

Lectures in Language, Culture, and Communication
30.11.2021

Multimodality in Organizations and Organizational Research: Approaches and Applications



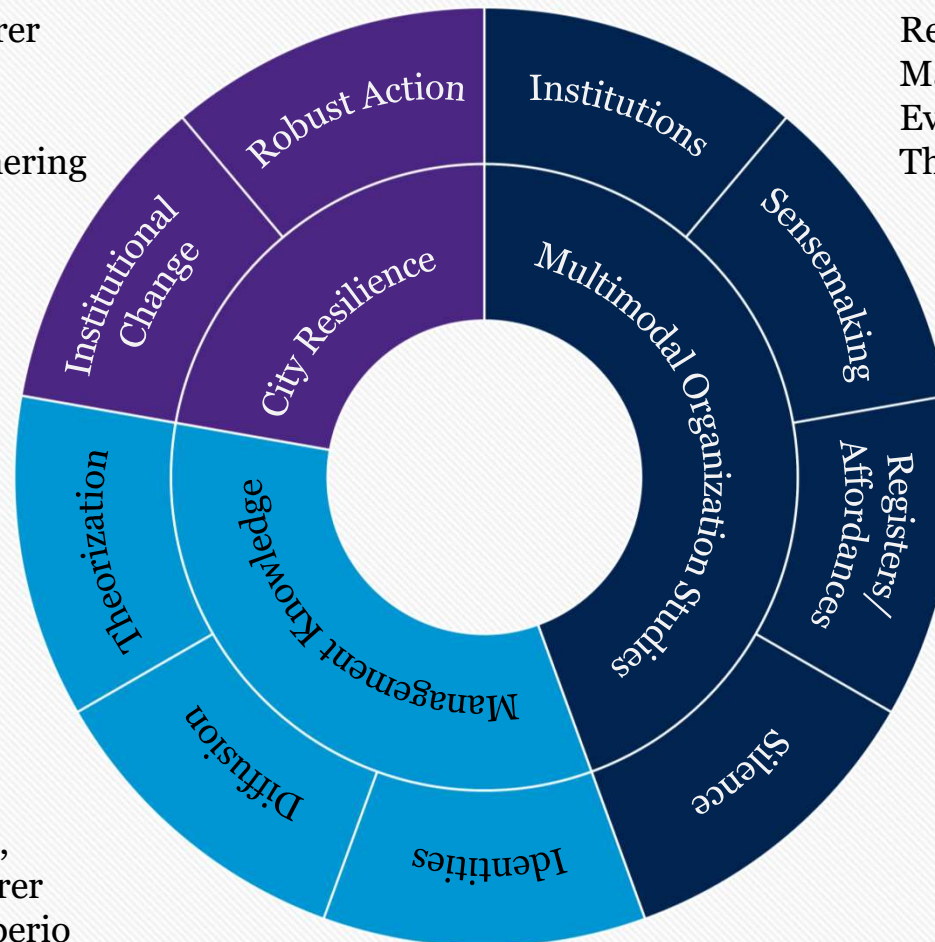
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A few words about me

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Article

The Interlinking Theorization of Management Concepts: Cohesion and Semantic Equivalence in Management Knowledge

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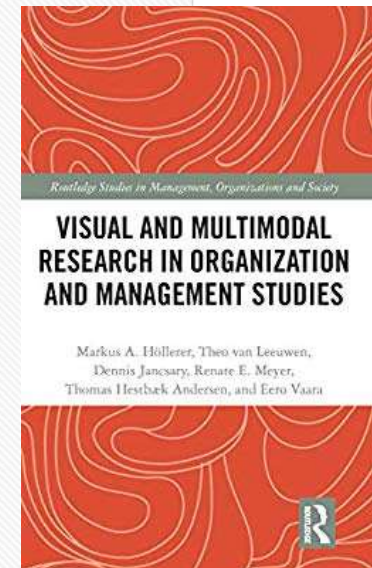
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Organization Studies
1-27
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Part 1

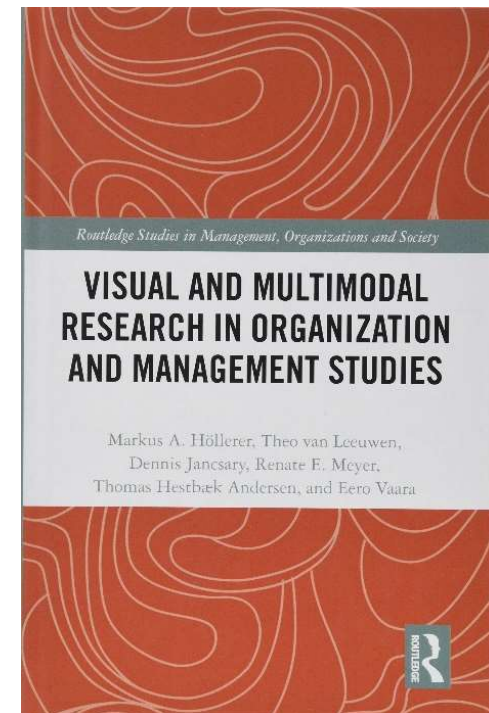
Introducing our perspective on multimodality



Multimodality

The way we understand it

- Mode as: “a **socially made and culturally given** semiotic resource for making meaning” (Kress, 2010: 79).
- Semiotic systems, just like verbal language, are part of a group, field, or society’s **shared stock of knowledge** (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013).
- Institutions as „sedimentations of meaning” resp. „crystallizations of meaning in objectified form” (Berger/Kellner, 1984) **in any shared sign system.**
- Modes are situated in particular **social, cultural, and ideological contexts**
 - Different eras and cultures, but also different life-spheres will engender distinct forms of expression.
 - The development and institutionalization of distinct distributions between semiotic modes define what can be done with verbal and visual signs.

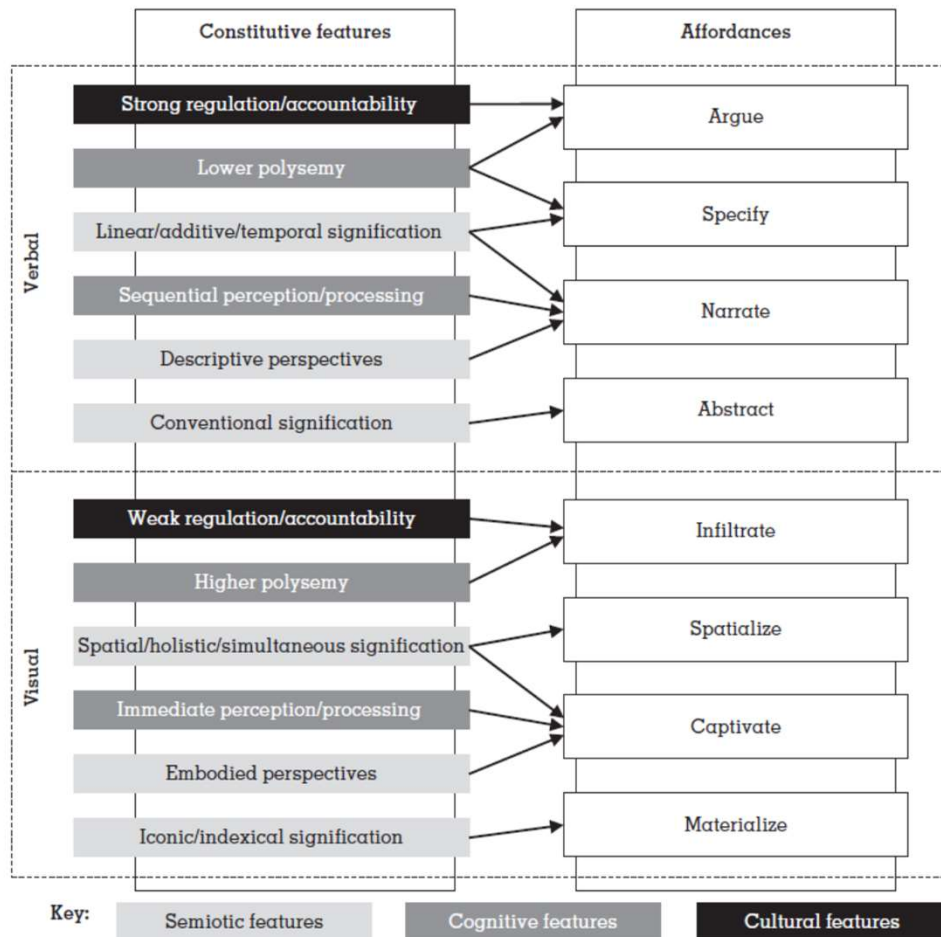


Social semiotics

The ‚social‘ in the usage of signs

- Social semiotics is sympathetic to a host of dominant approaches in current organization research due to integrating
 - meaning as socially constructed;
 - the notion of discourse;
 - a focus on social practices;
 - the relevance of materiality and artifacts.
- The ‚social‘ in social semiotics manifests in the centrality of concepts such as
 - **modes** as socially constructed resources for meaning making;
 - **affordances** as interactionally realized potentials for meaning;
 - **metafunctions** as mediating relationships between producer, image, and spectator;
 - modal **registers** as institutionally constituted repertoires of meaning.

Modes and affordances



What forms of usage do multimodal artifacts invite and enable?

Helping orphans find new homes



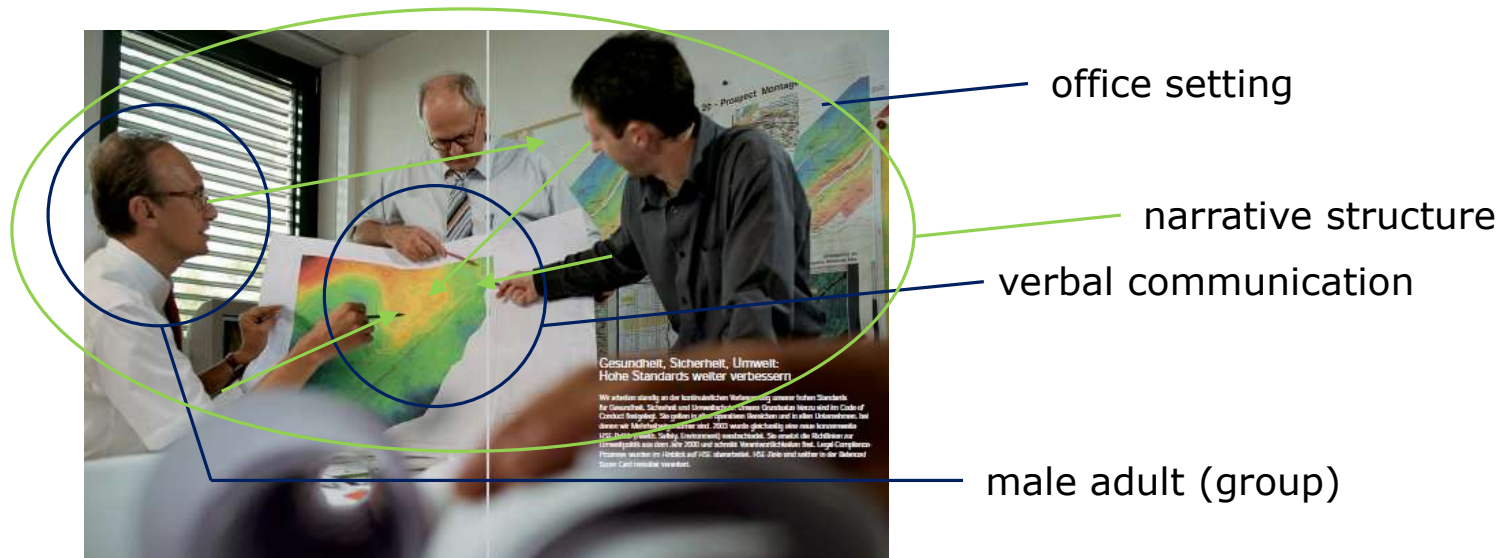
Working hard to improve ecological standards



Modes and metafunctions

- **The ideational metafunction ('the world' as object)**
How does a mode represent people and objects and their relations in a world?
 - How does a mode depict interactions between elements spatially and temporally (e.g., tell a story)?
 - How does a mode compare elements and assign qualities (e.g., classify)?

How are meanings organized, audiences addressed, and texts composed?



Modes and metafunctions

- **The interpersonal metafunction ('relations' as object)**

How does a mode establish social relationships with the audience?

- How does a mode create a particular position for the audience?
- How does a mode engage the audience?

How are meanings organized, audiences addressed, and texts composed?



direct contact
intimate social distance
viewer power (vertical angle)
Identification (horizontal angle)

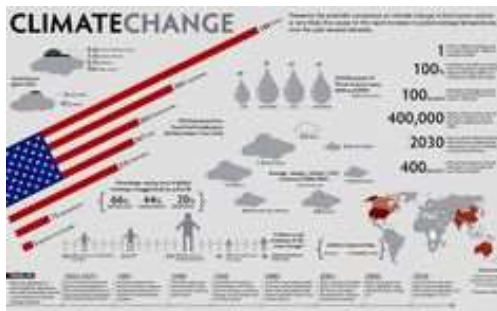
sensory coding orientation

- color palette
- perspective
- de-contextualization
- focus

Modes and metafunctions

- **The textual metafunction ('language' as object)**
How does a mode create coherence between elements within and across texts?
 - How does a mode arrange elements in(to) a compositional whole?
 - How does a mode cue broader discourses and contexts?

How are meanings organized, audiences addressed, and texts composed?



Modes and registers

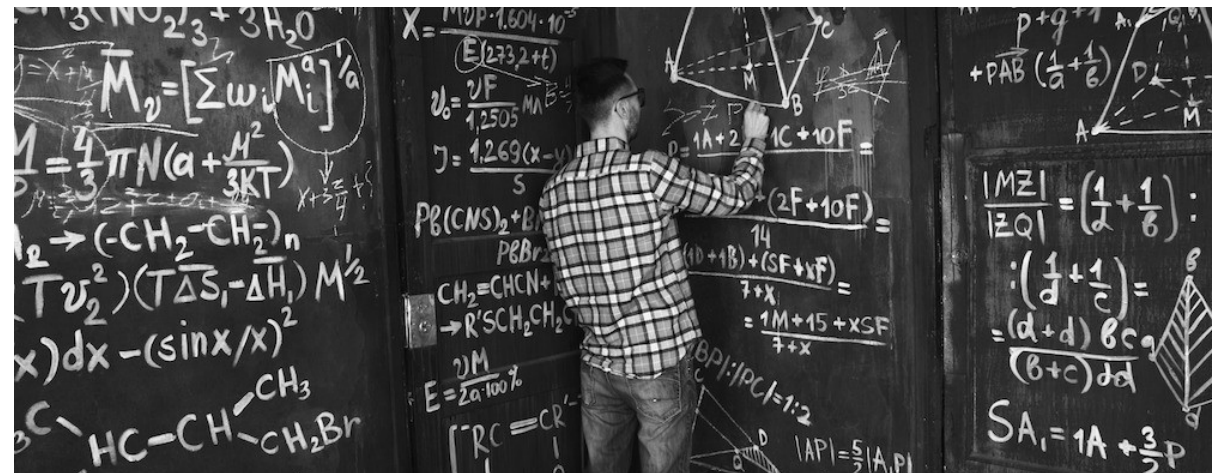
- “Modal registers” defined as collective adaptations of the meaning-making resources of a semiotic mode according to the specific social/institutional context of use (e.g., Matthiessen, 2015).
- “The typified linguistic instantiations of an institution in a particular mode as a modal register of that institution” (Jancsary et al., 2018)
- Communicate categories (institutions, organizations, professions, places) through typologies of design and aesthetics
- Allow for individualization through deviation from the category (register expansion, combination, or innovation)

Which legitimate ‘resources’ do the different modes provide?



Questions, comments ...

- ...
- ...
- ...



Part 2

Relevance for organization(s): Approaches and Applications



Approaches to multimodality in organization research

<i>Archaeological</i>	<i>Practice</i>	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Dialogical</i>	<i>Documenting</i>
Artifacts to store and transmit social knowledge and allow for the reconstruction of meaning structures	Socially meaningful objects that are created, employed, and manipulated in organizational contexts as part of social practices	Symbolic devices that exert influence and impact on audience perception and evaluation of reality	'Triggers' that elicit multifaceted information from conversation partners; resources to communicate in multimodal languages	A form of supporting theory building, data analysis, and/or presentation of findings in scientific contexts
Meaning (structures) in multimodal elements of discourse	Use and handling of multimodal artefacts in practice	Impact of multimodal artefacts on audiences	Sense-making of interview partners	Content and/or meaning of visual artefacts

Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen (2013)
Höllerer et al., (2019)

Approaches to multimodality in organization research

Archaeological

- Categories and identities
- Branding
- Roles and subject positions
- Sense-making and theorization
- Legitimacy and credibility

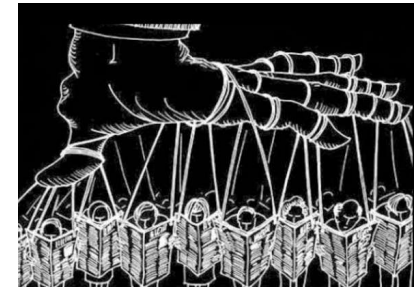
Practice

- Coordination and negotiation
- Mobilization
- Knowledge creation and transmission
- Valuation and Evaluation
- Power and resistance

Strategic

- Emotion and trust
- Memory and recall
- Information processing
- Decision-making
- Persuasion and rhetoric

Figure 5. Illustration of meditation on Heaven (source: Leydig, 1888: 245).



Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen (2013)
Höllerer, Meyer, Jancsary, & Vettori (2013)
Bruni, Jancsary, & Meyer (2021)

The archaeological approach: Looking at meaning (structures)



Sensemaking, roles, and subject positions (Höllerer, Jancsary, & Grafström, 2018)

- "This article explores the role of visual and multimodal text in encapsulating complex and spatially dispersed phenomena in global finance during, and after, 2008 in one distinct event: the global financial crisis (GFC)."
- Sensemaking of economic phenomena
 - Theorization (extending the verbal)
 - Representation (detailing the verbal)
 - Validity (evidence for the verbal)
 - Resonance (embedding of the verbal)
- Role(s) of organizations in society
- Agenda setting in the media



Methodology and data



Figure 1: Analytical Process (Adapted from Jancsary, Höllerer, & Meyer, 2016)

Narratives of the crisis I

'Fight for survival' (N=54)

The crisis is a struggle that takes various actors to the breaking point [test of mettle] and separates the powerless [meet the victims] from the strong ones [tales of survival]. While some victims are blameless, others have failed to prepare adequately [challenged and found lacking].



'Heroic quest' (N=44)

Experts formulate ways [experts to the rescue] of revising faulty economic models to eventually understand the precise causes of the GFC and propose adequate solutions [in search of answers]. As battling the crisis has highest priority, major sacrifices have to be made [complexity and trade-offs].



'Resilience' (N=31)

Some practices have survived the onslaught [some things remain the same], and visionary action and adaptation still support success [strategic adaptation] and may even create novel opportunities [new opportunities] despite the GFC. Liberal market economies persist [resilient capitalism], and market forces will eventually return to an equilibrium [self-healing].



'Political power play' (N=26)

The GFC reinforces ideological differences [political controversies]. While some gain political capital from battling the crisis [political heroes], others lose the trust of the electorate [political failures]. Across the globe, power relations are changing [political shifts].



Narratives of the crisis II

'Radical change' (N=20)

The GFC constitutes a major rupture [critical event]. Our world will never be the same again [the world has changed], and we witness a major change in the rules of the economic game [the rules have changed].



'Blame game' (N=19)

Investigations about responsibility for the crisis are ongoing [identify the culprits], and actors are defending themselves from allegations [claims of innocence]. In some cases, culpability is hard to determine [moral ambiguity]. Where justice is too slow, people take to the streets [social unrest].

'Difficult recovery' (N=18)

Although there are clear signs of recovery [silver linings], there are also indications that the worst may yet come [it's not over yet]. In any case, actors face a hard struggle to return to normalcy [tough way back].



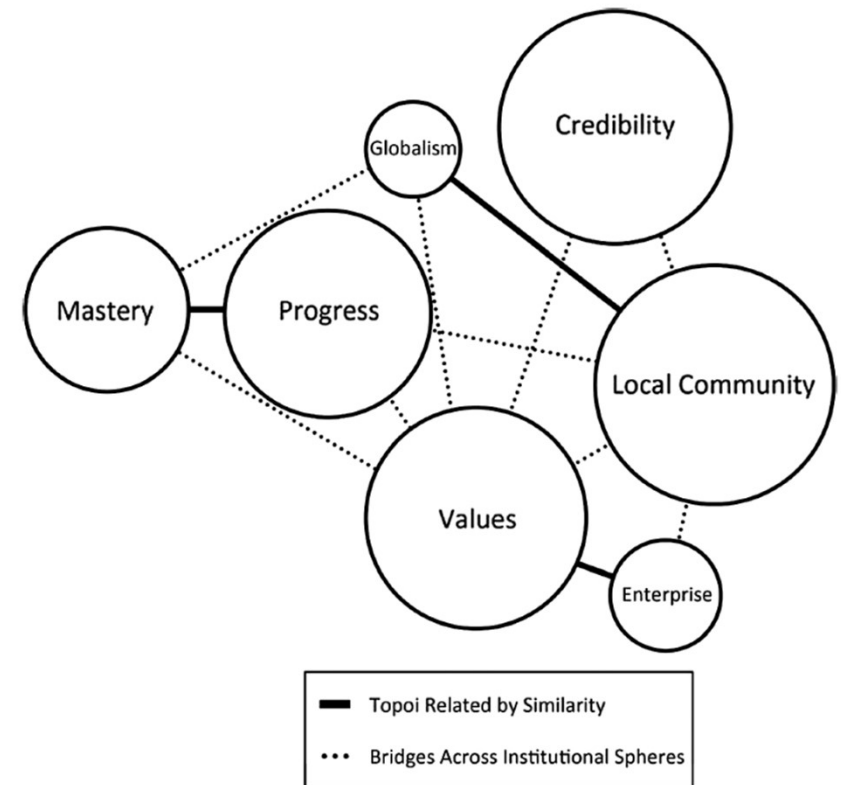
'Prisoner's dilemma' (N=17)

While the crisis has local implications, it is first and foremost a global phenomenon [global threat]. Actors realize that this requires coordinated action [in this together], but individual opportunism and national interests hamper such efforts [international discord].

Legitimation

(Höllerer, Jancsary, Meyer & Vettori, 2013)

- Austrian CSR reports
- Visual and multimodal communication of
 - appropriateness
 - transparency
 - accountability
- „Bridging” of logics enhances legitimacy



De-legitimation and erosion (Bruni, Jancsary, & Meyer, 2021)

- Anti-vaccination groups on Facebook
 - attack on dominant societal institutions
 - attempts at eroding established knowledge
 - ‚radical‘ institutional change efforts

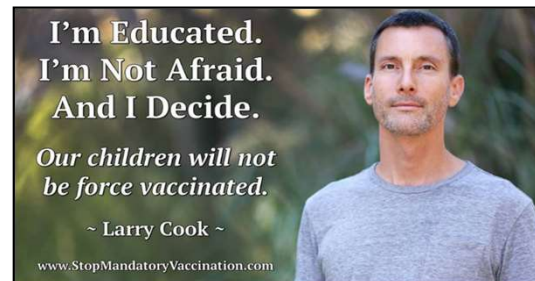


Anti-capitalism



Vioxx to Gardasil....True evil at work.

Free choice



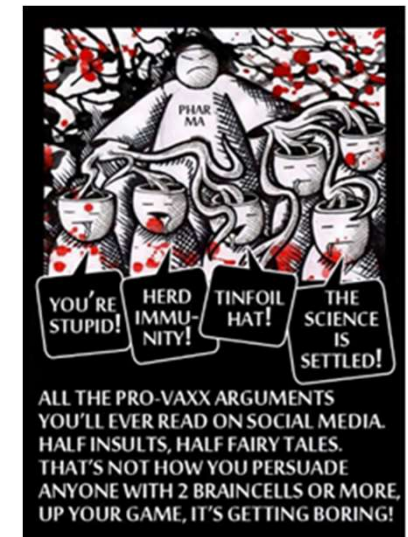
And here we are, **fighting vaccine mandates**, with an intimidating and very powerful pharmaceutical industry behind it all. Although we should never go where angels fear to tread, it is also true that **we must find our courage and stand up** to corruption, lies and abuse of power. Otherwise **we will end up enslaved** and by then it will be too late to stop it. Find your courage. We need you in this fight [extract]

Back to nature



Woke vs Sheepie

Oppression



The practice approach: Looking at (inter)action



Practices of valuation (Arjaliès & Bansal, 2018)

- Assessment of portfolio quality by investment managers
- tends to disregard information that does not easily integrate into financial numbers
- Visuals (like emojis) help accommodate environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria in financial decisions.



Figure 1. Example of yield curve and spread analysis.
Source: Bloomberg. https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/solution/bloomberg-terminal-learn-more/?utm_medium=dotcom&utm_campaign=Dotcom&utm_source=Website&utm_content=bcom-article&bbgsum=dg-ws-prof-bcom-a1, accessed 5 December 2015.

Table 3. Emojis and their meanings in French and English.

Emoji	Meaning (French)	Meaning (English)
🚫	A éviter à tout prix	To be avoided at all costs
😊	Bien	Good
❤️	Coup de coeur	Kudos
😞	Décevant	Disappointing
🚀	Dynamisme	Dynamism
😐	Moyen	So so
😮	Ouh la	Uh oh
😬	Prometteuse	Promising
🐢	Sans dynamisme	Dull
😎	Super	Super

Source: Internal document, Company under study.

Practices of negotiation and planning (Comi & Whyte, 2018)

- Giving form to potential futures
- Multimodal artefacts allow for
 - imagining
 - testing
 - stabilizing
 - reifying
- Use of artefacts „foregrounds the sensorial dimension of practitioners' orientation towards the future“ (p. 22)
- Discourse and practices interact in these processes.

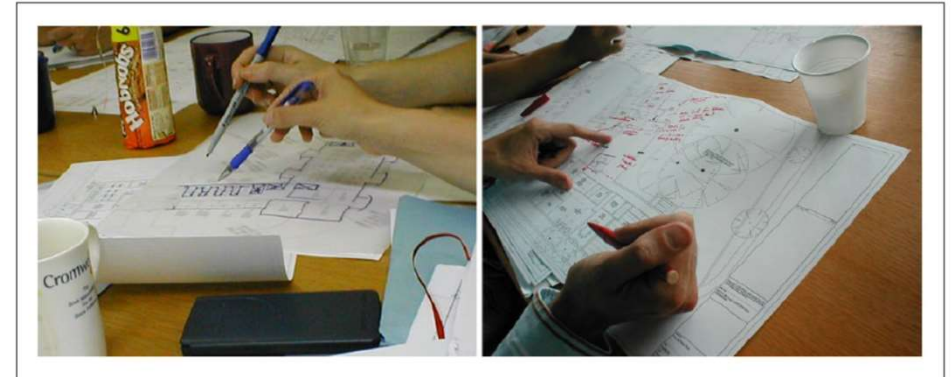


Figure 1. The architects sketching on tracing paper over existing plans (left) and annotating existing plans (right).



Figure 2. Model work at Cullinan Studio.

Practices of coordination and control (Ravelli & Stenglin, 2008)

- Interpersonal meanings are ‚built into‘ spaces and architecture.
- These evoke and manifest aspects of power, social distance, and affect ...
- ... and therefore, influence the interactions of people within the space.

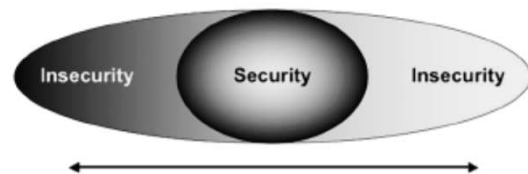
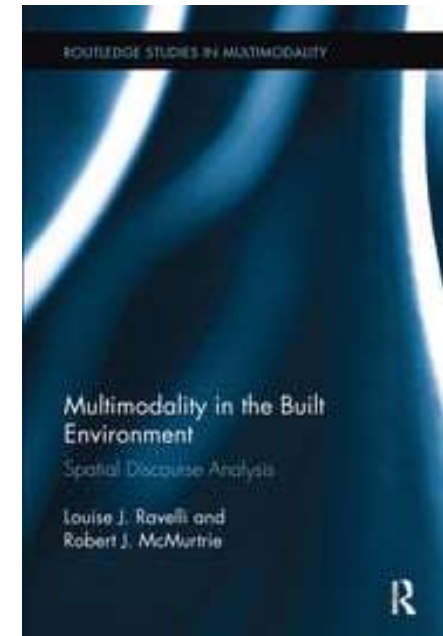


Figure 1. Binding scale: security and insecurity



Photo 5. Rear entry to the Scientia



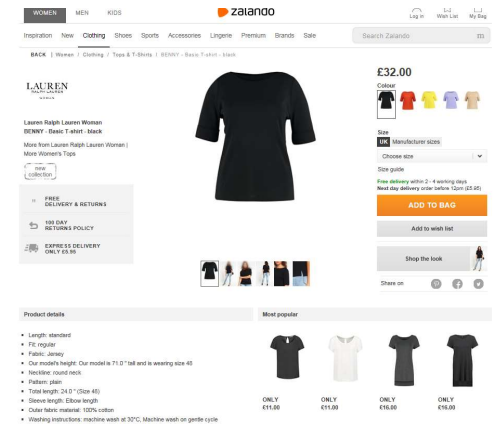
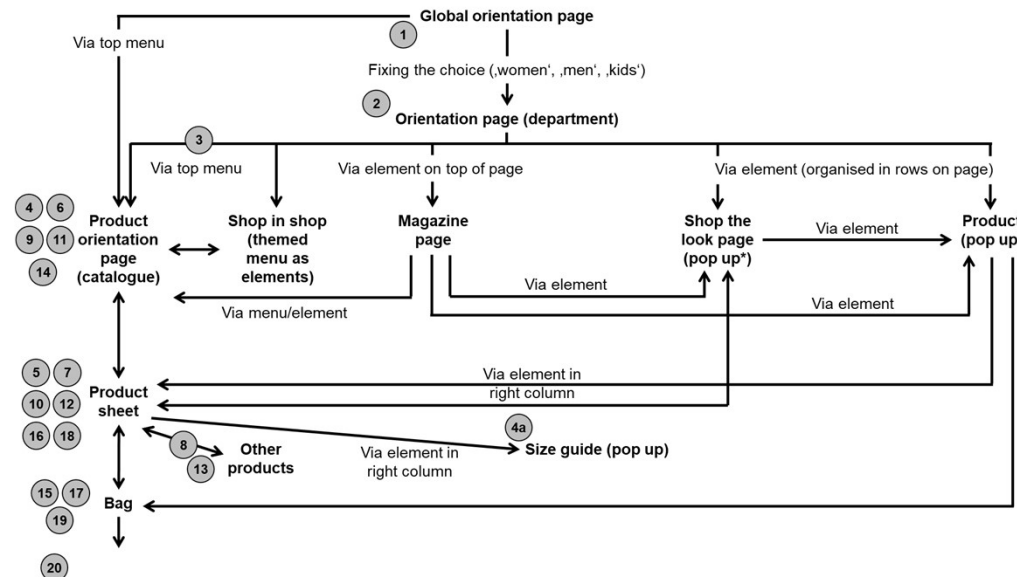
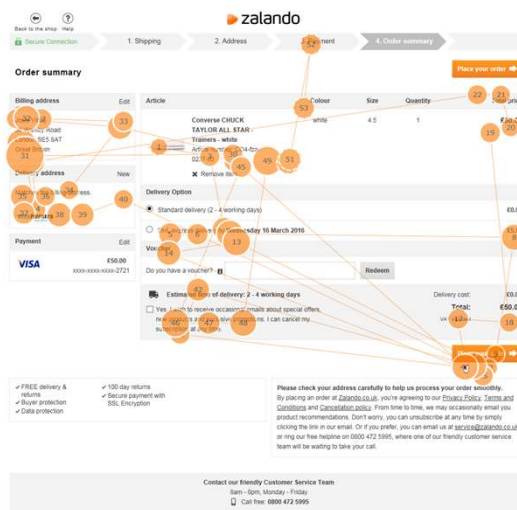
“three-dimensional texts”

The strategic approach: Looking at cognitive and affective impact



Impact on decision-making (Höllerer et al., 2019)

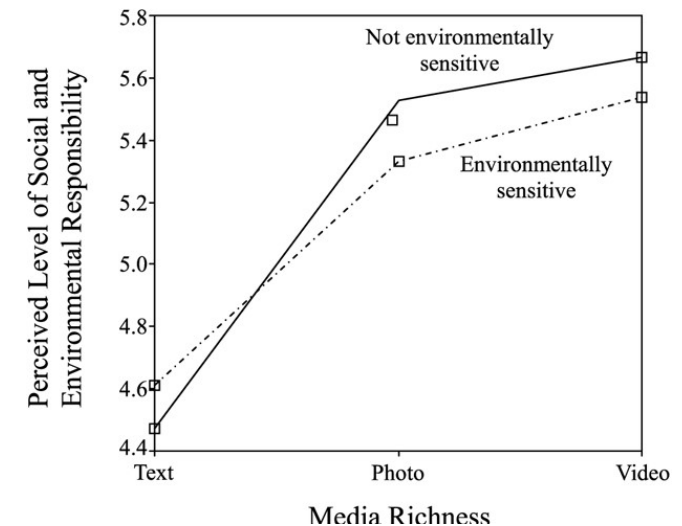
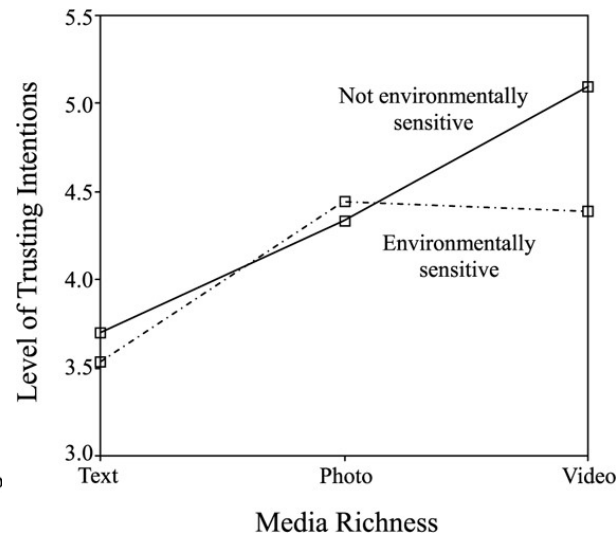
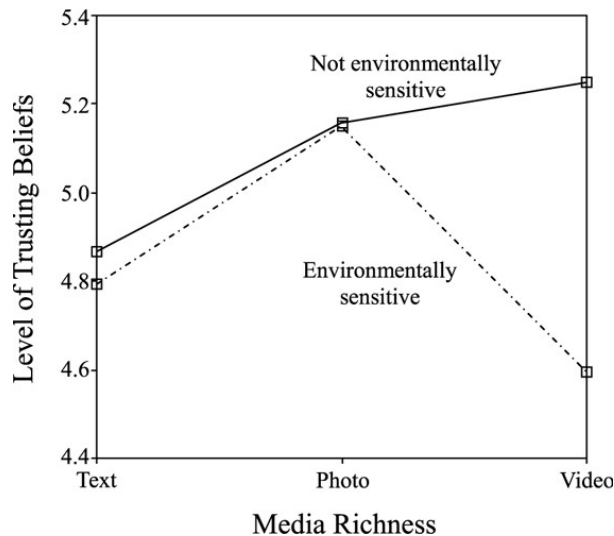
- „what happens when face-to-face interaction moves online“
- Translating face-to-face embodied and situated interactions into multimodal (hyper)text.
- Reducing the perception of risk through multimodal design of the website.



Impact on trust

(Cho, Phillips, Hageman, & Patten, 2009)

- Impressions of accountability and transparency on the web
- Are user perceptions impacted by variations in media richness?



Part 3

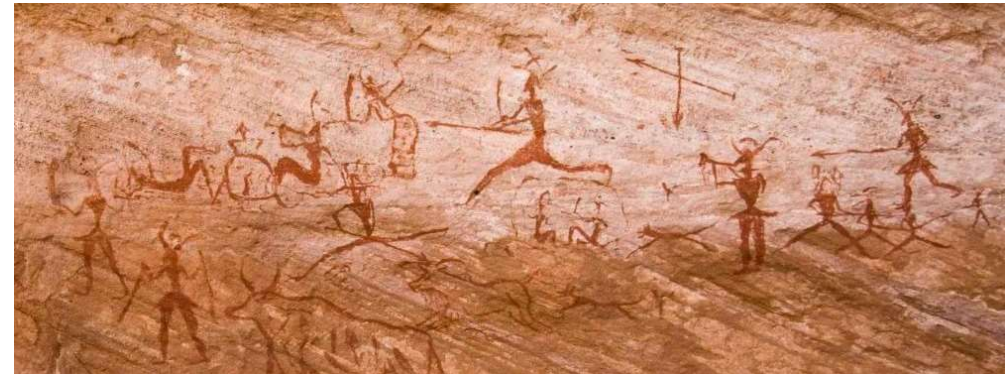
Conclusions and Reflections



Assessment of practical relevance

(based on Höllerer, Jancsary, & Ravelli, forthcoming)

- Multimodality has the potential to increase the relevance of organization and management research.
- Management can be understood in large parts as a semiotic practice.
- Managers, then need to be skilled (social) semioticians.
- They need to ...
 - ... develop a conscious and reflective stance towards multimodality;
 - ... acquire the necessary ‚literacy‘ to understand their multimodal environments more systematically;
 - ... develop the skills to design communication multimodally and in ways that are conscious of the cultural and institutional basis of modes.



The transformation of Erste Group I

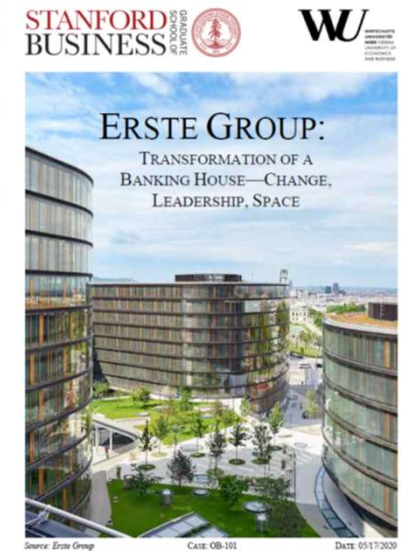
Source: Soule, Leixnering, Höllner, & Sutherland (2020)

Managerial Challenge: Adapting to massive market transformations

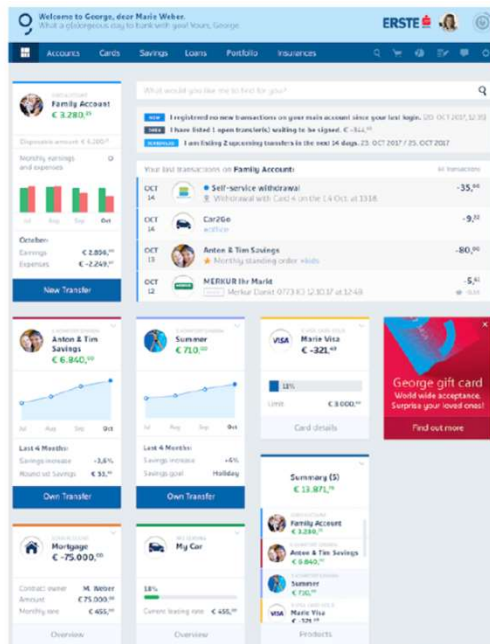
"Our **competitors**, if you look in the retail area, are companies like N26, like Revolut, like Monzo. They are **set up in a completely different way**. They don't have this legacy of 200 years of management experience, information technology. They are young companies, very agile, with very low hierarchy. And **we, also, have to act like them.**" (Thomas Schaufler, Board Member)



Erste Group © Helmut Lackner (Photographer).



„Categorization“



Source: Company documents.

Communicative Action: Re-defining the company

"The top people in the bank have bought into this and believe that 10 or 20 years from now, we will **not be called a bank** anymore. Rather, we will be **known as a financial life company**. However, it is still up to us to prove that having those things that make for financial health, the tools, all under one roof, creates value." (Andreas Treichl, CEO)

The transformation of Erste Group II

Source: Soule, Leixnering, Höllerer, & Sutherland (2020)

Managerial Challenge: Making the transformation tangible

"Everything was laid out in an orderly way. But it wasn't functional. It **reminded me of a building I had worked in 10 years earlier**. The office floors had typical cubicle offices, like in a good Dilbert comic, where everyone is more or less sitting behind some kind of wall. And there were 350 people in one space. The higher up in the hierarchy a manager was, the larger the office, with more windows, and a space for a personal assistant. It **looked so old-fashioned, so outdated, so retro**." (Peter Weiss, Deputy CIO)



Source: Company documents.

Erste-Campus: Herr Treichl sitzt im Großraumbüro

Am Samstag übersiedeln die letzten Mitarbeiter auf den neuen Erste-Campus in Wien

Wojciech Czaja 27. Februar 2016, 12:00 252 Postings

Source: Der Standard

„Theorization“



Source: Erste Group

Communicative Action: Materializing the change

"We want to **materialize those values**. We want to contribute to creating an environment that gives the bank the opportunity to **work the way others in the market work**. Our competitors today are no longer Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank and all the others. Our competitors are Apple, Google, Amazon, and a lot of fintechs. These are our competitors." (Peter Weiss, Deputy CIO)

The transformation of Erste Group III

Source: Soule, Leixnering, Höllerer, & Sutherland (2020)

Managerial Challenge: Taking risks and innovating the business

"In June 2014, I told my supervisory board chairman '**I want to clean up everything.**' And he said, '**You can't do that.** We had a loss in 2011, and we had a loss 2012. You can't do that again.' I said, 'Yes, I can. I don't want to continue working in a bank where I know we still have a problem here and there on our balance sheet.'" (Andreas Treichl, CEO)



Source: Bloomberg.

„Legitimation“



Alfred Stieglitz (Photographer).

Communicative Action: Encouraging new ways of thinking

"This is how I try to **explain the change in perception** we have to bring about. Because you can see how everybody sees this and has an understanding of what it is. This is the company talking about payment transactions: 'The way we talk about payments is this.' And then, all of a sudden, we say to them: 'No, **it's something different.** It's the one of the most important art works of the world.'" (Boris Marte, Deputy Chairman of the Board of the Foundation and Director of Corporate Sponsoring)

Multimodality

A brief and subjective outlook

Future research in multimodal organization studies should ...

- take multimodal communication and meaning construction seriously
- inspect the workings of individual modes more closely
- move away from the ‚low hanging fruits‘
- focus on the amalgamation of modes
- develop novel multimodal methods
- focus on presences as well as absences
- acknowledge the cultural construction of modes
- systematize the ‚omelette‘ of concepts and theories
- appreciate interdisciplinary work but be aware of pitfalls.

Höllerer, Daudigeos, & Jancsary, 2018

Höllerer, van Leeuwen, Jancsary, Meyer, Andersen, & Vaara, 2019

Jancsary, 2019

Overall reflection and discussion ...

- ...
- ...
- ...

Thank you!

