what we have already seen', thereby missing their potential to 'maximize what we see' (Weick, 1987, p. 122). Especially in nascent fields, review researchers tend to engage in taking stock and calling for future research in areas where they see a blind spot (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). At the same time, review authors in mature domains grapple with carving out space for a contribution amidst an already crowded field (Patriotta, 2017). This paper set out to gain a better understanding of how reviews can address these challenges in the theorizing process.

Granted, theorizing in review works is an even more difficult step in the process of advancing theory than in traditional empirical studies. Powerful theorizing entails moving iteratively between observations in the phenomenal world and the existing literature (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Weick, 2014). Reviews thus need to tap into the phenomenal world of a given field by interrogating the review data with existing theory in a dialectical way. This forces the researcher to continuously reflect on a field's dominant position, other stances, and the theory targeted for assumption challenging (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). Accordingly, moving back and forth between opposing worlds in dialectical interrogation produces a theoretical progression. Our analysis has shown that theorizing outcomes occur through two ways of dialectical interrogation. We now draw our findings together to discuss how consolidative interrogation and disruptive interrogation allow for theorizing to be stimulated by detecting emergence and novelty alongside puzzles, conflicts and paradoxes.

### **Consolidative Interrogation**

Interrogating the phenomenal world with existing theory in a consolidative way allows review researchers to span across, juxtapose, and link a field's different views into, for example, a research agenda, framework, model or typology (Torraco, 2005). Consolidative interrogation refers to seeking consensus amidst an expanding and more diversifying

knowledge base, thereby focusing on similarities to generate clarification of constructs and relationships. In this way, reviews can aid in ‘separating one’s core construct from the mass “noise” of prior research’ and enhance the ‘analytic precision of the construct’ (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017, p. 65).

Through consolidative interrogation, reviews can yield a research agenda or a framework that poses provocative, new perspectives on key issues that can lead to revisions and theoretical developments in a given field (Hoon et al., 2019; Mays et al., 2005; Torraco, 2005). Thus, emergence is detected by clarifying the constructs addressed in prior work and repositioning the core constructs within a framework. Hence, the consolidative interrogation of a field allows for refocusing insightful, yet disparate approaches on a dominant perspective. Integrating a vast and diverse body of works into a framework can establish a necessary consensus, thereby providing a theoretical structure that was not there before.

In these consensus-seeking works, a taxonomy, typology or conceptual classification of constructs is also beneficial as it allows the systematic ordering of a phenomenon’s core elements. Iterating between the review data and extant theory can lead to typologies which provide a means of describing complex organizational forms and attributes and explaining their different outcomes depending on how these attributes are arranged (Doty and Glick, 1994; Fiss, 2007). We encourage review researchers to devote attention towards these as holistic configurations, thereby unlocking the potential of future research on multidimensional constructs (e.g., Fiss, 2011; Rothman et al., 2017). As theorizing outcomes, typologies enable scholars ‘to move beyond the linear to explore multiple patterns’ and explain multiple causal relationships (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017, p. 74).

A consolidative interrogation in mature domains can provide measurement clarity to constructs that have been operationalized differently in previous studies and might not have (yet) been proven conceptually distinct from existing constructs. As new scholars enter the field, new streams of empirical research introduce further measures, thereby spurring the need for consolidation. By discriminating constructs from closely related antecedents, variables or outcomes, reviews allow for the improvement of measures – one of the pressing concerns in management research (Aguinis and Edwards, 2014; Aguinis and Vandenberg, 2014; Boyd et al., 2005). Moreover, consolidative interrogation entails the rigorous examination, reanalysis and interpretation of evidence across a number of quantitative analyses. By revealing what relationships have been examined so far, novelty is detected in terms of what relationships are still missing. Furthermore, a consensus-confirming synthesis of a mature body of empirical evidence may provide more robust design decisions based on the weight of research evidence. Knowing which relationships to probe further and which to not pursue any longer can lead future research towards more meaningful research designs. Hence, interrogating review data with existing theory in a consolidative way can promote the development of stronger theory by generating more sound conclusions than from isolated studies alone (Donaldson et al., 2013).

### **Disruptive Interrogation**

Our analysis also demonstrates disruptive interrogation plays a powerful part in theorizing through which reviews ‘identify an anomaly or tension’ in a given field (Shepherd

and Suddaby, 2017, p. 61). This anomaly seeking allows scholars to rethink or redirect existing theory and advance theoretical understanding, given that asking better questions will lead to better explanations (Tsang and Ellsaesser, 2011). As assumption challenging is widely acknowledged for theorizing (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), dialectical interrogation entails scrutinizing the underlying theoretical, ontological or methodological assumptions that are reinforced and clung to in a research field. Especially for nascent topics, this typically entails less detailing the stock of knowledge already present, resisting a focus on how gaps could be filled, and moving away from defending an established position. However, reviews conducted in mature fields also benefit from unravelling underlying conflicts, paradoxes or absurd occurrences (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017). As such, disruptive interrogation constitutes a critical step in moving mature but fragmented fields further by offering new or broader perspectives, repositioning core constructs in novel ways and shifting the ontological emphasis.

In disruptively interrogating review data with existing theory, reviews can prompt an ontological or epistemological shift that reframes the nature of constructs and the relationships between constructs (e.g., Ravasi and Canato, 2013; Schad et al., 2016). More specifically, disruptive interrogation may aid in prompting a different ontological emphasis from those used in initial research on the phenomenon of interest. Especially mature areas of research can benefit from adopting an alternative philosophical approach regarding the nature of the phenomenon as well as the knowledge about this phenomenon. Disruptive interrogation, as revealed in our analysis, unpacks the individual paradigmatic premises, thereby leading the researcher to reframe a construct via a shift in ontological and epistemological emphasis. According to Thompson (2011), shifting a construct's relative positioning along an ontological and epistemological spectrum can constitute a richly generative step in the development of a scientific field.

Finally, disruptive interrogation of a given field can constitute an impetus for adopting a new or broader perspective through juxtaposing and linking previously different theoretical foundations (Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Lewis and Grimes, 1999). Through the complexification of the established construct, these shifts can lead to different research logics of action whose different assumptions and orientations inform subsequent work (Kilduff et al., 2011; Morgan, 1980).

Overall, disruptive interrogation moves beyond the 'agree to disagree' approach in a given domain to unpack why disagreement exists and theorize on anomalies to understand management phenomena (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017). In this sense, it is the unanticipated and the unexpected that puzzles the review researcher to forge divergent and new paths in theorizing (Peteraf, 2005; Whetten et al., 2009; Zahra and Newey, 2009). Interrogating the field in a consensus-challenging mode provides evidence that substantial variability exists across studies and aggregates the results from multiple previously conducted research activities, thereby laying the foundation for scholars to conceptualize about these divergent findings in new ways.

It can thus be seen that review researchers can conduct path-upsetting synthesis and, in turn, enter into the process of powerful theorizing. Accordingly, we advocate the disruptive interrogation of review data with existing theory as a way of more actively challenging dominant assumptions, engaging in counteracting consensus and being open to puzzles, conflicts, and paradoxes inherent in a field.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS: MAXIMIZING WHAT WE SEE FROM REVIEW-CENTRIC WORKS**

Drawing on the above discussion, we now offer insights on how reviews can ensure they act as vehicles for theory development. These implications can aid authors in stemming against the risk of self-referentiality in their review projects. Table II provides an overview of these methodological considerations, which we discuss below.

### **Grounding a Review Project in Dialectical Interrogation**

As the basis of any theorizing is a problem statement (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011), we encourage review researchers to adopt a dialectic interrogation logic right from the start. Grounding the project in dialectical interrogation forces the review scholar to reflect rigorously on the field's dominant position, other opposing stances, and the theory targeted for assumption challenging. This can entail seeking out the similarities inherent in a field in terms of a consensus-confirming mode (Ridder et al., 2014). For developing interesting and impactful theory, however, we argue that it also requires the researcher to be attuned to detecting the surprising, absurd occurrences of evidence that make up a given field of research. Rather than using reviews as vacuum cleaners to tidy up an entire field (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) and thus neatly point to underexplored areas in the room, reviews can benefit from finding the crumbs in the corner. For within these crumbs often lie the anomalous aspects, the unexplained, paradoxical or counterintuitive evidence which can allow for imaginative theorizing.

Grounding the project in dialectical interrogation further requires researchers to be reflexive of their own positionality in the review. Demonstrating reflexivity includes careful consideration of the underlying assumptions in a field and reflecting on the role of these assumptions in constituting the topic under study (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). Rhodes and Pullen (2018) draw attention to the need for reflexivity in reviews when noting that despite being systematic, researchers bring their own subjectivity into the review project in constructing and representing the subject of their inquiry. Adopting a dialectical interrogation logic from the outset, therefore, includes critical awareness and reflection of one's own role in both reviewing and re-constituting the literature.

### **Ensuring a Fit between the Rationale for the Review and the Choice of Methodology**

Especially from journal editors' perspectives, meta-analysis and systematic reviews seem to be valued more than more narratively oriented literature reviews in terms of meeting standards of clarity, rigor and replication (Jones and Gatrell, 2014). However, depending on the field of research and the content of the material under review, we propose that all of these methodologies have their strengths.

The advantages of a literature review, for example, are especially evident in emergent fields which are characterized by inconsistency, a fragmented body of knowledge, lack of a universal language and an absence of coalescing and binding theories (Adams et al., 2017). Here, literature reviews aim at evaluating a selected set of key papers

Table II. Overview of methodological considerations for review researchers

<i>Elements of research design</i>	<i>Nascent areas of research</i>	<i>Mature areas of research</i>	<i>Empirical evidence (qualitative and/or quantitative)</i>	<i>Empirical evidence (quantitative)</i>
Problem statement	Problematising underlying assumptions regarding theories, research, methods, or practices	Problematising theoretical and methodological developments; Problematising separate lines of research or disciplines	Problematising assumptions regarding construct measures or methodology	Problematising contradicting ideas, theories, statements or facts
Type of studies included	Primary reviews, conceptual and empirical articles	Primary reviews, conceptual and empirical articles	Primary empirical (qualitative or quantitative) studies	Similar empirical quantitative studies
Dominant method-logy- in-use	Typically literature reviews	Typically systematic reviews, some literature reviews	Literature reviews, systematic reviews, some meta-synthesis studies	Meta-analysis studies, some systematic reviews
Coverage of literature	Representative studies: Key articles chosen by the subject expert	Typically comprehensive search and selection: All relevant published and unpublished studies, including grey literature	Search and selection of all qualitative and/or quantitative studies relevant for the research question	Comprehensive, representative sample
Analytical techniques	Typically narrative analysis: Analysis may be chronological, conceptual or thematic	Typically thematic analysis, frequency analysis or a content analysis	Qualitative and/or quantitative methods for synthesizing empirical evidence (e.g., narrative analysis, frequency analysis)	Statistical methods for extracting and analysing primary data
Theorizing outcome	Core construct and core relationship clarification; systematic ordering of a phenomenon's core elements	Repositioning core constructs New or broader perspectives; underlying assumptions and ontological shift	Clear construct measurement and conceptual distinction; higher level of abstraction	Hypotheses about divergent findings; decisions on future research designs

that are exemplary for the development of a research field as a whole (Rousseau et al., 2008; Torraco, 2005). Literature reviews are typically based upon a narrative analysis where past research findings are evaluated verbally or conceptually. Granted, these approaches bear the risks of bias, misinterpretation, familiarity and selective usage to cite only the research that confirms the reviewer's interpretations (Cook et al., 1997; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). At the same time, literature reviews are acknowledged for their potential in exploring a phenomenon's core elements in a nascent area of research (Mays et al., 2005; Torraco, 2005).

In mature and fast-moving fields, most of the knowledge might reside in a large quantum of textual data (Duriau et al., 2007; Mays et al., 2005), including conceptual articles, book chapters, dissertations, conference proceedings as well as unpublished working papers (Adams et al., 2017; Rousseau et al., 2008). Consequently, systematic reviews are worthy of consideration as they encompass a fruitful way to capture a mature domain's full body of knowledge (Booth et al., 2016; Cook et al., 1997; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). However, the narrow, prescribed procedures and strict selection criteria of a systematic review might not always be appropriate for synthesizing a nascent domain. In those instances, the more dynamic, flexible and iterative nature of a literature review may be more beneficial to address the fluidity of emerging fields.

A further rationale of reviews is to solely focus on the body of quantitative and/or qualitative studies present in a given domain. A systematic review or a meta-synthesis is apt in a field has not yet the level of maturity necessary such as in a meta-analysis (Combs et al., 2019; Hoon, 2013). A mature areas of research, however, bears the potential for statistically meta-analysing its comprehensive set of quantitative studies (Aguinis et al., 2008; Cortina, 2003; Donaldson et al., 2013). This methodology allows applying inclusion criteria for quality (Aguinis et al., 2011) and avoiding bias analysis (Kepes et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding these advantages, not all studies in the field of management research allow a meta-analysis to be conducted (Cook et al., 1997; Tranfield et al., 2003). In these cases of heterogeneity, a systematic review or meta-synthesis is an appropriate alternative design over the usage of bibliometric analyses which are useful for capturing trends in publications, but less beneficial for developing theorizing outcomes as the review data itself is not fully engaged with and exploited. From the foregoing discussion, we encourage review scholars to take the broad range of different methodologies into consideration, thereby selecting techniques that best fit in terms of the relationship to the research field (Edmondson and McManus, 2007).

### **Paying Heed to Theorizing from a Synthesis of Qualitative Evidence**

We provided several illustrative examples in our study that stimulate theorizing through dialectically interrogating the empirical evidence in a given field. Meta-analysing quantitative data is acknowledged as common practice in management and organization studies (Aytug et al., 2012; Carlson and Ji, 2011; Schmidt, 2008). In addition, recent work highlights the role of quantitative empirical findings in the abductive process of inquiry (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017). Yet, there is a glaring shortage of theorizing from a synthesis of primary qualitative data in the management and organization studies discipline.

This can be attributed to the lack of methodologies – until recently – deemed as rigorous for these researchers to publish such reviews.

However, qualitative meta-analysis is starting to gain momentum with researchers drawing upon this methodology for advancing a field from the synthesis of qualitative data (Garavan et al., 2019; Habersang et al., 2019; Rauch et al., 2014). This movement draws on scholars who advocate the benefits of qualitative synthesis (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2007), with a growing expansion of scholarship devoted to developing the methodology of a qualitative meta-synthesis (Combs et al., 2019; Hoon, 2013). We call for dialectical interrogation in meta-syntheses as these review projects are especially apt for theorizing from the body of contextualized, often messy qualitative findings that might have been otherwise neglected.

## **CONTRIBUTION**

Although there is a rich debate around theory building (Langley, 1999; Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2011; Weick, 1989, 2014), theorizing from review-centric articles has been largely missing. We first contribute to these debates on the process of theorizing by highlighting dialectical interrogation as central for theory building (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). By specifying consolidative and disruptive interrogation as a means of consensus-confirming and path up-setting synthesis, we enrich our understanding of theorizing in the absence of new empirical observations. We show that scholars can enter into the process of powerful theorizing through the consolidative and disruptive interrogation of the phenomenal world – as represented in the review data – with extant theory.

Second, this study builds upon methodological advancements in review research (Rousseau et al., 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003). By offering insights for review researchers on theorizing, we direct this debate towards novel and impactful ways of conducting review-centric studies. Scholars have developed increasingly sophisticated techniques with regard to systematic reviews (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009), meta-analysis (Aguinis et al., 2008; Cortina, 2003), meta-synthesis (Hoon, 2013) or topic modelling (Hannigan et al., 2019). These studies predominantly explore discrete and isolated questions on review methodologies. Building on this work, we offer a clearer understanding of how reviews can ensure they act as vehicles for theory development through the techniques of grounding their project in dialectical interrogation, attending to rationale-methodological fit and paying heed to synthesizing from qualitative evidence.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper was motivated by the challenges of theorizing in review-centric research and the impression that the bar is set high for reviews to provide new insights aimed at stimulating theoretical advancements of a field. More critically, review works run the risk of merely summarizing ‘what we have already seen’, instead of ‘maximizing what we see’. Drawing on the strategies of theorizing from similarities and theorizing from anomalies in review articles, we highlight the need for the dialectical interrogation of a field. As a

result of our analysis, we offer two ways of interrogation (consolidative and disruptive) as a critical step in the process of theorizing. Through the consolidative or disruptive interrogation of the review data with extant theory, scholars can enter into the process of powerful theorizing. We hope that these insights will allow review-centric studies to take a seat at the table alongside traditional methods in stimulating the advancement of theory in management and organizational research.

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