Preface and acknowledgements

This book aims to be a guide to discursive organizational psychology. It is based on a series of doctoral and postdoctoral projects conducted at the research institute for organizational psychology (OPSY) of the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) over a period of roughly ten years and completed between 2006 and 2014. What is a guide? Often a person or a manual that brings people to, and leads them through, a museum or exhibition or neighbourhood to introduce them to unfamiliar objects, artefacts and ideas. In that spirit, we hope this book will guide those interested in discursive approaches to organizational phenomena and processes through the ideas and practices of discursive psychological analysis. Though a guidebook can never be as good as the experience itself, we have tried to write about the research projects in accessible and concrete ways, so readers can recognize the practices and practicalities of research. But this book is not meant to be methodological: if this sounds like a disclaimer, we want to emphasize that there are many ways to undertake discourse analysis, and that each research project needs to ‘find’ its own synthesis, one that interweaves processes of gaining research access, the conceptual framing, data gathering and analysing, and coming to a substantial interpretation and/or theoretical contribution. Still, travel guides can become ‘good friends’ during the years one travels with them. So we hope this book – covered with coffee stains and traces of dust and sunscreen, and full of scribbled comments – can become a trusted support as readers and users explore the possibilities of discursive approaches to research in organizational psychology (OP) and organizational research in general.

The book opens with two introductory chapters, which respectively situate the book’s contributions within the development of discursive approaches (mostly in organization studies) in Chapter 1 and in the history of organizational psychology in Chapter 2. Then, we present 12 chapters in four thematic sections: participation, resistance, creativity and intervention. Each chapter presents an independent and original empirical study that has been carefully composed in the context of a doctoral or postdoctoral project (see list below). As a result, the coverage of this book is boldly diverse. And yet, as we map out a different view on the field of organizational psychology through a lively collection of contributions,
we do not aim – or claim – to present an exhaustive list of (emerging) OP themes. Rather, as one can expect from a research guide, we aim to illuminate some stimulating ‘pieces’ of OP work that exemplify how an interest in discursive dynamics can help to alter the ways we understand certain organizational themes.

Given our location in the German part of Switzerland, we must point out that much of the data collection was done in German or in Swiss German – but also in English, French and Spanish, as documented in Chapters 3, 6, 8, 10 and 11. As most of the studies have not been written or published in the native language of their authors and research participants, the discourse analysis has to be considered in light of the translation work that comes along with it. In other words, the chapters in this book contain empirical material that at some point in the analytical process has been translated into English. When working with translations, more than with so-called ‘first-hand material’, we must be careful to read transcriptions as material that has already been ‘interpreted’. Recording what our research partners have ‘said’ and ‘done’ is quite different from recording the sayings and doings we have witnessed or been part of as researchers. This implies that discourse (analysis) is not just about text (‘naturalized’ as transcription), nor does it have to be inscribed in its linguistic context; instead, it forms a social research construct that gives expression to a social sentiment and life experience. The liveliness and emotion of the voices we hear are as much a part of discourses as of the specific language idioms that people draw upon in social interaction, such as research interviews.

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Furthermore, as all of the chapters (except for the introductions) are based on empirical data collection, we would like to thank all those who participated in the empirical studies for their time and openness. While many of them stay ‘anonymous’ in our presentations, we are fortunate to have had collaborations with people, organizations and communities in a wide range of settings. These range from voluntary and non-profit organizations to (Swiss-based) multinationals in industries such as banking, pharmaceuticals and food, to local research institutes, global research
organizations (such as CERN) and gatekeeping organizations (at UN summits); they also include citizens in local neighbourhoods and individual storytellers who simply took part in our research without any organizational connection.

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The majority of chapters were written especially for this book; in addition, with a few research projects we opted to draw upon and adapt already published journal articles. In particular, we include seven doctoral projects:


Four other chapters are based on previously published articles:
Chapter 7 is an adapted version of a manuscript published in the British Journal of Management: Nentwich, Julia and Patrizia Hoyer (2013), ‘The
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power of counter-arguments: Part-time work as practising resistance’, BJM, 24 (4), 557–570.


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