Dutch studies on work and organization

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Abstract

A review of the Dutch literature on work and organization in the nineties brings about the following assessments: a growing preference for micro-approaches, such as work teams; an increasing interest in change processes and participation issues; a rising number and diversity of theories and concepts: a greater tendency to rely on subjectivist, heuristic, interpretative and constructivist approaches; and, not least, more and more attempts to construe theory which is relevant, i.e. theory 'to-be-used' in practice. For three other propositions, however, we could not find sufficient support: we did not encounter large-scale inter-organization analyses, impressive attempts to theory integration, or a prevalence of harmony models.

1. Introduction

For more than one decade now, we have been used to favouring and conducting cross-national studies; we welcome and appreciate more and more this type comparative studies in a range of areas, such as cultural differences, variations in business structures, educational systems, HRM, and particularly on the structure and functioning of (comparable) organizations in various countries. We could do the same thing for academic theory and research themselves, i.e. for the methods, the concepts, the theories, and the specific issues scholars in different countries tend to apply and to be involved in. All these scientific activities can very well differ over countries as well. They can also be explained, provided our comparative study designs are valid. This article may be considered a modest Dutch contribution for such an endeavour. Foreign colleagues, studying work and organization, can read here what developments I observe in my country; so, they can check to what extent their context shows similar trends, or not, and why it does so.

Developments in the study of work and organization, in The Netherlands as well as elsewhere, are difficult to describe: several disciplines (such as economics, sociology, and psychology) and even inter-disciplines (labour relations, management) are involved. And not only are organizational structures and processes the object of study, but also the issues of work processes, task structures and job contents.

As far as particularly Dutch *organization* studies are concerned, the latest edition of Lammers et alii (1997) has to be recommended; these authors especially focus on developments in organizational sociology including its growing emphasis on organization design and intervention. With respect to *work* or *labour*, the Evers et alii (1998) book seems the most adequate source. The two books attempt to qualify general trends in these two broad areas. This article, however, will deal with that theory and research specifically that closely relates to *work* and the *work organization*. Consequently, *organized work* will have a central position here.

Earlier work on this subject (Van der Zwaan 1998) was commissioned by WESWA, a community encompassing all Dutch scholars addressing a wide range of themes such as the work organization, the quality of working life, employment conditions, labour markets and labour relations.

This contribution will particularly draw upon content analysis, and even do an attempt to 'test' a number of propositions formulated on beforehand. Theoretical and methodological perspectives will get special attention. I shall start to present a brief sketch of what, in my opinion, happened to the study of work & organization over the last app. thirty years. It forms the background of my interpretation of the relevant data. These data particularly derive from Dutch journals, dissertations and conference papers.

2. Dutch history

When over-viewing approximately thirty years of developments and attempting to categorize themes and periods, I roughly formulate the following propositions, while referring to the graphical representation in figure 1.
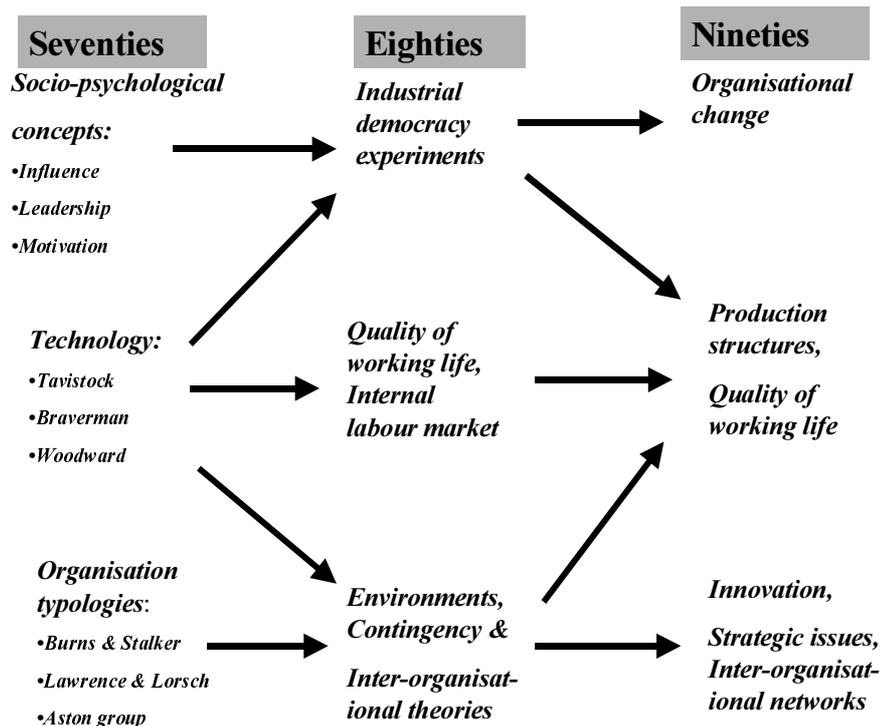
Seventies

Socio-psychological concepts:
•*Influence*
•*Leadership*
•*Motivation*

Technology:
•*Tavistock*
•*Braverman*
•*Woodward*

Organisation typologies:
•*Burns & Stalker*
•*Lawrence & Lorsch*
•*Aston group*

Eighties

Industrial democracy experiments

Quality of working life, Internal labour market

Environments, Contingency & Inter-organisational theories

Nineties

Organisational change

Production structures, Quality of working life

Innovation, Strategic issues, Inter-organisational networks

Figure 1. Three decades of work & organisation research

In The Netherlands, the *seventies* were dominated by three major topics of interest: first, the mostly social-psychological endeavours of leadership, motivation, influence, co-determination, attitudes, and group dynamics; second, the broad interest in the concept of technology; and third, a great many attempts to construe organizational structure typologies. Good illustrations of the first category are Berting & De Sitter (1971) and the yearly conferences (and proceedings) by the *BSS (Bedrijfssociologische Studiedagen)*.

The second category (of technology) is very heterogeneous in its composition. In the UK, it featured at least three independent frames of reference: the Tavistock or early socio-technical approach, the Woodward type of research, and the Bravermanian or 'labour process' way of theorizing. They were entirely independent as to their conceptual frames, their methods of analysis, and their socio-economic ideas, notwithstanding the fact that they all fully embraced and shared the common notion of technology. In the Netherlands, certainly the socio-technical and the Woodward approach were rather popular, then. Several dissertations owed their inspiration there. The Labour process approach had hardly been launched by Braverman, Nonetheless, in the Netherlands the idea of a gradual work quality decline had already got some sympathy.

With respect to the third category (of structural contingency typologies) I only refer to the Aston school as well as their predecessors Burns & Stalker (1961) and Lawrence & Lorsch (1969). This contingency paradigm then was, and at present still is very vivid in the Netherlands (see Lammers et al. 1997). In figure 1, the category of technology is given a position in the middle of the seventies' column, since it produced a threefold continuity in the eighties (see arrows), especially in The Netherlands.

In the *eighties,* the following lines are of interest (all of them, at least partly, 'technology follow-ups' from the seventies). One line, a two decades-long tradition of studies on participation and influence, is exemplified by and ending up with the well-known field-experimental project on so-called industrial democracy in ten Dutch firms, a large-scale study subsidized by the government (De Man 1988). Many of these projects, and certainly the latter experiments found some inspiration in socio-technics, but formed meanwhile

also a continuation of the social-psychological and small-group interests. Another line was the quality-of-working-life stream, which featured in the particularly Dutch debate between the Labour process proponents and those dedicated to the Socio-technical approach (Buitelaar 1988, Van Klaveren 1994, Mok 1994, De Sitter 1987, 1994). See also the 1989 and 1990 volumes of the *Tijdschrift voor Arbeidsvraagstukken*. A related item was the segmented internal labour market (Van Hoof 1987, Glebbeek 1993). The third line was the very organization theory perspective which comprised much empirical (and theoretical) analysis at the organization level (Koot 1980), and so much study on organizational typologies, the interfaces with the environment (Lammers 1993, 1997) and inter-organizational relationships (Van Gils 1978, Godfroij 1981); they were mostly contingency-oriented studies.

Following the developments over the *nineties*, I am inclined to conclude that the experiments on industrial democracy resulted in a double stream, first a renewed interest in organizational change and organizational development (e.g. Boonstra et al. 1996, Van Eijnatten 1996, Mastenbroek 1997), and second a renewal of socio-technical thinking ending up in what we nowadays call Modern Socio-technical Theory (MST) with its main architect being De Sitter (1987, 1994). This theory pays substantial attention to the very production structure, and the corresponding quality of working life. However, the latter concept essentially diverged from the labour quality concept in the Labour process approach (LPA), the sustained popularity of which we can also observe in the nineties (Huijgen & Pot 1995, Vos & Buitelaar 1996, Van Klaveren & Kooistra 1991, Post-groep 1991, Van Ruysseveldt 1989, Benders et al. 1999). In MST the concept Quality of Working Life (QoWL) is considered a derivative of the production structure, whereas LPA sees it as an implication of the organizational power structure.

Finally, the 1990s decade shows the trends indicated in the bottom right part of figure 1: an ongoing interest in organization-environment interaction and inter-organizational relationships (Lammers 1993, 1997). In the management literature, these are paralleled by such concepts as strategic management, innovation and networks (see, e.g., the Dutch journal of *Bedrijfskunde*). These themes, however, are rather far from my 'work & organization' focus in this article, except innovation (for example, Dhondt & Vaas 1996). As a matter of fact, the innovation issue was many times related to production management and task structures, mainly in the context of MST-oriented research, for example in a number of dissertations (e.g., De Leede 1997, Simonse 1998).

Below, I shall more sharply focus on this 1990s period, which was roughly characterized above. Doing this will further specify the features that especially profile this decade, and are likely to herald the beginning of the new millennium.

3. Propositions

Before going through the literature and attempting to substantiate those features, I will describe my suppositions. The word 'supposition' is Latin by origin, whereas its Greek counterpart (transcription) reads: 'hypothesis'. Neither of them do I prefer: the first comes close to an assumption which evades testing essentially, the second requires testing strictly, on the contrary. A good word in between seems 'proposition'.

My propositions are firm impressions, and so guiding questions. They relate to a variety of items, such as application or utilization (the pragmatic relevance of concepts), aggregation levels (shop-floor or higher-level perspectives), the role of empirical research and the methodologies used (case studies, qualitative methods, experiments), the diversity of theories (e.g. transaction costs, contingency), dominant paradigms (e.g. systems or action model), but also the prevalence of network ideas, new management concepts, production and operations management, and the role of participatory and interpretive approaches.

These items can be compressed into two paradigmatic schemes, one of which shows the dimensions of 'applied' versus 'academic', and 'macro' versus 'micro'-level; the other the dimensions of 'harmony' versus 'conflict' and 'process' versus 'structure', as figure 2 illustrates.

	Academic theory, Analysis, 'Espoused theoy'	
Macro & meso, Sociological, Social structures		Micro, (Social)psychological, Individual actors
	Intervention theory, Application, 'Theory-in-use'	

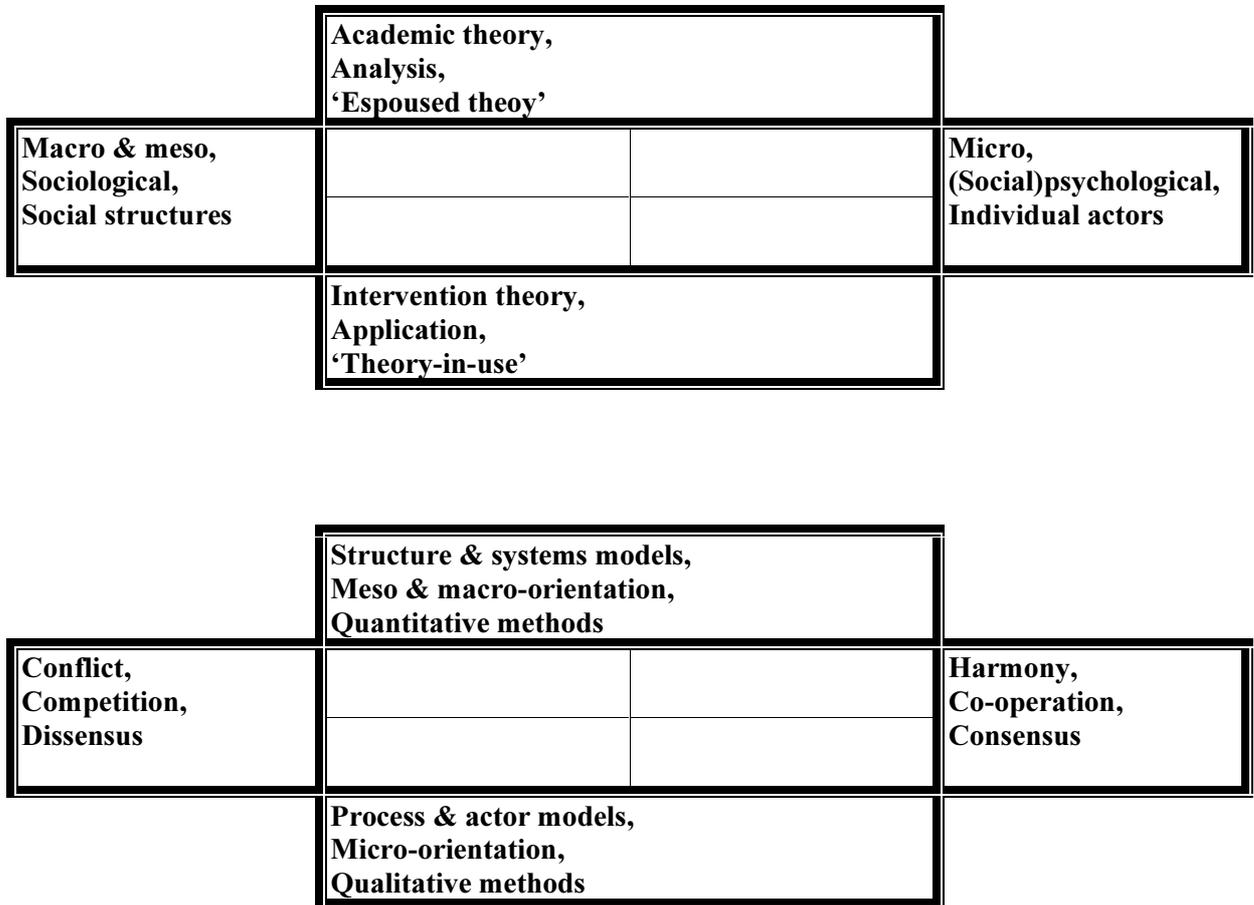|	Structure & systems models, Meso & macro-orientation, Quantitative methods	
Conflict, Competition, Dissensus		Harmony, Co-operation, Consensus
	Process & actor models, Micro-orientation, Qualitative methods	

Figure 2. Two two-dimensional paradigmatic schemes.

The two schemes in figure 2 represent common thinking in the field of 'work & organization' as well as in the domain of management theory. The above one encompasses the well-known Argyris distinction, next to the even more familiar 'aggregation level' divide. The scheme below displays two dimensions, which were formulated by Lammers (1993) and Berting (1992) respectively, and have become common in The Netherlands. These schemes help me to position and formulate at least 8 propositions.

While referring to the above scheme (in figure 2), I expect(ed) to encounter:
1. a drift towards utilization (application), and so to management science (theory-in-use), urged by a growing need to problem solution, e.g. how to support change processes, and how to design new structures;
2. a growing interest in micro-systems and micro-processes, e.g. team work, self-directed teams, production lay-out, group dynamics, self-organizing, and group performance;
3. and meanwhile, however, also an increasing orientation on supra-systems: external markets, inter-organizational alliances and co-operation, and networks.

The scheme below (figure 2) allows us to formulate the following three propositions:
4. a rising inclination to apply process and actor approaches (and so concepts related to change management) rather than to use structural and systems models;

5. a preference for harmony or consensus models (co-operation, participation, consultation, co-determination) rather than models of competition or conflict (including concepts of power, coalition, interest, negotiation, and conflict);

6. and, consequently, a considerable involvement in theory comparison, theory confrontation and, possibly, some attempts to theory integration, as the propositions 4 and 5 seem to invite to.

The developments described in these propositions can easily be associated with changes in the methods applied, as follows.

7. in empirical research, or the field of description: predominantly of a qualitative, interpretative nature, mostly with (in-depth) case studies and hardly structured interviews, which seem to have become more popular than ever before.

8. in operations practice, or the field of prescription: a growing number of new management concepts, new production and new labour concepts, as an antidote against the classical Taylor-based high-division-of-labour concept.

The numbers 4 and 5 are of special importance, as the 'systems-and-parties' model, the 'structure-and-actor' perspective, and the 'harmony-and-conflict' idea are well-known in the Netherlands. Referring to these notions, I observe little coverage of the parties' model (Lammers 1983, 1990, 1993, 1998) which assumes multiple stakeholders with diverging and even interfering interests; in other words, I do not encounter many political analyses of organizations. This seems, nevertheless, accompanied by a tendency to drop systems' and structure models in favour of actor approaches (Godfroy 1995). Consequently, these actor and process approaches prefer harmony assumptions.

4. Methodology

As far as the eight propositions will turn out to be plausible, they are to be seen as further specifications of the above general description of the nineties. Their tenability was checked by a systematic scrutiny of the literature on work and organization. For this purpose, an adequate sample was drawn from Dutch publications during the nineties' decade, including recent textbooks, dissertations, conferences and, evidently, Dutch journals.

The latter category includes *Tijdschrift voor Arbeidsvraagstukken; Gedrag & Organisatie; M&O, Tijdschrift voor Organisatiekunde en Sociaal Beleid;* and *Bedrijfskunde, Tijdschrift voor Modern Management.* In the Netherlands, these four journals together are considered to reflect adequately the main lines of current thought and research on work and organization. Colleagues in the field confirm this adequacy. The first two feature as core journals, since they particularly address the relevant items in a genuinely scientific way: the first (*TvA*) is highly sociology-oriented, the second (*G&O*) has a clear affiliation with social-psychological issues. The other two journals (*M&O* and *Bedrijfskunde*) serve an 'interface function' between science and practice: they translate academic insights ('espoused theory') into 'theory-in-use' in behalf of management. So they are undeniably interested in scientific research, but particularly from the perspective of managerial relevance, i.e. application. *M&O* generally engages in organization theory, mostly for the benefit of management consultants. *Bedrijfskunde* encompasses a much broader range of management disciplines, such as marketing, production, HRM, business development, et cetera. The latter two are also highly valued by social scientists. Particularly, the volumes from 1993 through 1995 were studied: they contain 388 articles, all of which have been the object of my analysis.

The analysis was conducted as follows. First, all the articles were 'scored' by the subject(s) dealt with. The result was an enormous amount of scores, because of a large range of (possible) subjects (see Van der Zwaan 1998b). Then, this huge and unstructured inventory was compressed (Van der Zwaan 1998b) into the main categories of 'operational relationship' (work organization), 'employment relationship' (employment conditions), and labour market and labour relations issues. For this distinction, I refer to Fruytier

(1994). Finally, my familiarity with the material resulting from this analytic operation allowed me to score each of the four journals on all of the 8 propositions in terms of plusses (confirmation) and minuses (rejected) and zeros (not applicable or doubtful). I realize that this approach does not assure that all potential subjectivity is banned. On the other hand, this approach provides more structure as well as more intimate knowledge about our object of research than the usual freewheeling-type of trend studies do.

Similarly, I screened all 180 dissertations concerned (over the same period), as well as all the relevant conference papers (WESWA 1996) and a large number of Dutch (text)books in the period between 1990 and 1998 (Van der Zwaan 1998b). These nine years cover more than the three-year period of the journals: it was necessary to get sufficiently large numbers; now we began earlier (1990) and stopped later (1998).

As far as the representativeness of the material is concerned, one complication, however, remains to be solved. There are, evidently, many Dutch scholars who publish at least part of their work in international (mostly English-language) journals, and so the conclusions from my search might turn out biased. We presume, however, that this problem is, in fact, less serious that it seems, since all our Dutch colleagues also publish in their own language, so they are part of our sample.

5. Outcomes per data source

The final conclusions as to each of the eight propositions will be described in chapter 6. Before, in this chapter I will conduct a detailed analysis of the various 'sources' resulting in a description of each journal and every publication category (visualized in table 1).

Proposition	*M & O* (71)	*Bedrijfskunde* (149)	*Arbeidsvraag-Stukken (76)*	*Gedrag & Organisatie (92)*	*Proefschriften (dissertation) (180)*	*WESWA - Conferences*	*Textbooks*
Utilization Application (1)	+	+	--	+	+	+	+
Micro-Systems (2)	--	?	+	+	+	+	+
Supra-Systems (3)	--	+	+	--	+	?	--
Process & Actor (4)	+	+	?	?	+	+	+
Harmony Approach (5)	+	+	--	--	--	--	+
Multiple Theory (6)	?	?	+	?	?	+	+
Qualitative Methods (7)	--	+	+	+	+	+	+
New mngmt Concepts (8)	--	+	+	+	+	+	+

Legend: + high; -- low; ? doubtful.

Table 1. Eight propositions scored per data source

5.1 Journals

The management journal *M&O* appears to show little interest in current items such as participatory redesign, information management, quality issues, networks and innovation. The concept of labour hardly occurs: a very small minority of articles deal with such dimensions as internal labour relations, work organization, employment conditions, internal labour markets, and working conditions. Interestingly, however, much attention is paid to culture, change management, consultancy, organizational learning, and personnel management. Moreover, these items tend to feature more and more theoretical abstraction and generalization. Nonetheless, they continue a pragmatic orientation, i.e. a drift to theory utilization, a clear preference for process approaches instead of expert and structural ones, and models of consensus and harmony rather than conflict, coalition, party and interest. Furthermore, I do not see any move toward meso-levels of aggregation (regions, industries, networks). This is noteworthy, as higher-level theory and analysis constitute a general trend in the management literature, at present. And finally, I did not encounter micro-systems studies, no confrontation of theories, and not too much methodology.

The other management journal of *Bedrijfskunde*, provides articles of a different content and perspective, in the main. Not only does it distinctively address the well-known functional business areas such as personnel, marketing, and production, it also appears to find network and industry level approaches attractive, in contrast to *M&O*. This parallels the general trend of stipulating the role of business environments and networks between companies. So, information management is also paid much attention to, as well as new production concepts, such as business process redesign, lean production, and socio-technical designs. Flexibility, mobilization, segmentation, participation, leadership, motivation or self-regulation are definitely not on the agenda either! Comparably to what was stated above, there is a growing drive toward pragmatism in theory building and an increasing emphasis on process approaches, while conflict models of organizational reality are also missing. The culture concept and theories on organizational learning and change raise little interest, which in turn strongly deviates from *M&O*. Communication and co-ordination, on the contrary, are extremely current themes. And so are the methods of organizational diagnosis and intervention.

In *Tijdschrift voor Arbeidsvraagstukken*, meso- and macro-issues obtain a reasonably high score (two fifths of all articles): trade union membership, de-centralization of the labour relations system, labour market opportunities of professions, ages and sexes, efficiency of employment agencies, et cetera. Furthermore, I see an 'inward-looking' trend, and so a growing number of company-centered themes. Variables that frequently recur are: gender, ethnicity and age in relation to job and wage discrimination as well as vocational and educational training in relation to increasing employment opportunities. Unexpectedly, the items of internal labour market mobility and internal labour market segmentation do not occur very often. They surface no more than participation, absenteeism and co-determination, which also seem out-of-date issues at present. With respect to the work organisation, the most popular items seem to be work load, quality of working life, group work, new organization concepts, task integration, and poorly paid manual labour. Though, they only get a moderate 'plus' score. Meanwhile, the subjects of technology, automation and production systems typologies hardly come up. They equally seem to have disappeared from the present agenda. Finally, this journal is genuinely scientific, which includes various theories, no harmony bias, a preference for empirical studies and methodologies and no priority to utilization.

As far as *Gedrag & Organisatie* is concerned, gender, ethnicity and age are also popular items, in contrast to vocational education and training. Internal labour market segmentation and mobility do not enjoy high interest either. On the contrary, this journal pays much attention to personnel selection, appraisal, job analysis, work study, and remuneration as well as communication and conflict handling. In the area of the work organization, quality of working life, stress, work load, and group autonomy are featuring, but also and in particular the classical subjects of work satisfaction and work motivation.

Group work or team-based work and the so-called new production concepts get a moderate coverage, mostly under the terms of (integrated) organizational development (renewal) or (modern) socio-technical theory. Finally, this journal again is scientific, i.e. it welcomes a diversity of theories and empirical approaches. It has, however, some more inclination to utilization than the previous one.

Three more evaluations of the two last journals should be added yet. The first is that cross-national and cross-industry comparisons play a substantial role in *Tijdschrift voor Arbeidsvraagstukken* (*TvA*), whereas they are missing in the other journal *Gedrag & Organisatie* (*G&O*). Second, surprisingly, the item of personnel or human resource management is nearly absent in *TvA*, while receiving much attention in *G&O* (personnel instruments, leadership, motivation). Third, understandably, both these journals comprise few articles on design, development, application, implementation, and intervention, in contrast to the management journals. Utilisation of research outcomes does not turn out a paramount option: analysis forms the heart. However, this holds much less for *Gedrag & Organisatie*, which proves rather practice-oriented, as I already stipulated. Meanwhile, it also continues its interest in the subjects that sociologists preferred in the seventies, such as leadership and motivation.

5.2 Dissertations & conference papers

The 180 *proefschriften* (dissertations) deal with information management, production and operations management, consultancy theory, external labour markets and labour relations, corporate governance and strategy, cross-cultural management, innovation, team production, gender relations, and the like. The *WESWA* conferences mainly focus on strategies and processes of organizational change, empirical relationships between innovation and quality of working life, whole-task groups, shop-floor management, lean production, socio-technical theory, employability, the employment relationship, and new production concepts. The dissertations and papers support most of my hypotheses: twelve out of sixteen; they reject them in only two cases: the harmony approach proves not dominant, twice.

The greater part of the conference papers elaborate on such issues as the strategies and processes conditioning organizational change, the relationship between the quality of working life and innovation, the theoretical underpinning and comparative evaluations of whole-task groups, the employability concept and employment contracts, the growth and decline of management fads and fashions, production control models versus socio-technics. These themes relate to a very Dutch distinction between the employment relationship, employment conditions, internal labour relations on the one hand, and the production organisation, task structures, and work place set-up on the other: we have come to term them the contractual and the operational relationship respectively. This Dutch distinction draws upon the debates between an updated version of the labour process approach and a re-thought variant of the socio-technical theory, as I said above.

5.3 Textbooks

According to table 1, particularly, the textbooks provide the strongest 'support': only one hypothesis features a minus sign: supra-systems. My comments on how the recent Dutch textbooks score on each of the eight parameters reads as follows. As regards the utilization issue, it can not be denied that this trend does exist. Teaching programs in management education are booming, while university faculties and academic chairs of sociology or work and organization are passing away. These have been replaced with faculties and chairs of management. The applied nature of most dissertations is also unmistakable. Equally, in the many books dealing with new organizational concepts the drive towards applied and action research seems irresistible. The popularity of re-design theory is symbolic for this trend (De Sitter 1994, Huijgen & Pot 1995, Van Eijnatten 1996, Van Hooft 1996, Vos & Buitelaar 1996, Van der Zwaan 1997, Christis 1998). Furthermore, application-oriented are particularly also the textbooks on personnel or human resource

management (Kluytmans & Van der Meeren 1995, Gaspersz & Ott 1996, Paauwe & Huijgen 1996).

Second, as far as the micro-system is concerned the overwhelming interest in self-managing work teams, group dynamics implied, is evident. I only mention Kuipers & Van Amelsvoort (1990), Van Amelsvoort (1996), Van Amelsvoort & Scholtes (1995), Boonstra et al. (1996), Van Eijnatten (1996), Haak (1994), Hoogerwerf (1998), Peeters (1994), De Leede (1997), Molleman 1994), Simonse (1998), Verkerk et al. (1997). Apart from this, there is another theoretical mainstream at the micro-system level, which is entirely unrelated: the rational actor approach, which draws on economic organization theory (rational choice, agency and transaction cost theory), for example in the Inter-university Centre of Sociology (see, e.g., the dissertations by Wielers 1991, Batenburg 1991, Glebbeek 1993, Van der Meer 1993, Blumberg 1997, and ICS reports 1995 and 1997), and in a few business economics departments (e.g. Wolfs 1992 and Schwan 1993). This theory is even so concentrated on individual behaviour that it might be 'accused' of far-reaching atomism or reductionism (see Lammers et al. 1997, p. 449).

With respect to the micro-system's orientation, it is important to point to the classical theme of de-centralization. Lammers (1997) spends many pages on describing the impacts of organizational sociology on design and implementation theory. Although he admits that the sociological contribution to the very design theory has been limited (p. 631), he clearly stipulates one particular principle: organizing the 'optimal balance or tension between autonomy and dependency'. Hereby he observes a strong interest for the issue of de-centralization while referring to such authors as Burger (1992), Kastelein (1990), Mastenbroek (1996), and De Sitter (1994). I consider this decentralization concept related to the above utilization and micro-system categories. Both concepts, the modern 'bottom-up notion' of self-regulation, and the traditional 'top-down idea' of de-centralization are largely concurrent.

The third category of supra-systems is hard to come across in Dutch books. We saw above that networks, inter-organizational relationships and co-operative ventures (e.g. Godfroij 1995, Mijs 1989, Van Gils 1978, Van der Zwaan 1990) enjoy a paramount position in management journals as well as dissertations. The explanation might be that during the eighties and nineties organizational sociology in our country lost its interest in inter-organizational networks in favour of new perspectives such as 'explanatory' or 'rational choice' sociology, or 'neo-institutionalist' or 'economic organization' theories coming up from business economics (Lammers 1997). Meanwhile the ideas of networks, alliances and partnership (Nooteboom 1994) became popular in the management fields of innovation, logistics and strategy; but not in relation to work and organization.

Fourth, process, actors and change are nowadays highly preferred subjects, rather than structure approaches. Good examples are Boonstra et al. (1996), Doorewaard & De Nijs 1998), Van Eijnatten (1996), Hoogerwerf (1998), De Leeuw (1994), Schuring (1997). Even complex theoretical ideas by Giddens (1990) were used in an attempt to connect process and structure (Meeus 1994). Also Lammers (1997, p. 636-661) claims that organizational 'dynamics' tend to over-class organizational 'statics', when referring to Boonstra (1991), De Leeuw (1994), Mastenbroek (1996), Ramondt (1996) and Cozijnse & Vrakking (1995). All this shows the shift from structure to process approaches, from expert to participatory or co-development approaches: see such notions as consultation and coaching, negotiation, co-development, participatory design, organisational learning, and conflict management.

Fifth, as to the harmony models versus the concepts of parties, coalitions, conflict and power, I follow Lammers et al. (1997) where they describe Mastenbroek's (1993, 1996) notions of organizational parties, their power relationships, their bargaining processes and conflict management (p. 642, 658). However, I agree much more with his next statement (see p. 661) saying that Boonstra et al. (1996) actually feature 'the face of a fairly harmonious socio-cultural systems model'. This is exactly what all the socio-technical literature is about! It demonstrates the atmosphere of peace, consensus, harmony and congruence, rather than parties that are difficult to reconcile. All literature related to application seems

to 'suffer' from such a harmony bias, whatever their recognition of all kinds of 'resistance to change'. So I am confident to score the sixth item validly with a plus sign.

Sixth, the usage of multiple theory and theory comparison are also given a plus sign. Not only had the debate between labour process adherents and socio-technics proponents a conspicuous place in the journal *Tijdschrift voor Arbeidsvraagstukken* (1989 & 1990), the discussion was again reopened and repeated in Huijgen & Pot (1995) and Van der Zwaan (1997). Further on, Ten Have (1993) confronted socio-technical with transaction cost theory, Fruytier (1994) socio-technical with labour process theory, Meeus (1994) socio-technical with structuration theory, Van der Zwaan (1999) socio-technical with labour process and societal effect theory, Vos & Buitelaar (1996) socio-technical with transaction cost theory, Hoogerwerf (1998) complemented socio-technical with organizational learning theory, and finally Christis (1998) critically reviewed and compared some of these theories in order to understand the mechanisms of organizational stress. Mostly, modern socio-technical theory is part of the analysis. Apparently, it provides 'a common theoretical core ..., that ... can make an important contribution both to explaining problems and to designing better organizations' (Van Hees 1995). Lammers (1990, 1993, et al. 1997) made some efforts to categorize the myriad of existing theories, and he concludes that there are only two general perspectives, a systems and a parties 'model'. Whereas he claims that these two paradigms are to be considered complimentary, and so should be utilised in research accordingly, Kieser (1995) believes that the ongoing process of theoretical diversification can not be stopped anywhere. Schreuder & Witteloostuijn (1992) claim the the 'confrontation of approaches can lead to theoretical progress' (Van Hees 1995), whereas Godfroij (1995) agrees with Kieser (1995) in accepting the inevitability of an ever increasing diversity, and advocates in-depth research on so-called 'crystallization points', such as innovation, work organization, and HRM. All this means that we have also seen so far a vivid discussion on theory as such, whatever ambiguous its conclusions are as yet.

Seventh, the methodology subject can be described as a mere mirror of all the above trends. There is an abundant amount of literature in this area (Den Hertog & Van Sluijs 1995, Hutjes & Van Buuren 1992, Jonker 1990, De Leeuw 1996, Ramondt 1996, Verschuren & Doorewaard 1995, Van der Zwaan 1998). They all advocate the study of processes, in-depth studies of single or multiple cases, preferably following an interpretative 'qualitative' approach rather than applying 'quantitative' and neo-positivist methods. Good examples are also the dissertations by Roberts (1993) and Benschop (1996).

Finally, the new management concepts, the new production and organisation concepts can, undoubtedly, be given a plus mark, as all of them appear to penetrate somehow in the dominating bulk of the applied literature. Empowerment, lean production, business process re-design, the mini-company, self-managing teams, socio-technics, control capacity, organisational learning and knowledge management are referred to rather often (Vaas 1995, Dankbaar 1996, Van Hooft 1996, Dhondt & Vaas 1996, Boonsta et al. 1996, Van Eijnatten 1996, Karsten & Van Veen 1998). The first issue of the *Bedrijfskunde* journal in 1998 was especially devoted to new production concepts!

6. Conclusions

The main conclusions can be read from table 2, which compresses table 1 by adding up along the matrix rows. First, I consider five propositions 'confirmed': they concern utilization, micro-systems, process & actors, new concepts, and methodology. Among these five, there are in total only four deviant (minus signs) and three ambiguous (question marks) observations, which are partly due to the journals' natures. The second conclusion says that with respect to supra-systems, multiple theory, and harmony approach the outcome is by and large negative, so I tend to 'reject' these three propositions. My initial ideas as regards a 'harmony' and a 'supra-systems' approach should definitely be dropped,

although in each case three observations are in conformity. As regards 'multiple theory' it is doubtful whether the four question marks should be judged either as questionable or even as negative. All in all, these three propositions are not supported by the findings, certainly not enough.

Neither do they receive any support from Evers et al. (1998) who in their overview article claim that 'the issue of inter-organizational networks and alliances has been taken up more by management and business economics than by work and organizational sociologists' (p. 28) and that 'integration between disciplines has its limits' and 'has been hampered' (p. 25). They explain this with reference to the great many disciplines that engage in labour research in our country nowadays: 'the domain of labour and organization studies is fragmented' (p.25). The many multi-disciplinary schools of management (*bedrijfskunde*) play a dominant role: they seem to add fragmentation rather than make attempts to integrate perspectives and concepts. Similar fragmentation can equally be observed even in the HRM field (Looise & Paauwe 1998, Maenhout & Van Hoof 1993, Kluytmans 1999), one of the *bedrijfskunde* areas that are important in this evaluation.

As regards the 'harmony' item, I must add one more remark: it seems that the application-oriented journals and books tend to think in terms of harmony, at least compatibility of parties indeed, whereas the more academic-analytic literature goes on also studying competing interests and conflicts (see table 1). When assessing that application-oriented research and theorizing raise more and more attention, I consequently can neither fully confirm nor decline the 'harmony' hypothesis.

	+	?	--	Result
1. Utilization	6	0	1	+
2. Micro-systems	5	1	1	+
3. Supra-systems	3	1	3	--
4. Process & Actor	5	2	0	+
5. Harmony approach	3	0	4	--
6. Multiple theory	3	4	0	--
7. Qualitative methodology	6	0	1	+
8. New management concepts	6	0	1	+

Table 2. Overall assessment of eight propositions

Returning now to the two schemes in figure 2 and my eight propositions, I conclude the following.
1. Within the framework of the above scheme in figure 2 and my propositions 1, 2, and 3, a move has been taking place from academic theory and analysis ('espoused theory') towards intervention theory ('theory-in-use'), very much in the field of what I called micro-systems.
2. Within the framework of the scheme below in figure 2 and my propositions 4, 5, and 6, we see a move from structure and systems' models towards process and actors' models, whereas we can hardly draw a conclusion for the continuum of conflict and harmony.
3. With reference to the propositions 7 and 8, I would state that the qualitative-method observation constitutes a concomitant development of my second, and so foregoing, conclusion, while the new management concepts naturally result form the move described in the first conclusion.

7. Discussion and interpretation

Figure 3 visualizes a further interpretation of these outcomes. We see that application, utilization, and relevance seem to get more and more priority. Two important (inter-dependent) 'practice' areas (middle box in figure 3) are: work teams and team work on the one hand, and change, learning and participation processes on the other. Each of these endeavours, however, in turn requires real efforts to develop (new) theory (single-headed arrows), i.e. theoretical underpinning of design and development, particularly at micro-level. The 'theory' boxes at the figure 3 top and bottom comprise a few examples of such well-known theoretical focuses.
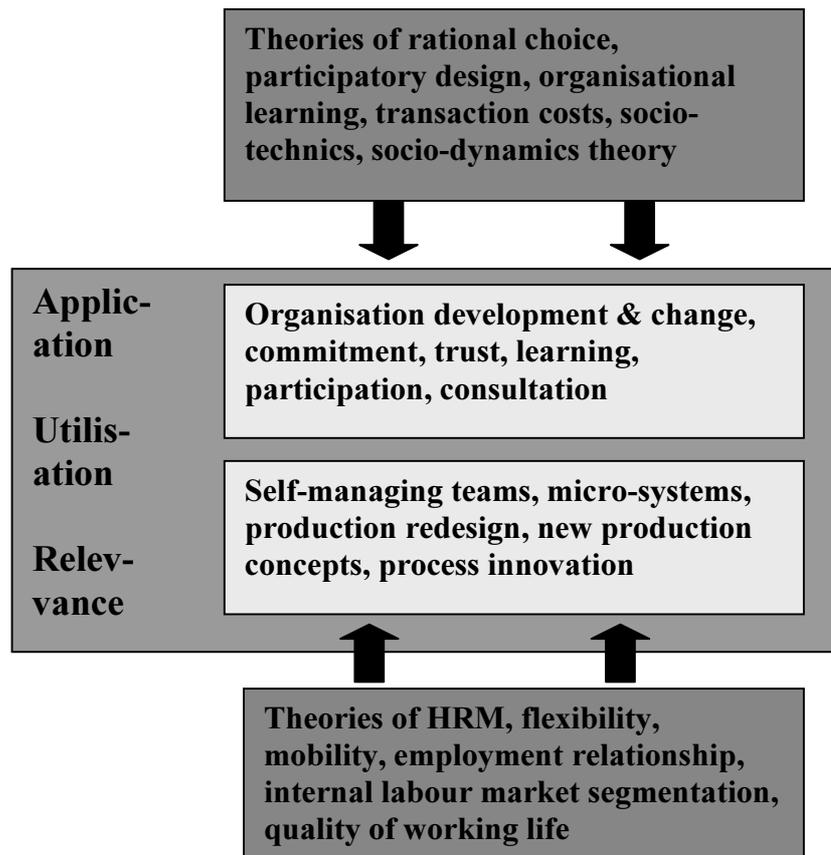

Figure 3. Two practice areas and two related theory domains

Looking into the future I now could provide figure 1 (at the beginning of this article) with one more column (at the right-hand side) stipulating what trends I observe for the near future. They are, in brief: first, a growing preference for micro-approaches; second, more and more interest in change processes and participation, third, an ever expanding number and diversity of theories and concepts, fourth a tendency to rely on subjectivist, heuristic, interpretative and constructivist approaches, fifth and not least, attempts to design relevant theory, i.e. theory 'to-be-used' and mostly mirroring more than one of these four points.

A final interpretation as well as summary of my findings can be read now from figure 4. For this purpose, I make use of an integrated model (see figure 1), including the Lammers' (1993) and Berting's (1992) conceptual schemes.
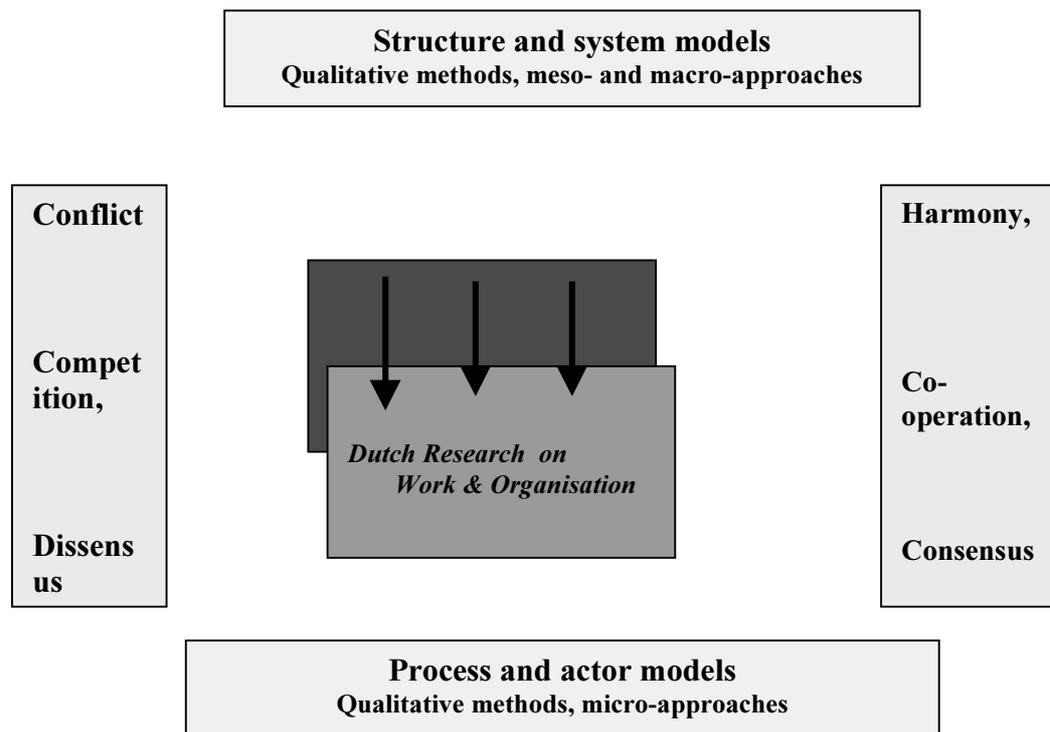
Figure 4. Trends in terms of two paradigm dimensions

The top end of the vertical axis represents structuralism and systems models, whereas the bottom end displays actor, party models, and process approaches. The horizontal axis opposes the concepts of conflict, dissent and competition (left) to consensus, harmony and co-operation at the right end. I think I have observed now a rather strong downward force, perhaps accompanied with slight pressures from left to right. What can not be read from this figure 4, however, is that the quest of relevance, application, and intervention is growing and possibly soon prevailing. Perhaps, this drift toward utilization accounts for actor models, interpretative approaches and harmony views.

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