



Libraries and Learning Services

University of Auckland Research Repository, ResearchSpace

Version

This is the Accepted Manuscript version. This version is defined in the NISO recommended practice RP-8-2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/>

Suggested Reference

Myers, M. D. (2016). Hermeneutics in organization studies. In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies* (pp. 113-124). Routledge. doi: [10.4324/9780203795248.ch7](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203795248.ch7)

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a chapter published in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies* in November 2015, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Philosophy-in-Organization-Studies/Mir-Willmott-Greenwood/p/book/9780415702867>

For more information, see [General copyright](#), [Publisher copyright](#).

HERMENEUTICS IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Michael D. Myers

University of Auckland

INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics is primarily concerned with human understanding: how it is possible for us to understand the meaning of a text. The word 'text' is interpreted broadly in contemporary hermeneutics and refers to written text, speech and any kind of human communication (which may be non-verbal). Hermeneutics can be described as both an underlying philosophy and as a specific way of analysing qualitative data (Bleicher, 1980). As a philosophical approach to human understanding, it provides one of the philosophical groundings for interpretivism (Klein and Myers, 1999). As a mode of analysis, it provides a set of concepts for analysing qualitative data in qualitative research projects.

Scholars in organization studies have engaged with hermeneutic philosophy in various ways. Some have used hermeneutic philosophy to establish and extend social constructivism and interpretive research as a viable research philosophy within management and organization studies (Klein and Myers, 1999). Interpretive research is now well accepted and has "come of age" in organizational studies (Prasad and Prasad, 2002, Walsham, 1995). Others, however, have used hermeneutics as a way of analysing their qualitative data, and in fact that is the most common usage. In recent years critical hermeneutics seems to have come to the fore, with hermeneutically-informed studies of culture, identity and sense-making within the context of organizations. For example, Gopinath and

Prasad (2012) used critical hermeneutics to challenge the conventional understanding and interpretation of a particular event viz. Coca Cola's exit from India in the 1970s. While most previous researchers had blamed the protectionist policies in India for Coca-Cola's demise, their hermeneutic analysis, focusing on the wider macro-economic and historical context, suggests that the company lost a valuable opportunity due to its own inflexible policies. As another example, Robinson and Kerr (2009) used critical hermeneutics to study charismatic leadership in a British organization. Although charismatic leadership is usually associated with positive organizational change, Robinson and Kay say that charismatic leadership and extreme leadership episodes in organizations can lead to long term damage.

Hermeneutics is important in the study of organizations because it provides a way to understand how socially constructed systems of meaning become accepted (legitimate) or challenged. As Phillips and Brown (1993) explain, any act of communication that attempts to change or reinforce the interpretive frameworks of the organizational actors is potentially a subject for hermeneutic analysis. Even a subject such as government contracting can be analysed using hermeneutics, since the parties to a contract need "to come to a mutual agreement about the meaning of a contract and the circumstances surrounding it" (White, 2009: 303).

Despite its potential to provide deep insights into the study of organizational phenomena, however, hermeneutic philosophy has been used by a relatively small number of scholars in organization studies. Over the past 20 years most of the major journals have published only 3-4 articles that engage with hermeneutic philosophy in some way. One of the possible reasons for this is that some of the classic texts on hermeneutics are not easy to understand. It can be a struggle for PhD students and researchers in organization studies to digest some of the essential hermeneutic works. For example, Gadamer's (1975) book "Truth and Method" provides an extensive review of the hermeneutical relevance of many important philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger. He also engages with literary criticism, theology, semiotics and various European thinkers

such as Levi-Strauss, Foucault and Derrida. Gadamer simply assumes that his readers will be familiar with these thinkers and their ideas, something which cannot be taken for granted with PhD students and scholars in business and organization studies. Hence it can be difficult for many scholars in organization studies to engage with hermeneutic philosophy in a meaningful way. Some of the classic texts are rather abstract and difficult to penetrate.

However, probably the main reason for hermeneutics remaining the domain of a minority of organizational scholars is that most scholars in organization studies are committed to a positivist view of knowledge, one that tries to emulate the natural sciences (Barrett et al., 2011). Positivist researchers want to remain value-free and like their research findings to be seen as objective. Hermeneutics, by contrast, sees prejudice, biases and prior knowledge as an essential element in the process of human understanding. Researchers using hermeneutics see their research findings as not purely subjective or objective, but rather, as inter-subjective. This is probably a leap too far for many organizational scholars and goes against their ideal of how scientific research should be conducted. I believe these two reasons largely explain why hermeneutic philosophy has been somewhat neglected in studies of organizations.

The main purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to explain the potential for hermeneutics for organizational studies. I hope that more organizational scholars will become interested in it and use it in their research work.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. The next section looks at the historical origins of hermeneutics and briefly explains some fundamental hermeneutic concepts. The following section reviews how hermeneutic philosophy has been used by organizational scholars. The final section is the discussion and conclusions and suggests some possible directions for the future development of philosophical and critical hermeneutics in organization studies. Some key texts for further reading are suggested.

HERMENEUTIC CONCEPTS

This section looks briefly at the historical origins of hermeneutics and explains some of the fundamental concepts of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics first arose in Western Europe during the Reformation, when Reformed scholars raised the question of Biblical interpretation. They argued that the meaning of the Scriptures could only be understood by interpreting the various texts within their social and cultural context. It was only in the 18th century, however, that the German philosopher Schleiermacher proposed hermeneutics as a general theory for the interpretation of all texts, not just sacred texts. He suggested that all text needs to be interpreted within a larger context, and that the process of understanding a text is circular, moving “back and forth between the parts and the whole” (Barrett et al., 2011, p. 184).

These ideas were then developed further by philosophers such as Dilthey and Heidegger. Subsequently, most organizational scholars have based their work on more recent social philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas. In these more recent works, the word ‘text’ in hermeneutics is no longer restricted to its literal meaning. Rather, the focus of contemporary hermeneutics is on text and text-analogues. The word “text” is thus interpreted metaphorically: A text or text-analogue is anything that can be treated as a text, such as any human artefact, action, organization or culture. Organizational practices, social structures, and organizational culture can all be understood and interpreted in the same way that we might read and understand a written text. Hence the main focus of scholars using hermeneutics in organization studies nowadays is the textual treatment of social and organizational settings. The hermeneutic effort consists of an attempt to make clear, or to make sense of, some organizational phenomenon within its particular social and cultural context.

I will now briefly explain some of the fundamental concepts of hermeneutics.

Historicity

One of the most fundamental concepts in hermeneutic philosophy is that of historicity. Historicity implies that as human beings, we are our history.

Who we are is a function of the historical circumstances and community that we find ourselves in, the historical language we speak, the historically evolving habits and practice we appropriate, the temporally conditioned choices we make. . . In short, hermeneutics defends the ontological claim that human beings *are* their history (Wachterhauser, 1986: 7).

The concept of historicity implies that our understanding of ourselves and others occurs in an historical context where our own historical background and experience informs our interpretation of any topic or subject.

The hermeneutic circle

Another fundamental concept in hermeneutic philosophy is that of the hermeneutic circle. The idea of a hermeneutic circle refers to the dialectic between the understanding of the text as a whole and the interpretation of its parts, in which descriptions are guided by anticipated explanations (Myers, 2004). As Gadamer explains:

It is a circular relationship. . . The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole (Gadamer, 1976a: 117).

The idea of the hermeneutic circle can be applied not just to texts, but to any text-analogue. For example, if a researcher in organization studies is studying entrepreneurship in an organisation, then the organization itself can be treated as a text. The researcher might start by gaining some general knowledge about the organization by reading the newspaper, searching the Internet etc. After doing this, the researcher might then interview specific people within the organisation. As the researcher

dives into the details, his or her understanding of the organisation as a whole develops. The movement of understanding 'is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole' (Myers, 2004).

Prejudice

Another important concept in hermeneutics is that of 'prejudice.' Hermeneutics suggests that our attempt to understand a text always involves some prior knowledge or expectation of what the text is about. For example, at a minimum we must have some understanding of the language in order to understand the written or spoken word. Although we tend to think of the word 'prejudice' in a negative light (e.g. racial prejudice), Gadamer points out that prior knowledge is a prerequisite for understanding. We tend to take this prior knowledge for granted.

Gadamer argues that the critical task of hermeneutics then becomes one of distinguishing between 'true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones by which we misunderstand' (Gadamer, 1976b: 124). Of course, the suspension of our prejudices is necessary if we are to begin to understand a text or text-analogue. But as Gadamer points out, this does not mean that we simply set aside our prejudices. Rather, it means that we, as researchers, must become aware of our own historicity (Gadamer, 1976b: 125). By this he means that we need to become aware of our own views and biases and how these affect the way in which we make sense of the world or interpret a text.

The idea that we need to become aware of our own prejudices brings to the fore the realisation that, for any understanding to take place, there needs to be a dialogue between the text and the interpreter.

Tradition

Although one might think that our prejudices are simply a matter of our own personal preferences, Gadamer points out that this is not so. Rather, our prejudices are often based on tradition – the

culture and customs that we have been taught, usually with the imprint of some form of authority. Tradition, along with our own historicity, forms the background and serves as the condition of our knowledge. However, this does not mean that we should remain uncritical of tradition; rather, tradition is the starting point for any understanding at all.

Autonomization

Another hermeneutic concept is that of autonomization. Ricoeur (1981) says that the author's meaning, once it is inscribed in a text, takes on a life of its own. This process of autonomization takes place whenever speech is inscribed in a text: the text takes on a fixed, finite and external representation. This means that the text now has an autonomous, "objective" existence independent of the author. Nowadays this can be illustrated by the Internet: once something is published on the web, it is almost impossible to delete it.

Distanciation

Distanciation refers to the inevitable distance that occurs in time and space between the text and its original author on the one hand, and the readers of the text (the audience) on the other (Lee, 1994). Ricoeur (1991) points out that, since the text takes on a life of its own, it becomes dissociated from the original author, the originally intended audience, and even its original meaning. The older the text is, and the further away it is in space (culturally and geographically etc.), the greater the distance between the author and the reader.

Appropriation and Engagement

Hermeneutics suggests that to understand the meaning of a text we must appropriate the meaning of it for ourselves. We have to make the text our own. Gadamer suggests that meaning does not reside in "the subjective feelings of the interpreter" nor in "the intentions of the author". Rather, meaning emerges from the engagement of reader and text. This process of critical engagement with the text is crucial (Myers, 2004).

Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer says that true understanding comes from the fusion of horizons. The expansion of our own horizon (viewpoint) is only possible if we are prepared to engage in a dialogue with the text. The key idea is that we should be prepared to allow our own horizons to be challenged as we engage with the text or text-analogue e.g. another person or organization.

TYPES OF HERMENEUTICS

There are different types of hermeneutics. The first one is what Prasad (2002) calls *classical hermeneutics*. Classical hermeneutics refers to the early hermeneutic philosophers such as Dilthey who advocated a 'pure hermeneutics' which stressed empathic understanding and the understanding of human action from the 'inside'. The focus was on interpreting a text in order to recover the author's originally intended meaning.

The second type of hermeneutics is called *philosophical hermeneutics*. Philosophical hermeneutics is usually associated with more recent hermeneutic scholars such as Heidegger and Gadamer. These scholars rejected the idea that it was possible to fully grasp the author's originally intended meaning. Rather, they emphasized that there is always a dialogue between the text and the interpreter, and any interpretation must acknowledge the reader's historicity, prejudices and traditions. Philosophical hermeneutics is sometimes criticized for being too subjectivistic and relativistic, although Gadamer did not agree with these criticisms (Prasad, 2002).

The third type of hermeneutics is called critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics emerged following the debates between Gadamer and Habermas (a critical theorist). While acknowledging the necessary dialectic between the interpreter and the text, critical hermeneutic philosophers reject the idea that interpretation is necessarily subjective and relativistic. They argue that some interpretations are better than others. Critical hermeneutic philosophers also suggest that there are socio-economic and political constraints within which human communication takes place. In this

form of hermeneutics there is thus an attempt to mediate 'hermeneutically-grounded self-understanding' and 'the objective context in which it is formed' (Bleicher, 1982, p. 150). The idea is to critique "the ideological aspects of the text being interpreted" (Prasad, 2002: 16). Both Ricoeur and Thompson are scholars who advocate critical hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1974, Ricoeur, 1976b, Ricoeur, 1981, Thompson, 1981). Ricoeur, for example, says there are two poles or distinct aspects of hermeneutics: the first is a hermeneutics of trust and involves the restoration of meaning; the second is a hermeneutics of suspicion and involves the reduction of illusion. This second pole involves the critique of ideology and implies that consciousness is, to some extent at least, "false consciousness" (Ricoeur, 1976a). Ricoeur argues that both poles are a necessary part of hermeneutic interpretation.

Closely related to that of critical hermeneutics is "depth hermeneutics." Depth hermeneutics assumes that the surface meaning of the "text" hides, but also expresses, a deeper meaning (Myers, 2004). "It assumes a continuing contradiction between the author's conscious and unconscious mind, a false consciousness, which appears in the text" (Diesing, 1991, p. 130). Depth hermeneutics thus gives more emphasis to one of Ricoeur's poles of hermeneutics (the hermeneutics of suspicion) rather than the other (the restoration of meaning).

THE ENGAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATION STUDIES WITH HERMENEUTICS

In this section I review some of the main themes that have been addressed by organizational scholars using hermeneutics. These include organizational theory, organizational culture, organizational narrative, organizational identity, leadership, and organizational research methods. I provide a few examples of how scholars in organization studies have engaged with each of these themes.

Organizational theory

Some scholars have used hermeneutic philosophy to critique organizational theories. For example, Adleson (1996) critiques the organizational learning literature from the perspective of hermeneutics. He suggests that hermeneutics provides a deeper understanding of how people view organizational problems and how they might be solved. Using Gadamer's concept of prejudice and pre-judgement, he points out that, just as the organization means different things to different people, so organizational problems are constituted in terms of their own understanding. He argues that the usual metaphor in the organizational learning literature of the organization as an integrated system or network (in which knowledge accumulates and circulates) is misconstrued, because from a hermeneutic standpoint "organizational life is characterized by enormously varied points of view and by many conflicting and changing stories" (Adleson, 1996: 38). Discourse is about shaping people's interpretations and he argues that this is a firmer basis on which to build a theory of organizational learning.

Burrell discusses the relevance of Habermas for organizational theory and mentions hermeneutics in the context of Habermas' theory of knowledge and human interests. He suggests that organizational theorists need to become more like philosophers and hence become more familiar with contemporary philosophy (Burrell, 1994).

Likewise, Blackler (1993) questions some of the conventional, deep-seated assumptions about managerial and organizational rationality. Using hermeneutics, he proposes a theory of organizations as activity systems which emphasize "the interplay of actions, language, technologies, social structures, implicit and explicit rules, history and institutions" (Blackler, 1993: 882).

Organizational culture

Organizational scholars have used hermeneutics in their study of organizational culture. They have looked at interpretation, meaning and culture in organizational settings. Instead of studying organizational culture from a functionalist, unitary perspective, scholars using hermeneutics tend to seek an in-depth understanding of the complex and diverse ways in which people interpret their culture

(Barrett et al., 2011). I tend to think that most hermeneutic studies of organizations can be seen as studies of organizational culture, although some explicitly refer to culture more than others.

Organizational story-telling and narrative

Closely related to the study of organizational culture is the study of organizational stories, story-telling and narrative. Although there are many approaches to narrative, hermeneutics is one of them (Boyce, 1996).

Gabriel uses hermeneutics to explore the idea of organizational stories as myth. He says that myths, while often expressing ambivalent and contradictory wishes, actually permit different or competing interpretations. He suggests that these myths represent efforts “to deal with life’s harshness, unpredictability and arbitrariness” (Gabriel, 1991: 873).

Phillips (1995) suggests that narrative fiction (e.g. novels, short stories, plays, songs, poems, and films) provides a useful way to think about organizations. He argues that the narrative approach to organizational analysis is complementary, rather than opposed to, traditional forms of organizational analysis. “The importance of narrative fiction lies in the fact that it tells a story, and in telling a story it creates a space for the representation of the life-world within which individuals find themselves... Many different viewpoints can be included in the text, each represented by a character” (Phillips, 1995: 628). Narrative fiction allows for different stories to be told and for doubts, uncertainties, contradictions and paradoxes to be acknowledged rather than hidden.

Myers (1994) uses hermeneutics to tell the story of the failure of an information systems project. This study reveals how and why there were conflicting interpretations of what happened and who was to blame. He looks at the diverse views of the various stakeholders and how the story unfolded over time. From a hermeneutic point of view, he makes the point that “success” is a matter of interpretation and depends upon whose perspective is being considered.

Prasad and Mir (2002) use critical hermeneutics to examine CEO letters to shareholders in the oil industry. The CEO letter is seen by the authors as an account of, and justification for, the company's activities and performance over the previous year. Focusing on the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Prasad and Mir show that the American oil companies used Western cultural myths to portray their international partners in the Arab world as unreliable and potentially dangerous in order to protect their power interests at home (Prasad and Mir, 2002). A hermeneutic analysis thus shows the letters of CEOs to be a form of action, and not simply a means of communications.

Kets de Vries and Miller (1987) say that interpretation is at the centre of organizational work. Researchers and managers need to search for themes and patterns in the text, and hermeneutics is very valuable in this regard.

One example of searching for themes and patterns is Lee's (1994) study of an email exchange. In a critique of information richness theory, Lee argues that there is a world of meaning in email communications within an organizational context. He uses several hermeneutic concepts to reveal how information richness occurs – it is an emergent property of the interaction of the email medium with its organizational context.

Organizational Identity

Brown and Humphreys (2006) explore organizational identity in the context of how different groups of people develop a shared understanding of place. Drawing on hermeneutics, they see organizations as social constructions and treat organizational identities as extremely fluid discursive constructions rather than as static and objective entities. Not only were there multiple, diverse, and conflicting accounts or narratives of the organization's identity, but these accounts enabled people to enact the version which they preferred. Looking at the meanings that people ascribe to place, they show "how different groups can draw on 'place' as a resource in their efforts to develop, promote, and protect their preferred versions of themselves and their organization" (Brown and Humphreys, 2006: 252).

Organizational design

Boland and Day (1989) look at information systems design in organizations as a process of giving meaning to the world through language and action. Their study is a hermeneutic of organizational action in that it reveals the structures of meaning that are drawn upon during the systems design process for organizations. In a similar way, Butler and Murphy (2007) apply concepts from phenomenology and hermeneutics to understand how social actors interpret and understand their world. They use this understanding to develop a set of design principles for the development of knowledge management systems in organizations.

Organizational research methods

Organization scholars have also proposed hermeneutics as being relevant for research methods and approaches. Interpretive approaches to research are usually regarded as those which draw on hermeneutics (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996, Hardy and Clegg, 2007). For example, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) suggest hermeneutics as a research paradigm for insider research – research that understands social reality by interpreting the meanings held by people or members of a social group. Klein and Myers (1999) propose hermeneutics as one of the philosophical foundations for doing interpretive field research. Although interpretive research is usually seen as opposed and irreconcilable with positivist research, Lee (1991) argues that the two are not mutually exclusive and that both can be integrated in some way.

Prasad (2002) suggests methodological guidelines for employing hermeneutics in organizational research. Similarly, Lueger et al. (2005) suggest hermeneutics as a methodology for capturing sense-making activities and the underlying social structures. They call this approach “objective hermeneutics” since their focus is on the subject-independent structures of social fields. Of course, an understanding of these social structures can only be obtained via the subjective interpretations of the actors. Their proposed hermeneutic process consists of reconstructing the underlying rules that apply in a specific

social and organizational context. They demonstrate this methodology in a study of how influence is exercised within organizations.

Butcher (2013) focuses on the researcher's identity while doing ethnographic fieldwork. Using the concept of reflexive hermeneutics, Butcher discusses how shared meanings developed with the research participants. He concludes that a researcher from outside can never truly belong in the field, no matter how much one wants to (Butcher, 2013).

The field or organization studies

Lastly, some scholars have used hermeneutics to critique the field of organization studies itself. Rao and Pasmore (1989) suggest that the study of organizations is incited by divergent interests. They argue that there are four different paradigms within organizational studies; these paradigms are the social innovation viewpoint, the critical viewpoint, the language game viewpoint, and the hermeneutic viewpoint. They say that the hermeneutic viewpoint is the least developed of the four, but has much to offer organizational studies.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, hermeneutics has much to offer organizational studies. Whether the theme is organization theory, organizational culture, narrative, identity and/or research methods, the use of hermeneutics has the potential to provide deep insights into organizational phenomena.

Hermeneutics is valuable, not just for making sense of a text or text-analogue that may be unclear, but also for challenging accepted interpretations. Critical hermeneutics in particular is a powerful way of critiquing ideology, power relations and culture.

However, one notable feature of the literature in organization studies is the way that many authors cite one or more concepts from hermeneutics as informing their work, but apart from a brief mention their engagement with hermeneutic philosophy is perhaps best described as rather limited.

For example, Yanow (2004) discusses how the local knowledge of lower level workers is often discounted and dismissed by managers and executives higher up in the organization. She focuses on the nature of local, contextual knowledge about organizational practices and how this knowledge might be translated to others higher up or outside of the organization. Although the subject matter is one of culture, meaning and power, and Yanow's article is clearly informed by hermeneutics, she only discusses hermeneutics very briefly (Yanow, 2004). Alvesson (2010), likewise, provides an overview of the key images of identity in organizations and how individual identity is metaphorically understood by researchers. He mentions the hermeneutic circle, with reference to how we understand the meaning of texts, but apart from that, there is no further discussion of any hermeneutic concepts. Phillips' (1995) treatment of organizational narrative is similar: his article about narrative fiction is obviously informed by hermeneutics, but he mentions the word just once.

Some organizational scholars, however, do not mention hermeneutics at all, despite some of the key concepts apparently being informed by hermeneutics. For example, Weick et al. (2005) discuss sense-making in organizations. Their discussion is informed by and appears to draw on various hermeneutic concepts (Weick et al., 2005), yet hermeneutics is not mentioned at all and no hermeneutic philosophers are cited.

One possible future direction for organizational scholars using hermeneutics is a focus on leadership. At the moment there are very few hermeneutically-informed articles on leadership, but I believe hermeneutics could offer rich insights into this subject. For example, Sparrowe (2005) focuses on authenticity in leadership as an emergent narrative process in which others play an important role. This is a different perspective than that which is usually adopted in studies of leadership, where authenticity is analysed in terms of the motivational effects of the leader's values and behaviour, and the consistency of these values with those of their followers (Sparrowe, 2005). Drawing on Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics, Sparrowe focuses on narrative and identity in his study of leadership. He argues that, rather than seeing the self as static, the narrative self is one that

experiences change, reversal, and surprise. We use different kinds of stories to make sense of these events, both to ourselves and others. He suggests that the concept of the narrative self, grounded in hermeneutics, provides a rich conceptual framework for understanding identity in relation to authenticity and leadership (Sparrowe, 2005).

We can summarize the current state of play by saying that hermeneutics has made a positive contribution to organization studies. However, at this stage the use of hermeneutics within organization studies still remains something of a cottage industry. While many organizational scholars seem to be informed by hermeneutics, only a small proportion explicitly use hermeneutic concepts. Prasad's comment, made more than a decade ago, that philosophical discussions of hermeneutics in management and organizational research remains rather limited is still true today (Prasad, 2002). Hence there is still much potential for scholars of organizations to better engage with hermeneutic philosophy.

KEY TEXTS FOR FURTHER READING

Prasad (2002) provides a very accessible introduction to hermeneutics and its relevance for organizational studies. He also suggests methodological guidelines for employing hermeneutics in organizational research.

A more comprehensive set of guidelines for employing hermeneutics is provided by Klein and Myers (1999). They suggest a set of principles for the conduct and evaluation of interpretive research in information systems. These principles are derived primarily from anthropology, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Although this article was written primarily for information systems' scholars, I believe it is equally relevant for those seeking to use hermeneutics in organizational studies as well.

A good empirical example of the use of hermeneutics in organizational research is Phillips and Brown's (1993) study of a corporation's image advertising campaign. Their study nicely illustrates how critical hermeneutics can be used to study corporate communications. They show how culture

and power are constituted and maintained by the ongoing communicative interaction of the organization's members (Phillips and Brown, 1993).

After reading these articles it is probably a good idea to read one or more of the general philosophical introductions. A good place to start would be Palmer's (1969) collection of readings. This book includes selected works by prominent hermeneutic scholars.

Gadamer's (1975) book "Truth and Method" is regarded as a classic in the field, but it is more difficult to read than the more general introductions. Gadamer's main concern is the veracity of interpretation; given our subjectivity, how can we avoid being purely relativistic? Gadamer's solution is to suggest that our prejudices and biases can be made subject to critical scrutiny (Myers, 2004).

REFERENCES

- Addleson, M. (1996) 'Resolving the spirit and substance of organizational learning', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 9, pp. 32-41.
- Alvesson, M. (2010) 'Self-doubters, strugglers, storytellers, surfers and others: Images of self-identities in organization studies', *Human Relations*, 63, pp. 193-217.
- Alvesson, M. and Deetz, S. (1996) 'Critical Theory and Postmodernism Approaches to Organizational Studies', in Clegg, S., Hardy, C. & Nord, W. (eds.) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 255-283.
- Barrett, F. J., Powley, E. H. and Pearce, B. (2011) 'Hermeneutic philosophy and organizational theory', in Tsoukas, H. & Chia, R. (eds.) *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*: Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 181-213.
- Blackler, F. (1993) 'Knowledge and the theory of organizations: organizations as activity systems and the reframing of management*', *Journal of management studies*, 30, pp. 863-884.
- Bleicher, J. (1980) *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bleicher, J. (1982) *The hermeneutic imagination*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Boland, R. J. and Day, W. F. (1989) 'The Experience of System Design: A Hermeneutic of Organizational Action', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 5(2), pp. 87-104.
- Boyce, M. (1996) 'Organizational story and storytelling: a critical review', *Journal of organizational change management*, 9, pp. 5-26.
- Brannick, T. and Coghlan, D. (2007) 'In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 10, pp. 59-74.
- Brown, A. and Humphreys, M. (2006) 'Organizational identity and place: A discursive exploration of hegemony and resistance', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43, pp. 231-257.
- Burrell, G. (1994) 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis 4: The Contribution of Jurgen Habermas', *Organization Studies*, 15, pp. 1-19.
- Butcher, T. (2013) 'Longing to belong', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 8, pp. 242-257.

- Butler, T. and Murphy, C. (2007) 'Understanding the design of information technologies for knowledge management in organizations: a pragmatic perspective', *Information Systems Journal*, 17, pp. 143-163.
- Diesing, P. (1991) *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Gabriel, Y. (1991) 'Turning Facts into Stories and Stories into Facts: A Hermeneutic Exploration of Organizational Folklore', *Human Relations*, 44, pp. 857-875.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1975) *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1976a) 'The Historicity of Understanding', in Connerton, P. (ed.) *Critical Sociology, Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, pp. 117-133.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1976b) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. California: University of California Press.
- Gopinath, C. and Prasad, a. (2012) 'Toward a critical framework for understanding MNE operations: Revisiting Coca-Cola's exit from India', *Organization*, 20, pp. 212-232.
- Hardy, C. and Clegg, S. (2007) 'Relativity Without Relativism : Reflexivity in Post-Paradigm Organization Studies', *British Journal of Management*, 8, pp. S5-S17.
- Kets de Vries, M. F. R. and Miller, D. (1987) 'Interpreting Organizational Texts', *Journal of Management Studies*, 24, pp. 233-247.
- Klein, H. K. and Myers, M. D. (1999) 'A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Systems', *MIS Quarterly*, 23(1), pp. 67-93.
- Lee, A. S. (1991) 'Integrating Positivist and Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Research', *Organizational Science*, 2(4), pp. 342-365.
- Lee, A. S. (1994) 'Electronic mail as a medium for rich communication: an empirical investigation using hermeneutic interpretation', *MIS Quarterly*, 18(2), pp. 143-157.
- Lueger, M., Sandner, K., Meyer, R. and Hammerschmid, G. (2005) 'Contextualizing Influence Activities: An Objective Hermeneutical Approach', *Organization Studies*, 26, pp. 1145-1168.
- Myers, M. D. (1994) 'A disaster for everyone to see: an interpretive analysis of a failed IS project', *Accounting, Management and Information Technologies*, 4(4), pp. 185-201.
- Myers, M. D. (2004) 'Hermeneutics in Information Systems Research', in Mingers, J. & Willcocks, L.P. (eds.) *Social Theory and Philosophy for Information Systems*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 103-128.
- Palmer, R. (1969) *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Phillips, N. (1995) 'Telling Organizational Tales: On the Role of Narrative Fiction in the Study of Organizations', *Organization Studies*, 16, pp. 625-649.
- Phillips, N. and Brown, J. L. (1993) 'Analyzing communication in and around organizations: A critical hermeneutic approach', *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6), pp. 1547.
- Prasad, A. (2002) 'The contest over meaning: Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology for understanding texts', *Organizational Research Methods*, 5, pp. 12-33.
- Prasad, A. and Mir, R. (2002) 'Digging Deep for Meaning: A Critical Hermeneutic Analysis of CEO Letters to Shareholders in the Oil Industry', *Journal of Business Communication*, 39, pp. 92-116.
- Prasad, A. and Prasad, P. (2002) 'The Coming of Age of Interpretive Organizational Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 5, pp. 4-11.
- Rao, M. V. H. and Pasmore, W. A. (1989) 'Knowledge and Interests in Organization Studies: A Conflict of Interpretations', *Organization Studies*, 10, pp. 225-239.
- Ricoeur, P. (1974) *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976a) 'Hermeneutics: Restoration of Meaning or Reduction of Illusion?', in Connerton, P. (ed.) *Critical Sociology, Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, pp. 194-203.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976b) *Interpretation Theory, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press.

- Ricoeur, P. (1981) *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991) *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*. Translated by: Blamey, K. & Thompson, J.B. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Robinson, S. K. and Kerr, R. (2009) 'The symbolic violence of leadership: A critical hermeneutic study of leadership and succession in a British organization in the post-Soviet context', *Human Relations*, 62, pp. 875-903.
- Sparrowe, R. T. (2005) 'Authentic leadership and the narrative self', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, pp. 419-439.
- Thompson, J. B. (1981) *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wachterhauser, B. R. (1986) *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Walsham, G. (1995) 'The Emergence of Interpretivism in IS Research', *Information Systems Research*, 6, pp. 376-394.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M. and Obstfeld, D. (2005) 'Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking', *Organization Science*, 16, pp. 409-421.
- White, J. D. (2009) 'The Hermeneutics of Government Contracting', *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 31, pp. 302-321.
- Yanow, D. (2004) 'Translating Local Knowledge at Organizational Peripheries*', *British journal of management*, 15, pp. 9-25.