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 guide-book 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 inter-weaves 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.

In editing this book, we have been lucky to be supported on many levels. First, we are grateful to the (co-)authors of the various chapters for their valuable texts, and also for responding generously during the revision process and for giving our queries the fullest attention. We also thank the authors for providing feedback on each other’s chapters; we are also grateful for feedback from other colleagues at the OPSY: Laurent Marti, Björn Müller, Martin Müller and Ursula Offenberger. In particular, we received excellent expert reviews from Martin Kornberger (Copenhagen Business School), and Art Dewulf (Wageningen University) who acted as external reviewers for some of the chapters.

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.

In particular, we are grateful for a few people who assisted us in the process of editing this book. First of all, there is Helen Snively who for many years edited single manuscripts from members of our institute but who took up the challenge to language-edit each page of this book with care for detail and understanding of our context. For the best language editing ever, thank you, Helen, not in the least for your patience with us on this last piece! Claudia Biri was a great help in taking care of all the nitty-gritty work on formatting and reference-checking. Finally, we can never say thanks enough to Christina Ihasz-Riedener, who as secretary of our institute always supports us and even helps us get the details of our projects right. Also, we recognize the professional guidance of our publisher Edward Elgar, in particular Francine O’Sullivan and Aisha Bushby. Last but not least, we thank our partners and families. Editing this book would have been impossible without their generous support and patience.

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
power of counter-arguments: Part-time work as practising resistance’, *BJM*, **24** (4), 557–570.


We thank the respective publishers – Wiley, Elsevier, and Routledge (Taylor & Francis) – for granting permission to reprint (partly adapted versions of) these articles.

We received financial support for the publishing of this book and especially for the language editing from the University of St. Gallen's Bühler-Reindl-Fonds. Furthermore, we are grateful for the grants we received for conducting the research projects reported in the following chapters:

Chapter 5: This text is based on a postdoctoral project that was funded by the Canton of St. Gallen, the Swiss Federal Fund for Integration (Integrationskredit des Bundes) and the Basic Research Fund of the University of St. Gallen's Research Commission.

Chapter 8: The Swiss National Science Foundation, NRP 56.

Chapter 10: The Basic Research Fund of the University of St. Gallen’s Research Commission.

Chapter 12: The Swiss National Science Foundation’s Marie Heim-Vögtlin Programme and the Basic Research Fund of the University of St. Gallen’s Research Commission.

Chapter 14: This project was funded by the organization that had chosen Annette Kluge, Dörte Resch and Pascal Dey to implement this change process.