EDITOR'S COMMENTS: DEVELOPING PROPOSITIONS, A PROCESS MODEL, OR A TYPOLOGY? ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF WRITING THEORY WITHOUT A BOILERPLATE

Writing theory papers is challenging and asks a lot of us as authors. Complex and big ideas may be hard to present in a focused and persuasive line of argument. Clearly defining constructs is not a straightforward task either, nor is knowing where to draw the line and set scope constraints or boundary conditions for your arguments (Whetten, 1989). And then where do you start: with the formulation of your own arguments, or with carving out the space for them within the existing literature? These and other well-known writing challenges make writing theory papers a real craft (Fulmer, 2012; Rindova, 2008; Suddaby, 2014).

The craft of writing theory lies partly in the fact that there are no straightforward formulas or templates for theory papers (Ragins, 2012). This lack of simple writing formulas or a more general boilerplate for theory papers is perhaps to some extent inevitable. Staying with the image of craftsmanship (Kilduff, 2006; Ragins, 2012), writing theory ultimately hinges on the actual practice and experience of writing (Ragins, 2012). It is therefore incumbent on authors to work on their craft—to practice and refine their skills at developing and writing compelling theory. But besides perfecting their own skills, authors also benefit from knowing what editors, reviewers, and readers generally expect to see for different types of theory papers. Such knowledge gives them a sense of the different ways theory papers are written and of how they may best lay out their own arguments in pursuit of a strong theoretical contribution.

With this in mind, I went through the reviewer reports and editorial letters for all of the *AMR* manuscripts I have handled to date and identified the common expectations that reviewers voiced for three frequently submitted and familiar types of theory papers: a manuscript centered around a set of propositions (a propositional style), a manuscript focused on developing a process model (a narrative style), and a manuscript building and elaborating a theoretical typology (a typological

style). I describe these different types of theory papers in terms of different styles of theorizing (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013), which are distinct forms of developing theoretical arguments and writing theory papers.

For each of these styles, I focused on identifying the expectations and concerns that reviewers raised insofar as these seemed to align with the style itself (as opposed to more general writing advice [see Ragins, 2012]). These reviewers are seasoned readers who see more than their fair share of manuscripts in various stages of readiness. Their feedback and advice on each of these styles are therefore helpful for those keen to develop manuscripts for *AMR*. I then combined and summarized their most common feedback and advice so as to capture their expectations for each style of theorizing. I describe these expectations in more detail below, including the most common suggestions that were made to address any style-related concerns.

With this essay I would thus like to accomplish two things. First, as others have done in previous editor's comments (Fulmer, 2012; Rindova, 2008), I would like to further demystify the process of writing theory papers and help authors improve their manuscripts by highlighting three common styles of theorizing. A clear outline of each of these styles may aid authors in forming a good understanding of the different ways theory manuscripts can be developed and written. This may be a helpful contribution in itself, given that writing theory is not often a central part of doctoral training at most schools and universities (Byron & Thatcher, 2016).

Second, for each style I outline common expectations in the eyes of *AMR* reviewers and readers. Oftentimes, when authors receive feedback on their manuscripts as part of the review process at *AMR*, they get highly technical and coded comments on what makes for a strong theory paper. Yet, more often than not, the feedback they receive on issues such as the difference between propositions and hypotheses, the presence of circular or tautological reasoning in a manuscript, or the seemingly "descriptive" nature of a model may not be immediately obvious. My aim here is to translate such coded

language and expectations for different styles of papers into a much more concrete understanding and to provide authors with practical pointers for developing and writing their manuscripts. My aim in doing so is *not* to offer a set of formulas or templates (there is no single boilerplate, not even for a particular style!) but, rather, to highlight general challenges for each style and a set of practical suggestions for working around them.

By highlighting these different styles of theorizing, the essay also reinforces the importance of diverse voices and different styles of theorizing for *AMR* (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Ragins, 2015; Suddaby, 2014). There is no singular theoretical tradition or style that defines *AMR*. The flexibility offered with *AMR*'s multiple traditions and styles does not, however, imply that there are no styles at all or that "anything goes." Rather, there are common styles of theorizing, such as the three discussed in this essay, that cut across different traditions of scholarship as well as micro and macro levels of analysis.

The remainder of the essay is structured as follows. I begin with a brief definition of three common styles of theorizing: the propositional, narrative, and typological styles. I then discuss the general characteristics of each style of theorizing, as well as the typical problems and challenges reviewers point to when a particular style is being used in a manuscript. I highlight some general remedies for these common problems and conclude the essay with some reflections on the craft of writing theory papers using these different styles.

STYLES OF THEORIZING

At its core, a style is a particular form of argumentation that we use to structure our thinking and express our ideas about a management or organizational phenomenon in a common idiom. Such an idiom can be an attempt to formalize ideas into a set of propositions that link cause and effect (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013), but it may also involve a way of narrating a series of interconnected management or organizational processes (Langley, 1999). Styles of theorizing such as these are idiomatic or common ways of "thinking about questions of explanation" (Abbott, 2004: 27), whereby a familiar "grammar," such as propositional or processual language, is used to represent and explain a particular management or organizational subject. The language in a paper often already highlights the common idiom of a style, but it is also evident in the way arguments are structured in the form of a set of propositions, process model, or theoretical typology.

In their recent editors' comments in *AMR*, Delbridge and Fiss (2013) made the point that the propositional style of theorizing is almost ubiquitous within published articles in the journal (i.e., fifty-nine out of eighty-three articles between January 2010 and December 2012 involved propositions). They expressed a concern that this dominance may crowd out alternative styles of theorizing in our field, as well as establish a particular linear and correlational form of thinking about causality. Other styles not only offer a different terminology and vocabulary but also encode alternative models of causality. Delbridge and Fiss concluded their comments by calling for more diversity in our styles of theorizing rather than a focus on one style in particular. In the spirit of their call, here I outline two other common styles—that is, the narrative and typological styles—besides the propositional style that authors use to structure and express their ideas.

These three styles are summarized in Table 1. Each is used across micro and macro areas of management and organizational research. These styles may be seen as common to a particular theoretical tradition or philosophy of science (Kilduff, 2006) but are actually more flexibly used across traditions and philosophies. The propositional style, for example, is not limited to positivism (Kilduff, 2006) but is similarly used in theory papers that depart from social constructivist commitments. These styles of theorizing can therefore best be understood as more general genres of argumentation and writing, with their "grammar" being used by authors to specify theoretical arguments in pursuit of a theoretical contribution. While these styles are commonly referred to by authors and reviewers alike, both groups of individuals may have different expectations about the proper and effective use of them. My purpose in this essay is to provide an overview and understanding of these styles from the perspective of *AMR* reviewers.

BASIC EXPECTATIONS AND COMMON PROBLEMS

As indicated in Table 1, each style has its own characteristics and comes with certain basic expectations consistent with each form. When these expectations are not addressed, this leads to common problems in the eyes of reviewers. Here I highlight the most frequently mentioned problems

TABLE 1
Three Common Styles of Theorizing, Their Basic Forms, and Typical Problems

Attributes of Each Style	Proposition-Based Style	Narrative-Based Style	Typology-Based Style
Definition	The statement of theoretical propositions that introduces new constructs and cause-effect relationships	The specification of a process model that lays out a set of mechanisms explaining events and outcomes	The specification of a typology that interrelates different dimensions to flesh out new constructs and causal interactions
Recent example in *AMR*	Ashforth, Schinoff, & Rogers (2016)	Hardy & Maguire (2016)	Creary, Caza, & Roberts (2015)
Core idiom—basic expectations	A formal idiom that formalizes contingencies around a subject into basic cause-effect relationships that act as broad signposts and implications for further research	A narrative idiom that explains an important subject and its potential outcomes around a generalized mechanism, as the underlying storyline of a process model	A categorization idiom that explains the fuzzy nature of many subjects by logically and causally combining different constructs into a coherent and explanatory set of types
Common problems with these styles of theorizing	1. Propositions are too narrow in scope and summarize the prior literature (as summary statements) 2. Propositions are modeled on hypothesis testing 3. Propositions include multiple clauses 4. Propositions lack detail on the causal agent	1. Narrative and process model are too descriptive 2. Narrative and process model lack explanatory detail 3. Narrative features stylized arguments and claims (lacking nuance and contingent variation) 4. Narrative features complex compounds and phrases as constructs	1. Typology is empirical, rather than theoretical 2. Typology is descriptive and does not offer multidimensional ideal types 3. Typology only systematizes and summarizes existing research 4. Typology features various degrees of causal entanglement (including circularity and tautology)
Remedies	1. Broaden the scope of the propositions and develop an original line of argument, with a novel set of assumptions as theorized grounds 2. Develop the arguments first, before formalizing them into propositions	1. Elaborate the underlying conceptual linkages of a process model, foregrounding a clear mechanism or set of mechanisms 2. Add details and more contingent variation to the overall narrative, strengthening its explanatory potential	1. Identify whether the proposed typology has a review or theory contribution, or both 2. Develop the typology from a theoretical angle, incorporating multiple theoretical dimensions 3. Draw out patterns of causality (using fuzzy set reasoning) and explicate the basic line of argument

for each style, as well as the possible ways authors can anticipate or avoid such problems in their papers.

The Propositional Style

A common style is to channel theoretical ideas and arguments into a set of formally stated propositions. In this style contingent patterns that an author argues describe a particular subject are captured in a specific logical propositional format (typically "if, then" clauses or general statements of association between certain constructs). Such propositions are then typically also clearly marked or highlighted as part of the manuscript (i.e., Proposition 1, Proposition 2, etc.). The idiom, in other words, is a formal one around technically stating cause-effects relationships that have a clearly focused and circumscribed scope.

In a past editor's comments, Martin Kilduff (2006: 254) exclusively associated the stating of propositions with a "logical positivist framework." While this may have been the root source for the propositional style, the style is now much more

flexibly used across different traditions and philosophies of science (as implied by the figures reported in Delbridge & Fiss, 2013). In a large majority of papers submitted to _AMR,_ propositions are generally used to articulate broad sets of contingencies as directions and implications for further empirical research.

Common problems. One of the most common problems reviewers cited for this style is that the formulated propositions are quite narrow in scope, capture basic cause-effect relations, and do not sufficiently break new ground. Reviewers highlighted that propositions oftentimes summarize quite well-known relationships where the grounds for a particular proposition are found in the prior literature, rather than in a novel set of arguments.

Many other reviewers voiced their frustration with what they saw as a close modeling of the propositional style on a deductive model of hypothesis testing. The basic concern here is that the potentially much broader nature of propositions, as guideposts toward further research, is narrowed into a more specific set of hypotheses that are readily tested—"as if the entire manuscript is in a sense an extended version of the hypothesis development section of an empirical paper," as one reviewer remarked. Whereas both propositions and hypotheses specify testable relationships, propositions are broader statements of relationships between constructs that cover novel theoretical ground. Hypotheses, on the other hand, specify a testable relationship between variables that does not require any new arguments as such. This mimicking of hypothesis testing, in other words, oftentimes leads to a shifting of the grounds for the propositions, from what should be a set of original assumptions and arguments to a summary of the prior literature and the logical deduction of a set of hypotheses.

A further problem that reviewers frequently identified concerns the way propositions are formulated in a manuscript. Many of their points here are reminiscent of Kilduff's editor's comments, in which he suggested that often "authors cram in unnecessary propositions despite their irrelevance" (2006: 264). Reviewers highlighted that many manuscripts often feature too many propositions. Although they did not seem to have an exact number in mind, reviewers often felt that authors tended to unnecessarily formulate propositions around the basic building blocks of their manuscript, as opposed to confining their propositions to the arguments they are developing. It is indeed surprisingly common to find the basic assumptions of a theoretical perspective or a basic definition expressed as the first set of propositions in a manuscript. Reviewers also identified problems with the actual phrasing of propositions, which often include multiple clauses and, thus, "multiple interacting parts." They also occasionally commented on how levels of analysis may shift between propositions, which, unless the propositions are distinctly set out as multilevel in orientation, is seen as a problem. A final but important comment reviewers often made, either directly or indirectly in their comments, is that a proposition may not be sufficiently clear about the "causal agent," in the form of, for example, organizational attributes or managerial choices, which as a causal trigger or force drives a particular outcome or effect. If this operational link concerning the causal agent is not present, both in the text preceding a particular proposition and in the actual phrasing of the proposition, reviewers felt that a proposition offers just a statement of an empirical correlation or association, akin to a hypothesis.

Remedies. Reviewers offered quite a bit of advice to authors on how to address these common problems with the propositional style. There may be no single formula for using the propositional style, but a general reviewer recommendation was that authors start with a bigger canvas when they sketch and formulate their arguments. Too often authors limit themselves to a rather focused or narrow set of arguments and rely too much on the available literature as a source. In such instances reviewers consider manuscripts as offering a largely summative contribution. What reviewers would like to see instead is the formulation of arguments with a much broader scope (think propositions, not hypotheses!) that are furthermore based on a novel and distinct set of theoretical grounds. Authors may be able to bring such novelty to their writing by introducing a novel theoretical perspective as the source for their arguments or by blending different theoretical perspectives and competing explanations in the literature. A good example of this is the recent article by Ashforth, Schinoff, and Rogers (2016), which defines the construct of personal identification (PI) and then outlines three "pathways" of PI based on whether it is threat, opportunity, or closeness (in relationships) based. The authors develop a structured set of propositions about the needs, targets, and outcomes for each of these pathways separately, but they also suggest how

the "antecedents of the three PI paths may blend, causing the PI process to play out in a melded form" (Ashforth et al., 2016: 49).

Reviewers also pointed out that authors may focus too much on the form of the propositional idiom and apply it in a rather formulaic manner, rather than asking the question of when and how best to use the style to further their arguments. They may, for example, obsess primarily about the "boxes and arrows" that link the different propositions (Whetten, 1989) and spell out each of the testable relationships, rather than focusing on the development of the arguments first. They may also, for reasons of legitimacy, focus primarily on formulating formal propositions and add a lot of them to the manuscript (Kilduff, 2006), where oftentimes fewer will do. Here reviewers' general advice to authors has been to write out their arguments in full first, before thinking about formulating any formal propositions. Propositions are summary statements that capture arguments in a more abbreviated and formal manner and act as a bridge to further empirical research. When propositions are used instead as a substitute for direct argumentation (rather than as its formal equivalent), this may, generally speaking, lead to less well-developed arguments, as well as a clear case of form being emphasized over content (Kilduff, 2006: 254). In fact, a good litmus test is that the argumentation by itself should be so well developed that a reader could infer the propositions even if they were absent. By the same token, the formally stated propositions should naturally follow from the argumentation such that if a reader only read the propositions, she or he could understand the nature and substance of the argumentation.

The Narrative Style

A second style involves using the idiom of narrative, as a grammar, to depict a general sequence of events that leads to a particular outcome an author is seeking to explain. The contingencies that an author describes are in this case formatted and compressed into a storyline (Pentland, 1999) that plots events that lead to, and thus determine, a certain outcome or set of outcomes.[1] This storyline features as the plot a generative mechanism that is at work, a mechanism that, when compared

to more focused cause-effect propositions, often describes much broader sequences and global turning points. The outcome or product of this style of theorizing is generally a process model that describes this generative mechanism or set of mechanisms at work. A process model, in other words, depicts the unfolding processes and dynamics associated with this mechanism (Langley, 1999) and is, thus, distinct from a "boxes and arrows" model that is broken down into separate propositions (Whetten, 1989). In some instances authors may vary storylines and plot alternative scenarios as a way of actively comparing different sets of theoretical assumptions and mechanisms and their resulting outcomes. Time and context also feature prominently in this style and are often written into the script of theoretical explanations.

Common problems. Among the most common issues reviewers raised regarding the narrative style is that the theorizing is either too descriptive or not sufficiently specific in an explanatory sense. In the first scenario, narrative papers and the process models that are produced are too tied to the particulars of a specific setting, which is then reflected in rather idiosyncratic labels for constructs and processes. This descriptive emphasis may in many instances result when authors write a theory paper alongside an empirical case study, with the theory then, intentionally or not, too closely modeled on the specifics of the case.

The second scenario is, in a sense, the other extreme; here the process theorizing has moved to an explanatory level (Pentland, 1999), but the arguments offered are highly stylized and rather generalized. This is seen as problematic since it is associated with a lack of detail on the exact causal mechanism or mechanisms that are at play and there is the rather strong assumption that the described processes almost naturally determine a set of outcomes over and beyond alternative explanations. In other words, in the eyes of reviewers, the underlying turning points, or mechanisms, that trigger a series of processes and their outcomes are not sufficiently explicit.

A further but related problem reviewers often highlighted is that in the narration of a set of processes and their outcomes, authors may be too focused on detailing and describing the different stages of a model rather than developing a set of well-argued explanations. This frequently seems to be the case with manuscripts where authors draw on a novel theoretical lens or perspective to redescribe and then explain the phases of a particular

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[1] The focus here is on narrative as a general style of theorizing (Pentland, 1999) and not on narratives, as a subject, within management and organizational research.

process, such as, for example, market or industry emergence or processes of institutional change. In many such cases, however, most effort is spent on describing how the new lens fits and applies to each stage, with insufficient attention to how the new lens offers a compelling set of explanations regarding the outcome of interest.

A final comment that reviewers made at times is that the idiom of the narrative style sometimes leads authors astray in focusing too much on finding process words for nounlike outcomes or on combining such words into compounds or sentence-based constructions (such as the made-up example of "institutional work transformation") that then, as constructs, include both a process and an outcome. The main concern that reviewers have here is that such constructs more often than not turn into broad umbrella constructs that subsume a lot of variety and contingent detail and may, on occasion, also be logically problematic in being circular and self-contained in focus, and in conflating processes and outcomes. In such instances, and in order to avoid such problems, it may be apt to use a simpler and more detailed theoretical vocabulary (cf. Ragins, 2012) that teases apart various processual dynamics and their emergent outcomes.

Remedies. The comments from reviewers on process papers in the narrative style highlight two general writing suggestions. The first is to abstract from the particulars of an event or particular scenario to a more analytical explanation that can be generalized across settings. One way of doing this is by focusing less on the description of a specific sequence of phases and events and more on the underlying conceptual model that links such phases and events to important outcomes. For many manuscripts this seems to be a case of shifting the main emphasis such that instead of focusing primarily on providing a sufficiently detailed description of the model, authors devote their energies instead to its explanatory potential by explicating the underlying plot or generative mechanism at work. The theoretical value and contribution of such a mechanism can then also be drawn out by pitting the highlighted mechanism against alternative explanations, which may be one way of addressing the intuitive reaction of reviewers and readers that the storyline that is offered is too general and based on rather strong assumptions.

The second writing suggestion is to populate the storyline of the process model with more explanatory details and parts, including the addition of focal actors who may play the role of protagonists or antagonists, specific processes of interaction, and indicators of context over time and place (Pentland, 1999). Adding such details as potential variation and further explanatory parts is perhaps the most direct way of addressing the often voiced concern of reviewers that process models describe a general sequence of events that authors suggest happens, but without any account of the agents or forces setting things into motion and in what different yet predictable ways. Surprisingly, more often than not, individual, collective, and organizational actors and their actions are, in fact, missing in the storyline of a process model. Many process models are also built around abstract compounds of concepts or broad categories, such as discourse, that are positioned as the driving force determining events and outcomes. Equally, in such instances, adding more variable parts to a storyline (such as, for example, different genres of discourse or different uses of a discourse) will generally enhance the explanatory potential and plausibility of a process model and make it appear less stylized and overly general.

A good example of this is the recent article by Hardy and Maguire (2016) characterizing the way in which, over time, a dominant discourse of risk may emerge. This discourse engulfs managers and organizations, making it hard for them to resist and pushing managers to organize risk in predictable ways, with more and more organizing being carried out in the name of risk. Besides clearly outlining the mechanism at work, Hardy and Maguire also add variable parts to their explanation, such as the turning points between past, present, and future forms of risk-related organizing, as well as the ironic and self-perpetuating consequence of increasing resistance to the discourse, leading to more risk-related organizing.

The Typological Style

The third style that is common is the typological style (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013). In this style an idiom of categorizing and clustering ideas and observations is used to offer a multidimensional take on a management or organizational subject. This is done by categorizing specific theoretical features or dimensions into distinct theoretical profiles or types that offer a set of theoretical coordinates for empirical research. The strength of the categorization idiom is that it is multidimensional, allowing an author to draw together

and integrate different constructs and partial explanations into an "integrative theory" (Fiss, 2011: 393). With this style an author can also offer more complex patterns of causality—for example, by identifying necessary and sufficient conditions of causality or causal interactions. In its ideal form, the typological style thus profiles a more complex configuration of constructs and causal patterns that sets it apart from the variance or "net-effects" type of causal relationships typical of the propositional style (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013), as well as from the more singular generalized mechanism common in the narrative style (Pentland, 1999).

Common problems. This ideal, however, is not always realized. The most common problem reviewers identified is that in many submissions the proposed typology is little more than a basic categorization of an empirical subject. This is the case, for example, when the typology is an empirical classification rather than theoretical in orientation and either describes basic empirical categories that can be observed (such as different types of firms in different industries) or offers an empirical taxonomy of firms based on particular common behavioral features (such as their strategies, modes of governance, etc.). In these instances the typology may be a useful point of reference for an empirical study, but it has limited theoretical mileage.

Another example is when authors do in fact develop categories based on theoretical rather than directly observable empirical dimensions, but then only relate a few select dimensions. The typology they construct in this way offers a basic theoretical categorization but of a very limited scope. Such a typology has, akin to a 2 × 2 matrix, a descriptive and diagnostic function in theoretically classifying different behavioral manifestations of a subject, but it fails to provide any deeper explanations about the occurrence of certain behaviors and their outcomes.

A question that reviewers have often raised in this respect concerns what novel propositions and explanations a typology offers and how it pushes our thinking about a subject forward. More often than not, reviewers feel that the typology offered in a manuscript has primarily a summative or review character. That is, a typology draws together and synthesizes different concepts and different parts of the literature into a more coherent whole. This is indeed a valuable exercise in itself in that it draws connections across concepts and different literature and makes contrasts and continuities between bodies of work more

salient. However, when it turns out that is all there is to the typology, reviewers have tended to feel that it may organize a body of literature and signal opportunities for research based on areas that have been neglected, but it has, apart from that, few, if any, direct theoretical implications.

A final issue reviewers have often highlighted with typology-based papers is that the causal processes or interactions that are implied as part of a typology are not clearly drawn out and may be even somewhat muddled together. This may be because causal processes and interactions cut across the different designated types, which makes it hard to identify a clear set of causal pathways. It also more generally results from the more complex causal picture that a typology offers, with multiple interactions and bidirectional causal paths. While this is potentially a theoretical strength of typologies (Fiss, 2011), it also constitutes a real challenge. That is, a more complex picture of causality may often lead to a confusing and entangled set of causal relations that are not clearly drawn apart and that may give rise to issues of circularity and tautology.

Remedies. These common problems may be anticipated and addressed in a number of ways. The first suggestion is for authors to reflect on the intended and actual contribution of the typology they are constructing (and ask their colleagues, as friendly reviewers, to do this as well) and to consider whether, beyond organizing an area of research into different categories, it offers new theory around new constructs, possible propositions, or novel explanations. One way of assessing this may be to consider the content of each of the categories and whether the labeled categories primarily position and reference different streams of research or whether instead they provoke and highlight new constructs or causal processes. Such reflection may help authors realize if it perhaps makes more sense to write a review rather than a theory paper around their typology, as well as explore the ways it perhaps can potentially be developed in a more theoretical direction.

A second recommendation is to think through the theoretical dimensions and causal factors that are correlated as part of a typology. From a theory perspective, the currency of a theoretical typology often comes from having general yet variable dimensions and factors that then intersect and combine into novel constructs and causal interactions. In that way new constructs, propositions, or causal explanations may result from the exercise. When, on the other hand, the dimensions and factors that are drawn together are more

binary in nature or revolve around extreme opposites, their intersection is generally less likely to spur new thinking and offer up new theoretical insights. The challenge for authors, in other words, is to think about the groundwork of their typology. They need to reflect on the theoretically formative potential of the dimensions they are correlating. This also requires thinking through why these and not other dimensions, by themselves and in combination, are theoretically most potent for the subject at hand.

A good example that testifies to these first two suggestions is the recent article by Creary, Caza, and Roberts (2015) on the way the strategies of managers and subordinates for managing subordinates' multiple identities affect resource exchange within this relationship. They synthesize different theories (leader-member exchange theory, relational-cultural theory, positive organizational scholarship) into a typology of inclusionary or exclusionary strategies on both sides of the relationship. They then elaborate the typology through an additional set of propositions to demonstrate how the alignment or misalignment in strategies between managers and subordinates leads to the production, exchange, exploitation, or suppression of resources in the relationship.

The third and final suggestion that reviewers made relates to causality. As mentioned, typologies may present a more complex and somewhat entangled causal picture at first. While this is no easy challenge, the job of authors is to draw out and formulate clear causal relationships or broader causal processes. In some instances, with a bit of work, authors are able to align the different variable parts and interactions into either a focused set of singular propositions or a broader set of causal trajectories. If, however, this still proves rather difficult based on their own reasoning, it may be useful to use a particular methodology, such as a fuzzy set approach (Fiss, 2011), to systematically go through the process of identifying the active causal force of different variables or constructs and their possible interactions. Authors may then, in turn, be able to formulate the most plausible propositions or probable causal pathways associated with their typology.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is no single boilerplate for developing and writing a theory paper. Instead, there are multiple styles of theorizing and different ways of writing a theoretical manuscript. Here I have focused on three common styles—propositional, narrative, and typological—which, in a sense, present core idioms for writing theory papers. There are other styles besides the three discussed here, such as theoretical essays, but these three are among the most frequently used by authors submitting their work to *AMR*. Each of the three styles comes with certain characteristics specific to its form. The differences between these styles, however, have not always been sufficiently recognized, leading to the erroneous assumption that theory manuscripts of any kind need propositions (Kilduff, 2006). One objective of this essay therefore has been to lay out the characteristics of different styles of theory papers and the challenges associated with writing a theory paper in each of these forms. A greater understanding of these different styles may help authors identify the right style for their paper, depending on whether their objective is specifying cause-effect relationships, defining new constructs, or explaining a particular observed or predictable outcome. Such understanding may also help authors consider ways these styles may be combined. For example, typologies are often used to flesh out a set of novel constructs that are then extended into a set of propositions (for an example see Creary et al., 2015). It is similarly not uncommon for the evolving trajectory of a process model to be broken up into specific propositions (for an example see Huang & Knight, 2017).

It is furthermore likely that few authors have had any direct training in these styles of theorizing and writing as part of their doctoral education (Byron & Thatcher, 2016). Most authors instead learn the craft of writing theory papers through practice and, thus, through direct experience. Although there may not be a substitute for such direct experience, learning about the characteristics of different styles of theory papers may make a significant difference. Besides becoming more familiar with such different styles and the writing challenges associated with them, authors also have to become skilled in expressing themselves through the idiom of a particular style. They can look to published articles in *AMR* as exemplars of each style. These exemplars may feature as a model for their own manuscript (Fulmer, 2012). But besides such modeling, authors will benefit from practicing writing in a particular style. Such practice allows them to start to speak competently in the idiom of the style such that they can configure its basic "grammar" into a coherent line of argument in their own manuscript. This kind of practiced fluency in a particular

style probably requires continuing involvement, guided by a desire to write well and to perfect one's writing skills (Ragins, 2012), rather than following a simple formula or "recipe" (Kilduff, 2006).

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