A patient is not a car

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CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I set out to study what happens to management concepts as they are adopted by organizations. Whereas a number of theoretical perspectives have helped expand our understanding of why organizations invest significant resources to apply new management concepts and how these concepts impact management and organizations, very little is known about what happens within organizations when these ideas are shaped in practice (Gondo and Amis, 2013; Reay et al. 2013). As I argued, translation as a perspective has proliferated quietly but rapidly to address this issue, but the discourse of this theoretical perspective remains under-theorized and fragmented. The blurred boundaries between specific contributions of translation hinder an informed comparison of these approaches and their results in understanding how specific organizational actors undertake the challenge of making concepts locally meaningful. This relative neglect is problematic insofar as scholars of translation assume the perspective to be a 'ready-made' agentic approach, without carefully scrutinizing the extent to which primacy is actually given to different actors in developing ideas and practices (Sturdy, 2004). Despite its proclaimed focus on agency, with translation being 'in the hands of people' (Johnson and Hägstrom 2005, p. 371), there has been limited systematic research on how individual actors translate new ideas to their organizations (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016). Hence, the conceptualization of agency in translation might be problematic in and of itself and might require closer study to see if it really accomplishes what it promises to deliver. By problematizing the assumption (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) that translation is an inherently coherent and agentic perspective, this research contextualized and deepened our understanding of the specific possibilities and limitations of alternative translation approaches. Furthermore, it explored the potential for developing a more agentic focus in translation.

As such, the conceptual and empirical investigation of this dissertation aimed to explore the role of human agency in the translation of management concepts. To do this, I conducted an abductive, qualitative study at the Dutch national network, 'LIDZ' ('Lean in de zorg' - Lean in healthcare). A back and forth between theory and data yielded three sub-topics of research that were addressed in chapters two, three and four. In the following sections of this chapter I summarize the main findings of these chapters and derive theoretical implications to address the

main research question of this dissertation. Subsequently I reflect on how my own ontological and epistemological positions related to the theoretical contribution of this research and on how this dissertation may be positioned within a wider field of literature by touching upon its relation to institutional and organization theory. After this, I discuss the practical implications of this study and I indicate how the limitations, boundary conditions and findings of the study may provide bases for future research. In the remainder of this chapter, I will again alternate between 'I' and 'we.' I use 'we' to refer to the collaborative work of the studies in the previous three chapters, but I will mostly use 'I' when reflecting on personal considerations and on implications that go beyond the individual chapters.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

To explore the role of human agency in the translation of management concepts, three specific sub-questions were raised. Below, I address the main research findings of chapters two, three and four of this dissertation to answer these sub-questions. In chapter two I set out to answer the following: how is the translation of management concepts conceptualized and what is the role of agency? In chapter three I asked the question: how do key intermediate actors translate management concepts across professional and managerial boundaries? In chapter four I focused on answering: what is the relationship between the identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts? See Table 5.1 for a summary of the research questions, the main findings and theoretical implications.

Chapter two - Translation and agency in studying the flow of management concepts

In chapter two we used a systematic literature review to investigate the key foci and base assumptions of different translation approaches. Rather than fixing the term and definition of translation ourselves, we intended to examine how translation itself has been envisioned in diverse intellectual communities. We identified two theoretically relevant dimensions that mark important differences between these various strands of research: the source of variation and the object of variation. With these dimensions, we developed a typology of four alternative approaches to translation. Depending on the approach, who or what affects the process of translation changes. For example, actors may be decentered from the process or may be assigned a conscious or strategic position. The conceptualization of an actor's context, their tools and the

outcomes of the translation processes may change as well. The review indicated that these alternative approaches to translation may be strongly influenced by various theoretical perspectives and we showed how the assumptions of institutional, rational, dramaturgical and political perspectives are echoed in the various, yet polarized, interpretations and conceptualizations of translation. By articulating the assumptions underlying these approaches and by defining how key elements are understood, we aim to encourage and enable translation researchers to better specify their approach to translation and to reflexively intertwine perspectives, taking advantage of the possibilities for enhanced integration.

Chapter three - Translation of management concepts across professional and managerial boundaries

'(1) The work floor really wanted it and my department and my old boss wanted it and I wanted it. The board of directors did not have a leading position in the beginning. But they did say: 'it is a good idea, proceed.' (2) Here [points at a diagram] in [year] we had no contact with the board of directors and we were coaching at the team level. [So] [w]e developed that further. You see that we have increasingly been coaching and . . . we have a dotted line to the board of directors. Contact has been incidental in nature. (3) Since [year] contact has become more frequent and [the board] has expressed their commitment to also finding their own role; because you do expect something from them then.' (Informant 10)

Lamenting on the challenges of translating Lean in a hospital setting, the above interviewee clearly indicated how his translation efforts are related to his position in the interstices of professional and managerial hierarchies and how these efforts came to reflect three different modes as a result of this. Taking issue with the polarization of agency in translation—where individual agency is implied or where attention is focused mainly on higher-level, executive managers—chapter three focused on the boundary-spanning practices of intermediate agents championing the implementation of Lean in hospital settings. Here, we developed a theoretical model of boundary spanning in translation. We identified a set of three practices intermediate agents draw upon when aligning the meaning of Lean across professional and managerial boundaries: 'positioning' 'labeling' and 'channeling.' There is significant similarity between these practices and 'editing rules', a notion introduced by Sahlin-Andersson (1996). While the

idea of editing rules has been used extensively to understand the way in which ideas and concepts become embedded in new localities—with editing rules stemming from the organizational or field level to shape varying potential for agency (Kirkpatrick, Bullinger, Lega and Dent, 2013)— less attention has been paid to how editing rules in practice might be a function of the agency of actors. Aiming to remedy this, our study tries to show how in relation to modes of bridging, buffering and blending, micro-practices vary as a function of general, embedding 'editing rules' (positioning, labeling and channeling) but also of the strategic orientations of key agents. Our study reveals how buffering is a significant, yet paradoxical and under-theorized part of translation, and offers a more nuanced view of the role of boundary-spanning agents in translation and further clarifies the use of editing rules to shape translation practices.

Chapter four - Identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts

'But I have started working differently—approaching things in a different way. But it is because I really support [Lean]. But it is a struggle, mind you. I can be really bummed out by [limited managerial support and no financial means]. And I really was before, but now I think, 'let's just keep an open outlook and let's go.' And I like it like that. And sometimes you have to get off the formal ways—that's clear as well. And the connection with quality and safety has to be tighter. I need to go there more too.' (Informant 20).

In chapter four, we started from the position that 'we cannot understand processes of organizing unless we understand identity' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 52). Consequently, we investigated how the translation of management concepts is connected to identity work. In chapter three we had defined key actors in terms of the position they held in between professional and managerial boundaries, but such an approach had also obscured them from view. Who are these boundary-spanning individuals outside of their relationship to others? Therefore, in this chapter, we studied intermediate agents championing the implementation of Lean in hospital settings and focused on the tension between individual identification with the concept and the perceived demands of their organizational contexts. The view 'identity as struggle' was particularly relevant to our concerns as we found that actors engage in narrative constructions to create a coherent sense of self within specific organizational contexts where new concepts and practices are introduced and where there is an expectation to engage with them in terms of self-identity. We identified four different

categories of identity work in relation to translation: externalizing, professionalizing, rationalizing and proselytizing. We also showed that identity work mutually affects the actor and the concept by means of three attributes of identification: salience, transience and valence.

5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

As chapters two, three and four enabled me to answer the three specific sub-questions of this dissertation, we can now derive the theoretical implications of this research in general and in relation to the main research question specifically. I problematized the assumption that translation is a coherent and agentic theoretical perspective. Which has left the perspective lingering in states of latency, obscuring its conceptual clarity in its own right, and in its relative contribution to organization and institutional theory. By using existing agentic perspectives as a lens, two notions transpired that allow for an advanced conceptualization of human agency in the translation of management concepts: *mechanisms of duality* and *the spatial metaphor*.

Agency in translation: rethinking mechanisms of duality

The literature review in chapter two hoped to more closely examine the under-theorized and fragmented discourse hampering the progress of translation research as an academic field. From this review, I showed how alternative approaches to translation have different conceptualizations of what the construct entails, specifically in terms of key foci and base assumptions. From our qualitative analysis, one of the conceptual distinctions in translation concerned the source of variation, which generally results in two main approaches to translation: embeddedness approaches and strategizing approaches to translation. Embeddedness approaches generally consider variation as a natural result of the interaction of a concept and the context in which it is embedded. Individual agency is, at best, implied and, in some cases, its neglect is explicit (e.g., Zilber 2006, p. 300). Strategizing approaches instead, highlight 'the strategic opportunities associated with different interpretations [of] an idea or a practice within a given organizational context' (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen 2009, p. 192). Overall, translation studies tend to either collapse organizational and individual considerations related to the translation of concepts, or, instead, polarize these considerations between a form of determinism and voluntarism. This has inhibited the development of an underlying theory about the dynamic between individuals and their organizational contexts and has limited our understanding of the interdependence

between the two.

In chapter two, we provided a typology of alternative approaches that enables more reflexivity and a better specification in the use of translation and we showed how the specification of dualisms (polarized approaches) opens up possibilities for taking an integrative approach as the limitations of approaches can be addressed, by considering insights from multiple perspectives and viewing their elements as mutually constitutive. In chapters three and four, I specifically addressed the tendency to conflate or separate organizational and individual considerations related to the translation of management and I aimed to show how the two are mutually constitutive and link them through closer interaction.

In chapter three, we show how micro-practices in translation are simultaneously a function of general, embedding 'editing rules' (positioning, labeling and channeling) but also of the strategic orientations of key agents. While the idea of editing rules (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) has been used extensively to understand how ideas and concepts become embedded in new contexts, it reflects an 'embeddedness approach' with organizational considerations to translation. Less attention has been paid to how editing rules in practice might also be a function of the agency of actors and may come to vary as a result of their strategic orientations. In showing the similarity between our (inductively derived) practices of 'positioning', 'labeling' and 'channeling' and the notion of editing rules, and in drawing on a boundary spanning perspective, we argue that the orientation of key intermediate actors, spanning professional and managerial boundaries, is an important factor in specifying the nature of editing rules and in shaping the micro-practices they use. In this sense, our findings are consistent with the general idea that editing rules shape translation practices; while, at the same time, our findings offer a more nuanced view of how these editing rules interact with different modes of strategic orientation (bridging, buffering and blending) in shaping these practices.

In chapter four, we showed how the identity work of key agents is simultaneously a function of the complex interaction between the agents' personal identification with Lean but also of the contextual pressures pertaining to them. The interaction between these two was found to result in four types of identity work. Additionally, we showed how, in turn, this identity work affects the actor and the concept. By means of three attributes of identification the actor and the concept are narratively constructed: salience, transience and valence. As such, our research suggests a need and a way to reconcile the current opposing conceptualizations of agency to

better understand their interaction in translation.

In sum, drawing on the agentic perspectives of boundary spanning and identity work allowed me to explore, refine and extend the conceptualization of agency within translation by showing how the interaction between organizational—or contextual—and individual considerations affects translation, which often goes unnoticed when taking an either-or or conflated approach. I found that seeing these relationships as mutually constitutive, with actors being simultaneously embedded in their contexts and also maintaining an ability to shape management concepts and their contexts, urges us to rethink the role of agency in translation. Researchers should try to go beyond a rationalization of actors that conflates or separates organizational and individual considerations for adapting concepts. And instead allow for a conceptualization where agency reflects the mutually constitutive, interpretive activity through which the concept and the agent are simultaneously constructed, in the tensions between individual claims and the demands on this self by context.

Agency in translation: rethinking the spatial metaphor

As mentioned before, diffusion and translation represent two fundamentally different paradigms in studying the spread of ideas, concepts and practices. Taking issue with diffusion as a sequential process, in which ideas are treated as thing-like objects spreading relatively unchanged and as a function of innate characteristics, translation perspectives instead conceive of ideas as 'fluid entities that change when moving from 'here to there' because of a complex web of activities in the organization' (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016, p. 1). As such, translation as a perspective is seen as moving away from linear framings of innovation to more non-linear models of transfer (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; see also Akrich, Callon and Latour, 2002a, 2002b; Mica, 2011, 2013). Yet, as we have seen, central to translation studies is the travel-of-ideas metaphor, which consists of a dis-embedding/re-embedding dialectic (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Mica, 2013). Underlying this metaphor is the main theoretical assumption that the degree of translation required for an idea to be reapplied in a new setting depends on the distance it needs to *overcome*. Distance is implicitly conceptualized as a noun, capturing a (stable) state of geographical, contextual and/or temporal proximity between the 'context of origin' and the 'recipient context' (Morris and Lancaster, 2006, p. 210; Røvik, 1998, 2000; Nicolini, 2010). Translation as such, 'has become a popular theoretical device […] for understanding how change

is effected through temporal and spatial movement' (O'Mahoney, 2016, p. 1). So despite its proclaimed turn toward 'non-linearity', we still find elements of a spatial metaphor, with a unidirectional, top-down logic underlying the translation perspective. A metaphor that, I argue, may hamper the development of a clear understanding of what happens when ideas and concepts spread and are given new meaning in different localities.

In chapters three and four, I address the tendency in studies of the 'travels' of management concepts to conceptualize distance as an a-priori spatial proximity that needs to be overcome. In chapter three, by drawing on a boundary spanning perspective, we were struck by the contrast between 'connecting' and 'buffering' orientations that the individuals in this study held in introducing Lean across organizational boundaries. Attending to the strategic orientation actors take in mediating the professional and managerial hierarchies, shows how the translation efforts of key actors may include shifts between overcoming and creating a sense of distance. The study therefore illuminates how buffering is a significant, yet paradoxical and under-theorized part of translation. We contend that these findings are relevant because they draw attention to how translation may also include the generation of space (or distance), contrasting with prior literature on translation which emphasizes alignment efforts used to overcome distance by making different meanings mutually compatible (Latour, 1986).

In chapter four, our attention was directed to the ways in which distance—and distancing—is actively constructed by agents as a way of maintaining a stable self-narrative in dealing with the complex interaction between the self and the context (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Gergen and Gergen, 1997; Ibarra, 1999; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Snow and Anderson, 1987). The notion of distance in identity work relates to the separation between a 'current self' and an 'aspirational identity' (Beech, 2011; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Distance is then conceived of as a 'cynical distance' toward cultural prescriptions (Fleming and Spicer, 2003, p. 1338) or as a 'cognitive distance' . . . toward the institutions in which [actors] are embedded (Creed et al., 2010, p. 1228). Snow and Anderson (1987), for example, show how 'identity talk' constitutes the primary form of identity work through which homeless people may engage in 'categoric', 'specific' and 'institutional' distancing to reject incongruence between role-based social identities and personal identities. Similarly, Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2006) show how priests use specific tactics to create a comfortable distance between their personal identities and the demands of priesthood. Here, distance is used

as a verb, rather than a noun and is seen as a means to 'distance [oneself] from other identity options', (Larson and Pepper 2003, p. 532) to 'resist through distance' professional occupations, (Alvesson and Robertson, 2016; Collinson, 1994) or to 'subjectively distance' oneself from managerial domination and a work-imposed identity by constructing identities that one may regard as more 'authentic' (Costas and Fleming, 2009). To create this distance, employees may shift their foci or targets of identification (Frandsen, 2012; Kuhn and Nelson, 2002) and draw upon different sources of self-definition (Alvesson and Robertson, 2016; Fleming and Spicer, 2003). By using identity work as an analytical lens, our findings show that agents may draw upon salience, transience and valence to simultaneously position the concept and themselves to cope with the discrepancies between their personal identification with Lean and the contextual pressures pertaining to them. These personal and subjective constructions of distance by key agents may guide and affect the subsequent mechanisms of translation as we see specified in current literature; consequently, translation literature could benefit from adopting a broader and more dynamic conception of agency to better understand the flow and impact of management concepts.

In sum, drawing on the agentic perspectives of boundary spanning and identity work allowed me to explore, refine and extend the conceptualization of agency within translation. By rethinking the spatial metaphor I showed how agency in translation, rather than focusing on using alignment to overcome distance, may actually entail the subjective construction and generation of distance among the concept, the context and the agent. As such, researchers should try to go beyond a conceptualization of translation as an effort to overcome an a-priori spatial proximity where the geographical, contextual and/or temporal distance is associated with 'the trajectory of the practice's diffusion' (Gondo and Amis, 2013, p. 244) reflecting the difference between the 'context of origin' and the 'recipient context'. Instead, a sensitivity to the relation between the 'trajectory of the self' (Giddens, 1991) and the 'trajectory of innovation diffusion' (McMaster, Mumford, Swanson, Warboys and Wastell, 1997, p. 44; Rogers, 1983, see also Gondo and Amis, 2013) is likely to yield a better understanding of what happens when ideas and concepts spread and are given new meaning in different localities. After all, Latour (1996, p. 150) already argued: 'the trajectory of a project depends not on the context but on the people who do the work of contextualizing'.

Table 5.1 *Research questions, main findings and theoretical implications*

	Main Findings	Theoretical Implications	
		Rethinking mechanisms of duality *Translation as a theoretical perspective tends to either collapse or polarize organizational and individual considerations related to the adaptation of concepts, which has inhibited the development of an underlying theory about their interdependence.*	*Rethinking the spatial metaphor* *Translation as a theoretical perspective tends to exhibit elements of a spatial metaphor, with a unidirectional, top-down logic, which may hamper the development of a clear understanding of what happens when concepts are given new meanings in new contexts.*
Chapter two Translating management concepts: Towards a typology of alternative approaches RQ: How is the translation of management concepts conceptualized and what is the role of agency?	- Identification of two dimensions in translation of management concepts: the source of variation (embeddedness-strategizing) and the object of variation (ideational-material). - A typology of alternative approaches to translation. Articulation of key foci, base assumptions and key elements. - The four approaches echo institutional, rational, dramaturgical and political perspectives.	- The typology of alternative approaches enables more reflexivity and a better specification in the use of translation. - The specification of dualisms (polarized approaches) opens up possibilities for taking an integrative approach. - The limitations of approaches can be addressed by considering insights from multiple perspectives and viewing their elements as mutually constitutive.	
Chapter three Aligning the meaning of Lean: Boundary spanning agents in the translation of management concepts RQ: How do key intermediate actors translate management concepts across professional and managerial boundaries?	- Development of theoretical model of boundary spanning in translation. - Identification of three practices key agents use to align the meaning of Lean across professional and managerial boundaries: positioning, labeling and channeling. - Practices come to vary in relation to modes of bridging, buffering and blending.	- Micro-practices in translation are a function of general, embedding 'editing rules' (positioning, labeling and channeling) but also of the strategic orientations of key agents. - Key agents' mediation across organizational boundaries is associated with different modes of strategic orientation (bridging, buffering and blending).	- Translation efforts of key actors—mediating professional and managerial hierarchies—shift between overcoming (connecting) and creating a sense of distance (disconnecting). - Identification of 'buffering' as a significant, yet paradoxical and under-theorized part of translation.
Chapter four Translating identities: Management concepts as means and outcomes of identity work RQ: What is the relationship between the identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts?	- Actors engage in narrative constructions to create a coherent sense of self within specific organizational contexts where new concepts and practices are introduced. - Identification of four different categories of translation-as-identity-work: externalizing, professionalizing, rationalizing and proselytizing.	- Identity work is a function of the complex interaction between the agents' personal identification with Lean and the contextual pressures pertaining to them. - Identity work mutually affects the actor and the concept by means of three attributes of identification through which they are both narratively constructed: salience, transience and valence.	- Distance is actively constructed for a stable self-narrative in dealing with agents' personal identification with Lean and the contextual pressures pertaining to them. - Agents may draw upon salience, transience and valence to 'distance' the concept and themselves to cope with experienced discrepancies.

Paradigmatic assumptions in rethinking mechanisms of duality and spatial metaphors

As translation research approaches data analysis as a contextual act, rather than as a normative one (Lægreid, 2007 in Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009), it requires researchers be very much aware of their own position towards their object of study and to constantly question the epistemological assumptions underlying the situated nature of knowledge production (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 197). To do justice both to the reflexive epistemology inherent to translation research and to a personal interest in reflexivity, I followed an abductive, qualitative approach. In contrast to traditional perspectives, abduction does not view knowledge as being devoid of ambiguity and subjectivity (Bartel and Garud, 2006; Schwab, 1980), but instead uses inferences that require a reflexive and self-critical approach on the part of the researcher. This demands that researchers show awareness of and identify their own ontological and epistemological position relative to the object of study, as well as understand their paradigmatic, political, theoretical, methodological and social pre-understandings as a tool to engage with the empirical material (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p. 1269; Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009).

As such, it should be noted that this research started from the ontological position that in translation, agents are simultaneously embedded in their contexts and are able to actively work within these contexts to redefine the meaning and shape of concepts and ideas. This is quite ostensible in the three projects. For example, in chapter two, I argue that the dualisms presented through the typology can be used as dualities. To do this, one could adopt an integrative approach that addresses the limitations of restrictive interpretations by considering insights from multiple perspectives and viewing their elements as mutually constitutive. In chapter three, I argue that distance in translation studies could be seen as a subjectively construed, relative position between the concept and the agent; a notion which reciprocally influences the position of the concept within the context. And in chapter four, following Giddens (1991), I explicitly defined identity as produced through discursive acts within the ongoing interaction of structure and agency. Here and as a result, I show how in translation both the actor and concept are simultaneously affected through identity work.

Research participants, however, hardly—if ever—used words or phrases such as 'simultaneity', 'reciprocally', or 'mutual constitution.' Nor would they elaborate on this paradox in language that was easy to analyze or quote. However, being reflective of my own paradigmatic

pre-understandings, following iterative steps between data and theory and adopting agentic perspectives, allowed me to see this mutual constitution. As a result, I started to find this similarity in the data patterns and was able to abstract and decontextualize its essence to an interpretation that could be applied to the empirical context of this study (Bartel and Garud, 2006). For those who subscribe to more conventional approaches, which aim to establish direct links between particulars and general rules, this may appear to be a dangerous exercise (Bartel and Garud, 2006). Yet, when utilizing an 'ampliative' form of reasoning (Cornelissen and Durand, 2006; see also Bartel and Garud, 2006), value may be found in adopting interpretative flexibility rather than following the rigidity of building theory from data or validating and falsifying hypotheses which 'frequently exhibit a misleading surface of rigor and robustness' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p. 1279). And indeed, allowing space for creative inference in working with the empirical material enabled me to see that translation as a perspective is not as coherent and agentic as we assume it to be; this finding led me to rethink mechanisms of duality and spatial metaphors in a way that purely inductive or deductive approaches would not have facilitated.

Starting from this ontological position, one of the research issues I would like to highlight is my use of language to deal with this 'mutual constitution'. To make sense of the encountered surprises in the data and to see my own pre-understandings as a tool to engage with the empirical material (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p. 1269), the use of 'the right language' is key in reflecting this essence, as well as to generate valid descriptions and abstractions. And whereas 'all philosophy is [a] 'critique of language'' (Wittgenstein, T4.0031) its linearity and limited capability to convey simultaneity can become specifically problematic when these are the exact processes one wishes to describe. Drawing on the agentic perspectives of boundary spanning and identity work, I was confronted with a narrative challenge to reconceptualize agency in translation to reflect this duality of mutual constitution to a greater extent. It is complex to use language to describe a recursive relationship in which domains mutually affect each other, acting as both a means and an outcome at the same time. This is easily modeled in drawing—with a loop of arrows in which there is no rigid starting point—but with language as a medium to convey the same message, the idea is a difficult one to express. In chapter four, I wished to address the limited attention paid to mutual modification processes in which a concept and an actor influence each other, especially considering translation originally denoted the 'creat[ion] of

a new link that modifies . . . those who translated and that which is translated' (Latour, 1993, p. 6 in Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, p. 24). Yet, as translation—to some extent—already holds the creation of a link between a concept and an agent and I wished the research question to accurately reflect the idea of mutual modification, the original question, 'How does identity work affect translation?' seemed nonsensical. The question 'Through what mutual modification processes do a concept and an actor influence each other?' would, despite doing justice to our conceptual interests, have been too complex and too far ahead of the findings in this chapter. I decided to go with 'What is the relationship between the identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts?' for clarity's sake, even though 'relationship' does not entirely do justice to the underlying considerations of conducting this research. In a similar vein, it was hard to express in words the dual implications of the 'attributes of identification' around which our analysis started to evolve. We initially decided to frame our analysis in a sequential fashion by stating: 'Overall, while our main focus was initially on how Lean was narratively constructed through these three attributes of identification, we also found the actors to be simultaneously produced.' Here, we placed the effect of the agent on the concept first and the effect of the concept on the agent second; this again, by breaking up the dual causality, did not entirely do justice to their assumed mutual constitution. Later however, we framed the relationship as follows: 'Both the actor and concept are affected through the resulting identity work' and we 'present an ideal-type vignette of an 'individual' organized around three attributes of identification—salience, transience and valence—through which the position of the concept in relation to themselves and to their organization is narratively constructed.' By using words and phrases such as: 'concurrently', 'simultaneously', 'reciprocally', 'recursively' and 'mutually constituted' I aimed to denote an underlying relationship among context, concept and agent. The promotion of a duality perspective, as the one I adhered to, should be understood in the context of a more general turn towards notions of performativity, constitutive approaches and 'work metaphors' in understanding and refining the structure-agency paradox, both within the social sciences in general and within organization and institutional theories more specifically (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009; Heugens and Lander, 2009; Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997). Therefore, in broader areas of research I expect portraying these dual relationships through language will be a challenge, as they are notably difficult to model. We need to use accurate, but concise words,

phrases and metaphors to convey our point, without jeopardizing the readability and clarity of our texts. More thorough reflection on—and awareness of—how to do this is certainly called for.

Translation in relation to institutional and organization theory

In the previous sections I showed how this dissertation attempts to advance our understanding and conceptualization of the specific possibilities and limitations of alternative translation approaches and promotes a more agentic approach to translation. By addressing the sub-questions, as well as by drawing on agentic perspectives, I rethought the mechanisms of duality and spatial metaphors present in the translation perspective. In doing so, I aimed to contribute to the perspective's conceptual clarity in its own right. Yet, in order to grasp translation as a construct or perspective, we must go beyond the boundaries of the perspective and touch upon its connection to institutional and organization theory. This is especially necessary since translation is considered to be one of the central pillars of 'Scandinavian institutionalism' and is continuously portrayed in relation to 'mainstream' institutional thinking—either as one of its 'expanding horizons' (Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby and Sahlin-Andersson, 2008; Nielsen, Mathiassen and Newell, 2014; Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016) or as its 'theoretical counterpart' with which a 'conceptual battle' is being fought (Mica, 2013, p. 5). The previous chapters outlined how translation gained prominence through its critique of the diffusion models of innovation underlying the institutionalist traditions in organization theory. Whereas this, indeed, formed the starting point of the translation perspective and the discriminatory logic is still very prominent in legitimizing its relative position among other theoretical perspectives, we should be careful in using institutional theory too much as a theoretical straw man.

During the systematic literature review in chapter two, I came to realize that in studying the flow and impact of management concepts, institutional theory is quite consistently portrayed as a perspective that emphasizes how social environments exert mechanisms of coercion, imitation and normative pressure and aims to explain why concepts are applied in similar ways. From a translation perspective, institutional models are consequently critiqued for paying limited attention to the variation that may occur as a result of using models in different contexts, as well as for its conceptualization of agency as very much constrained by the proclaimed need of actors to find legitimacy in their institutional environments (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009; Creed, Scully and Austin, 2002). In legitimizing its relative position 'the growing number of studies on

translation share a focus on the modification of ideas by agentic actors in relation to a specific context' (Van Grinsven, Heusinkveld and Cornelissen, 2016, p. 2). Here we find three central aspects that reflect a relative and discriminative position to institutional theory: (1) the role of context, (2) the modification of ideas and their characteristics and (3) the role of agentic actors in establishing change.

What is largely overlooked however is the theoretical development *within* the institutional models with which translation is put on a par. First, the distinction between 'old institutionalism' and 'new institutionalism' is often collapsed. Although both 'institutionalisms' have a strong emphasis on isomorphism and standardization as 'a result of organizations' quests to attain legitimacy within their larger environments' (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999, p. 656) early institutionalists (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Selznick, 1949, 1957; Zucker, 1977) accounted for the role of actors in institutional change, whereas neo-institutionalists placed a stronger focus on the exogenous pressures of social environments (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999, p. 656; see also Gondo and Amis, 2013), thereby overlooking the role of agency (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009). Second, taking issue with the emphasis on diffusion and isomorphic behavior, institutional theory has undergone considerable theoretical development to adopt a stronger focus on institutional agency and change opening up research to more 'endogenous explanations' (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009; Powell and Colyvas, 2008). Especially by studying institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004) and institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011), institutional theorists have reintroduced individual agency to institutional analysis (see the special research forums in Academy of Management Journal: Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002; Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer and Zilber, 2010). By taking both a more micro-perspective, which addresses the paradox of embeddedness and a more relational perspective (Seo and Creed, 2002; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009), these strands of research aim to demonstrate how individuals leverage resources to create or transform institutions. And in doing so, they become more sensitive to the questions that theorists of translation claimed as their own.

This may cause critics of the translation perspective to wonder to what extent 'translation theory was not fighting outside the diffusion theory the same battle as the diffusion of innovations theorists fought inside of it' (Mica, 2013, p. 7). Failing to acknowledge the recent developments in institutional theory, either because of an unintentional simplistic reading or

because of an intentional attempt to use the diffusion models underlying (neo-)institutionalism traditions as a theoretical straw man, translation theorists could be accused of artificially enhancing the conceptual contribution of translation to organization theory. If indeed it appears to be just a matter of the distance an observer takes, diffusion and translation perspectives may be conceived as 'theoretical allomorphs', highlighting slightly different aspects of the same phenomenon. One might argue that the distinction is too minimal to warrant different theoretical approaches (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Mica, 2013).

Yet and obviously, whereas mainstream institutional approaches have indeed taken a more micro perspective and adopted a stronger focus on institutional agency and change, I believe the translation perspective holds enormous potential for studying the relationship between agency and practice change. In contrast to the 'thing-like' approach to concepts in mainstream institutional approaches, in which agency and change are interconnected, but separate notions, a translation perspective allows us to see management concepts as fluid entities in relation to complex webs of meaning-making activities in organizations. This emphasis on the meaning-making activities of agents, in a mutually constitutive relationship with the fluidity of concepts (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016, p. 1), helps us explore the processes through which ideas are shaped in practice (Reay et al., 2013) and enables us to see what happens within organizations when new concepts are adopted (Gondo and Amis, 2013) in ways that mainstream institutional traditions still prohibit. But, having said this, we must acknowledge that this potential is still lingering in a state of latency, as the assumption that translation is a coherent and agentic perspective has in fact obscured the perspective's conceptual clarity and relative contribution. In this dissertation, by exploring, refining and extending the conceptualization of agency within the realm of translation, we found the production of actors (implementation managers) and the fluidity of Lean mutually constituted. What actors do, how their actions change the concept, and vice versa, becomes especially apparent when we look at the micro-practices they use to align meanings across organizational boundaries (positioning, labeling and channeling), and the attributes of identification they use to narratively construct the concepts and themselves in different forms of identity work (salience, transience and valence). As such, a clearer delineation of translation as a theoretical perspective—as I attempted in this dissertation—makes its relative position, or conceptual contribution, to institutional and organization theory more distinctive as well.

5.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on these theoretical implications, which encourage future research to rethink mechanisms of duality and spatial metaphors in translation, this dissertation also provides a number of practical implications. Where, theoretically, I aimed to study the role of agentic actors who modify ideas in relation to a specific context, empirically, I studied the role of intermediate agents who managed the implementation of Lean in a hospital context. As well as being an excellent context for the theoretical motivations of my study, it is also an important sector in which the stakes are high and where the implementation of new concepts may lead to improvements to the quality and cost-efficiency of healthcare, directly impacting the lives of people. But, being under major macro-economic pressures to reorganize systems and processes to improve safety and quality, while at the same time being expected to do this with less means, presents a challenging task for healthcare professionals. It is especially difficult to adopt innovations in practice since clinicians and other medical professionals have a lot of decision-making power, which they often use to refuse to conform to any suggested changes that might endanger their functional autonomy. Against this backdrop, important managerial implications may be derived from the findings of this study

First, our findings emphasize the importance of specific individuals in implementation processes, which makes it crucial to think carefully about which agents should have a leading role. We know that the institutionalization of practices implies the involvement of various types of actors, both internal and external to the organization (Perkmann and Spicer, 2008); and the role of the specific organizational actors in this study, in taking the initiative to translate concepts, ideas and practices to make them locally meaningful, appeared very significant. This is in sharp contrast to how these individuals reflected on 'ending up' in these positions. In the majority of instances who was chosen to lead the implementation of Lean tended to be very much a matter of coincidence, or a choice with unforeseen consequences, as Lean started gaining popularity and moved from a pilot program to a project to a strategic consideration. This randomness very likely led to the situations where there is significant discrepancy between the identification of key actors with Lean and the (experienced) organizational engagement with this concept. And this discrepancy was found to impact the agents' efforts in translation to a great extent, as they had to 'actively maneuver' an optimal balance between themselves and the ideas they translated, as well as find balance between individual agency and creation of the self on one hand, and the shaping

of management concepts in a broader organizational context on the other. The complex prior and emerging orientations, emotions and identities of actors, both generally and in relation to a concept, may impact translation processes to a greater extent than the rationality assumptions in theory and practice allow us to realize. We should therefore acknowledge to a greater extent how specific individuals affect translation processes, both with respect to how this may affect the shape of concepts, ideas and, practices and how this may simultaneously impact the agent. For example, if an individual with significant personal identification with the concept only has limited, or even merely 'ceremonial' organizational support, they may downplay their personal and emotional engagement with the concept and instead focus on its organizational value in order to present themselves as experts. This inclination to balance personal commitment with organizational reticence poses challenges that may be considered limiting from an organizational, but also from an individual point of view, when the concept becomes further removed from the considerations they had for adopting it in the first place. At the same time, the individual in charge of implementing a concept is also empirically relevant considering the range of different hierarchical stakeholders involved. He or she should be sensitive to differences in meaning making across organizational boundaries and have the interpretative flexibility, the functional autonomy and professional authority to engage with different stakeholders and their meaning-making processes, yet also be able and willing to provide the context in which different stakeholders are allowed to engage their own interpretations. This requires a person with legitimacy among managerial and professional groups of stakeholders, who is also knowledgeable about the concept. A combination of which is difficult to attain in a single person, but worth striving for nonetheless, to achieve desired outcomes that match with organizational and individual considerations of adoption.

Second, our findings indicate that agents may change concepts in ways that are different from what current perspectives allow us to recognize. So, being conscious of the conditions under which they can do so and knowing with which tools to deploy these conditions may aid key agents to implement concepts in a meaningful way. In the empirical studies of chapter three and four, I analyzed how specific organizational actors perceived their role, experiences, interpretations and decisions in translating Lean. In particular, I focused on the accounts these agents gave of practices and attributes of identification involved in changing the concept. In chapter three, we provided a model that allowed us to see how, in different modes, individuals

use different general practices (positioning, labeling and channeling) to align higher-level management and work-floor professionals in their meaning-making activities of the concept. By differentiating across modes of strategic orientation (bridging, buffering and blending) we showed how in each of these modes these generic practices gained specificity. In chapter four, we identified three attributes of identification (salience, transience and valence) through which we found the concept to be narratively constructed across four types of identity work (externalizing, rationalizing, professionalizing and proselytizing). Practitioners may use both these micro-practices and attributes of identification as a means of reflecting on how they and a concept are constructed simultaneously, in relative position to each other and their context, opening up new ways of thinking about their role in translation. Also, these micro-practices and attributes of identification could be used to actively translate a concept into practice. For example, to achieve alignment in meaning-making activities between higher-level management and work-floor professionals, implementation managers, as boundary spanners, may engage a buffering mode in which they draw on the micro-practices of 'replacing dysfunctional labels' and 'juggling conflicting story lines' to achieve quasi-independent meaning-making among these different hierarchical stakeholders. Although this mode may seem paradoxical, as it creates distance between parties instead of overcoming it, it can shield conscious reflection from extending to what is happening elsewhere, which may be necessary to achieve collective meaning-making in the end.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation investigates and addresses the role of human agency in the translation of management concepts and its contributions and recognized limitations open up specific avenues for more research in this area. In this section, I go beyond the specific limitations that were already discussed as part of chapters two to four, and instead review a number of issues that span this research in its entirety and which provide bases for future research.

One concern is the analytical boundaries of this research. A clear delineation of the analytical boundaries of the main constructs was essential especially since, currently, the discourse on translation in the flow and impact of management concepts remains under-theorized and fragmented. In chapter two we set out to define these analytical boundaries and we defined both 'management concepts' and 'translation' within the context of this research. Throughout this

dissertation, for the sake of readability and in an effort to contribute to conceptual clarity, I used the term 'management concepts' to refer to 'relatively coherent prescriptive vision[s] on how to deal with specific organizational issues, which are coined with a particular label' (Benders and Verlaar, 2003, p. 758; Van Grinsven et al., 2016, p. 5). In doing so, I did not adopt an overly inclusive definition of what a management concept may entail. In a similar fashion, I used an analytically distinct, but narrow definition of translation. In the systematic literature review (chapter two) we studied papers, books and book chapters that reference a 'translation approach', yielding a set of nine publications closely related to translation which we used in a strategy of forward citation. Yet, while I aimed to do justice to different terms used for the concept of translation and to get a strong grip on the diversified field (e.g., 'Scandinavian Institutionalism' 'Actor-Network Theory' 'editing' 'creolization' 'hybridization' and 'bricolage'), I recognize that I paid limited attention to different a-priori research streams—or theoretical archetypes—within translation. Radaelli and Sitton-Kent (2016), for example, identified distinct research streams embedded within translation theory—Scandinavian Institutionalism, Actor-Network Theory, Framing Theory and the more traditional literatures on adoption/diffusion—before they conducted their own analysis. O'Mahoney (2016), while taking an abductive approach, studied how different theoretical archetypes underpin various interpretations of translation and he distinguishes between the scientism archetype, the actualist philosophy of Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the social constructivist archetype in 'Scandinavian Institutionalism' and the symbolic interactionist philosophy. In contrast, by collapsing possibly different theoretical approaches to translation with an inductive approach, I was not overly sensitive to the analytical distinctions that different research traditions may have fed into the domain. As a result, I also used the terms 'translation theory' 'translation studies' 'translation perspective' and 'translation approach' synonymously, disregarding the underlying differences these labels may entail. Some could argue that in doing so, I didn't adequately recognize how specific traditions have studied and defined core concepts of translation. Røvik (2016, p. 4) for example, would note, 'the terms 'translation theory' and 'translation studies' . . . refer to two different schools of thought.' Additionally, the way interests are studied within Actor-Network Theory, does not entirely correspond to the way the term is used in our analytical category of strategizing approaches. However, rather than fix the terms and definitions of translation myself, it was my intention to instead examine how any 'boundary police' have engaged in such exercise to

understand how translation has itself been translated into different words and meanings within distinct intellectual communities (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999). So, although these definitions of the key constructs allowed for a clear delineation of the analytical boundaries of this research and allowed me to address the under-theorized and fragmented discourse on translation in the flow and impact of management concepts, a number of conscious decisions were taken that I urge future research to take into account as they may have possibly biased the results on which I built my findings and conclusions.

A second issue concerns my approach to data collection. As noted, I collected data mainly via face-to-face, retrospective interviews with key informants who were (at least partially) responsible for the implementation of Lean in the hospitals of the LIDZ-network. As a result, I was able to more deeply study the role of key agents in the co-construction of Lean as it was introduced in the hospitals in the study. Inherent limitations, which resulted from deliberate choices I made in datacollection, are threefold. First, similar to many studies, this research relied mainly on the self-reports of key informants. Although I sought to validate the findings by closely studying the documents interviewees sent me after the interviews as well as by participating in Gemba walks as a means to contextualize the findings, I did not collect data that would have allowed me to explore how others in the organizations both interpreted Lean and affected the translation of the concept and the efforts of the key agents. This is especially relevant as translation studies acknowledge that ideas and concepts do not transform under the authorship of one powerful actor, but rather from the complex array of human and non-human actants within a network (Brown, 2002; Latour, 1987; Røvik, 2016). Second, it should be noted that I interviewed these individuals only once. I specifically asked for chronological accounts, having interviewees reflect on different stages of the implementation of Lean and the translation efforts associated with these stages. Also, I was provided with a list indicating the stage of 'Lean development' for each of the hospitals. Even though, hospitals assigned their stage themselves and, therefore, these self-assigned indications do not necessarily reflect an objective stage, they do reflect variation in stages of development. As the chairman of the network remarked: *'It's up for discussion whether they should be a 3 or 4, but I don't think many have assigned themselves a 4 when they really are a 3. The margin of error is 1.'* However, retrospective and discursive accounts increase the risk of post-rationalization as interviewees might not recall or positively frame their past interactions and thought processes (Barley, 1986) and may not adequately capture changes in practice, actions and

material transformations. Third, by focusing on key agents' accounts of translating Lean inside their hospitals, this study primarily reflects an intra-organizational approach. Even despite an initial intention to address the 'the dearth of attempts to bridge inter-organizational mechanisms of diffusion with intra-organizational implementation and adaptation' (Ansari, Fiss and Zajac, 2010, p. 68) as well as recent insights that a significant amount of learning occurs at the interface of the organization (Amis and Aïssaoui, 2013; Huising, 2016), this dissertation mainly focused on developments within the hospitals under study, looking less at developments that occurred within the network as a whole. And while this perspective offered rich insights on agency in translation, it remains relatively disconnected from possible inter-organizational mechanisms. In sum, it is necessary to acknowledge that the translation of practices involves various types of actors, both internal and external to the organization (Perkmann and Spicer, 2008), that it concerns a dynamic process and that what happens inside organizations is connected to what happens outside of them (Huising, 2016). Hence, I encourage future research to more systematically study a wider array of actors and their engagement with management concepts, engage in longitudinal approaches with real-time observations to examine how translation unfolds through sequences of actions (Berends and Lammers, 2010; Van de Ven and Poole 2005) and to take into account a broader notion of context to better study the interaction between intra-organizational and inter-organizational dynamics. Doing so would not only lead to an enhanced understanding of the adaptation of concepts within an organization, but would also contribute to our knowledge of the agentic processes through which it occurs.

A third issue relates to the idiosyncrasies of the empirical context I studied. While, conceptually, the translation of management concepts in a recipient context was my topic of study, empirically, I examined the implementation of Lean in hospitals. Even though I expect our findings to hold particular relevance for understanding the translation of concepts and ideas in other empirical settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the idiosyncratic nature of Lean, as well as the context of Dutch healthcare, should be noted here. Prior work on practice characteristics and adoption has suggested specific affordances to be relevant for adaptation. Ansari, Fiss and Zajac (2010) for example argue that the interpretive viability, divisibility and complexity of a practice will affect the extent and fidelity with which it is adapted. In contrast to other management concepts, Lean is rich in its symbolic and technical aspects (Huising, 2016) and one of the proclaimed features of Lean is that it seeks to move beyond a conventional top-down approach,

instead placing an emphasis on the involvement of staff in the review of processes (Timmons, 2014). I did not take into account how the specific characteristics of the concept may have biased the translation efforts of the implementation managers in this study. In a similar vein, it is necessary to acknowledge the specific nature of Dutch healthcare. Arguably, this context offered a good empirical setting as it allowed me to study specific key actors who, operating within the interstices of professional and managerial hierarchies (Kellogg, 2014), had to engage in significant agentic efforts to translate the concept. Yet and as stated before, healthcare is under major macro-economic pressures to reorganize its systems and processes and individual agents feel the stress of having to improve safety and quality while also being expected to do this with less means. Also, hospitals are complex and highly professionalized workplaces, organized functionally along medical disciplines; so, the interviewees in our study often mentioned doctors who are often not directly employed by the hospital and will exercise their power not to conform to changes that might endanger their functional autonomy. The idiosyncratic characteristics of Lean as a concept and Dutch healthcare as a context do make it necessary to verify the patterns of our study in different contexts. Specifically, future research should examine whether and how the agentic efforts of key agents specified in the models of the empirical studies (chapters three and four), hold for other management concepts in other professionalized settings in which the power distance between managerial and professional stakeholders might be more extensive.

A fourth issue relates to my strong focus on actors' discursive constructions in shaping meaning and interpretations, and I acknowledge that this research did not escape the dichotomy between the representational and structural issues of practice adaptation. As stated in chapter two, scholars should be encouraged to better specify their approach to translation and to intertwine perspectives reflexively, taking advantage of the possibilities for enhanced integration. We showed how alternative approaches have different conceptualizations of what translation entails and argued that these dualisms can be used as dualities by taking an integrative approach. We distinguished between two dimensions: (1) the source of variation, which opposes embeddedness and strategizing approaches to translation; and (2) the object of variation, which opposes representational and structural approaches to translation. In chapter three and four, we specifically address this first dimension and the current tendency to conflate or separate organizational and individual considerations related to the translation of concepts. In chapter four, for example, we show how the complex interaction between agents' personal identification with a

concept and the contextual pressures pertaining to them, is a mechanism for identity work. In doing so our findings suggest a reconciliation of the current opposing conceptualizations of agency, which could provide a better understanding of their interaction within translation. And even though, in relation to the second dimension, the distinction between talk and action is problematic, with talk arguably being a form of implementation in its own right (Sturdy and Fleming, 2003), agency in translation is not bereft of material aspects (Green, Li and Nohria, 2009). Similar to the exercise of reconciling embeddedness and strategizing approaches, future research should study the interplay of the symbolic and the material as actors engage in translation.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, this dissertation invites scholars studying the flow and impact of management concepts to be more reflexive and explicit of their approach when using translation as a perspective and to conceive of agency in translation as the mutually constitutive, interpretive activity through which concept and agent are constructed simultaneously, in relative position to each other and their context. In offering theoretical models that encourage us to rethink such mechanisms of duality and spatial metaphors, I hope this research contributes to a clearer understanding of what happens when ideas and concepts spread and are given new meaning in different localities. After all, the idea that a 'patient is not a car' dictates an approach to studying Lean that allows for seeing its micro-level translations in a 'new' healthcare context, painting a completely different picture of Lean than when treating the concept as a 'thing' that hardly changes when diffused.