

Please cite as:

Yearworth, M., Ormerod, R., & White, L. (2019). *Problem structuring interventions in practice?* Paper presented at the 30th European Conference on Operational Research (EURO 2019), Dublin, Ireland.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10871/37710>



Problem structuring interventions in practice?

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Research Narrative

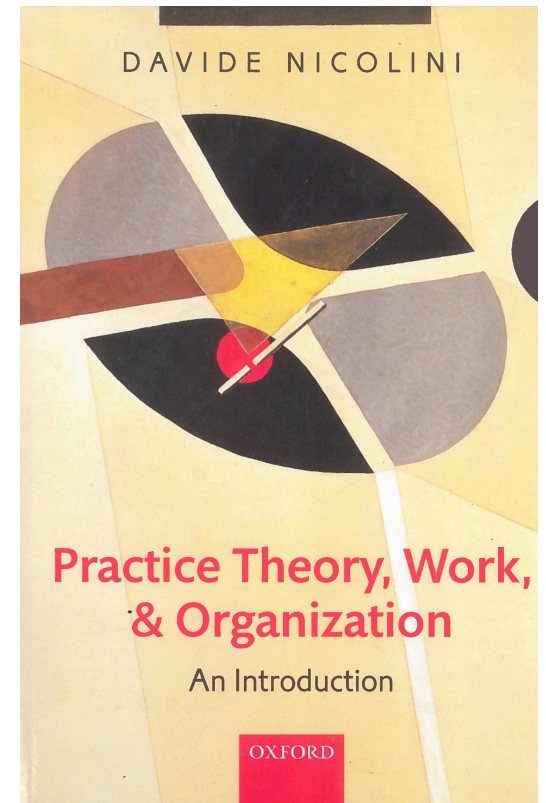
- The derivation of generic constitutive rules for Problem Structuring Methods (PSMs) was motivated by the observation of everyday problem structuring in organisations (Yearworth & White, 2014)
- The existence of a ‘problem structuring mentality’ naturally provokes questions about appropriate underlying theory
- There is already a nexus around the practice of problem structuring and theorising about it and social practice theory offers a way forward (Ormerod, 2008, 2014, 2016)
- This might provide the means for connecting research into OR practice with wider debates in the management literature
- The workshop nature of PSM engagements provides a unique insight into the particular place and particular time of management decision making when dealing with messy problems
- We define a research agenda, set out some provocative research questions and discuss their implications for OR practice

Ormerod on Practice Theory...

“Practice Theory is an emerging school with social and organizational studies undergoing what Schatzky (2001) describes as a ‘practice turn’. He declares that ‘Thinkers once spoke of ‘structures,’ ‘system,’ ‘meaning,’ ‘life world,’ ‘events,’ and ‘actions when naming the primary generic social thing. Today, many theorists would accord ‘practices’ a comparable honor’ (p. 1). Nicolini has observed that there has been ‘a dramatic growth in analyses utilizing terms such as practice, praxis, interaction, activity, performativity, and performance Nicolini (2013, p.2).” (Ormerod, *forthcoming*)

Nicolini on Practice Theory...

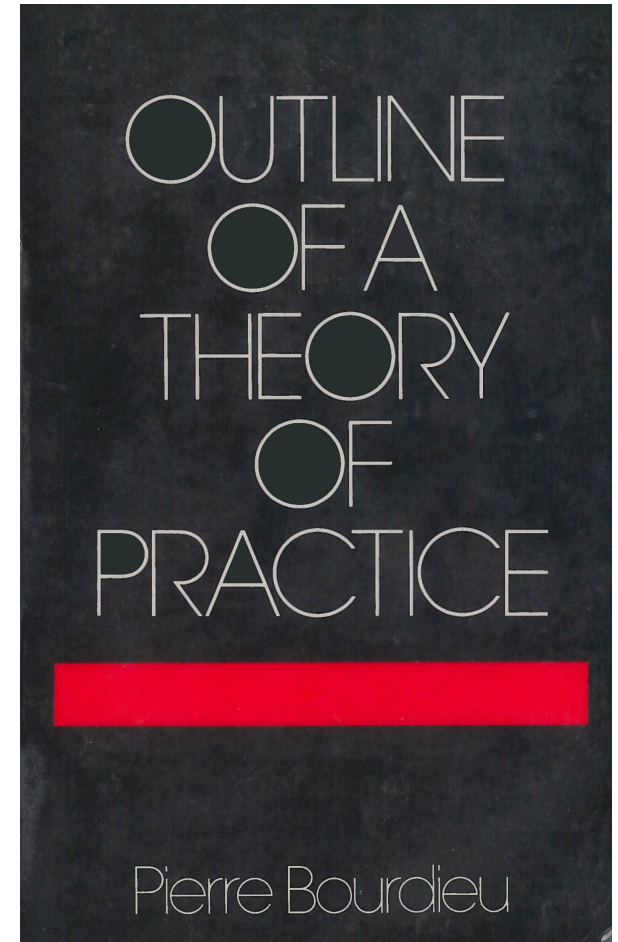
“The appeal of what has been variably described as practice idiom, practice standpoint, practice lens and a practice-based approach lies in its capacity to describe important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice using tools, discourse, and our bodies. From this perspective the social world would appear as a vast array of assemblage of performance of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects and texts, and knotted together in such a way that that the results of one performance become the resource for another.” (Nicolini, 2013)



Bourdieu from the perspective of an OR practitioner

- Bourdieu introduces 3 terms: *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*
- Field is taken to be the location of social action where everyday practice takes place
- Capital underpins the disposition of social agents and takes the form of social, cultural and economic capital
- Agents' dispositions are dynamic over time as practice, i.e. a sequence of engagements, leads to acquiring new experiences. A system of dispositions is referred to by Bourdieu as 'habitus'

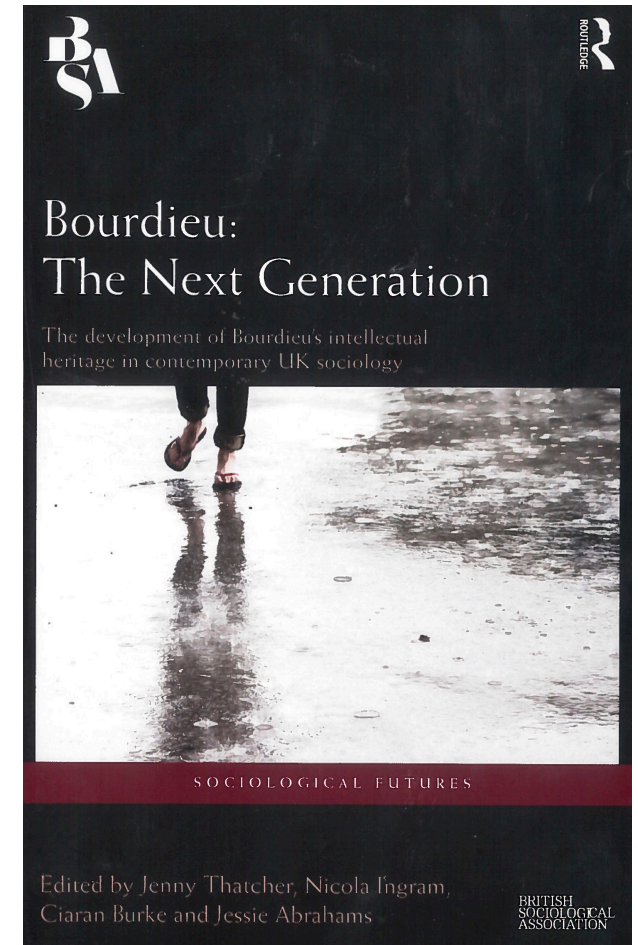
(Ormerod, *forthcoming*)



Bourdieu in a nutshell

[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice
(Burke, 2016, p. 8)

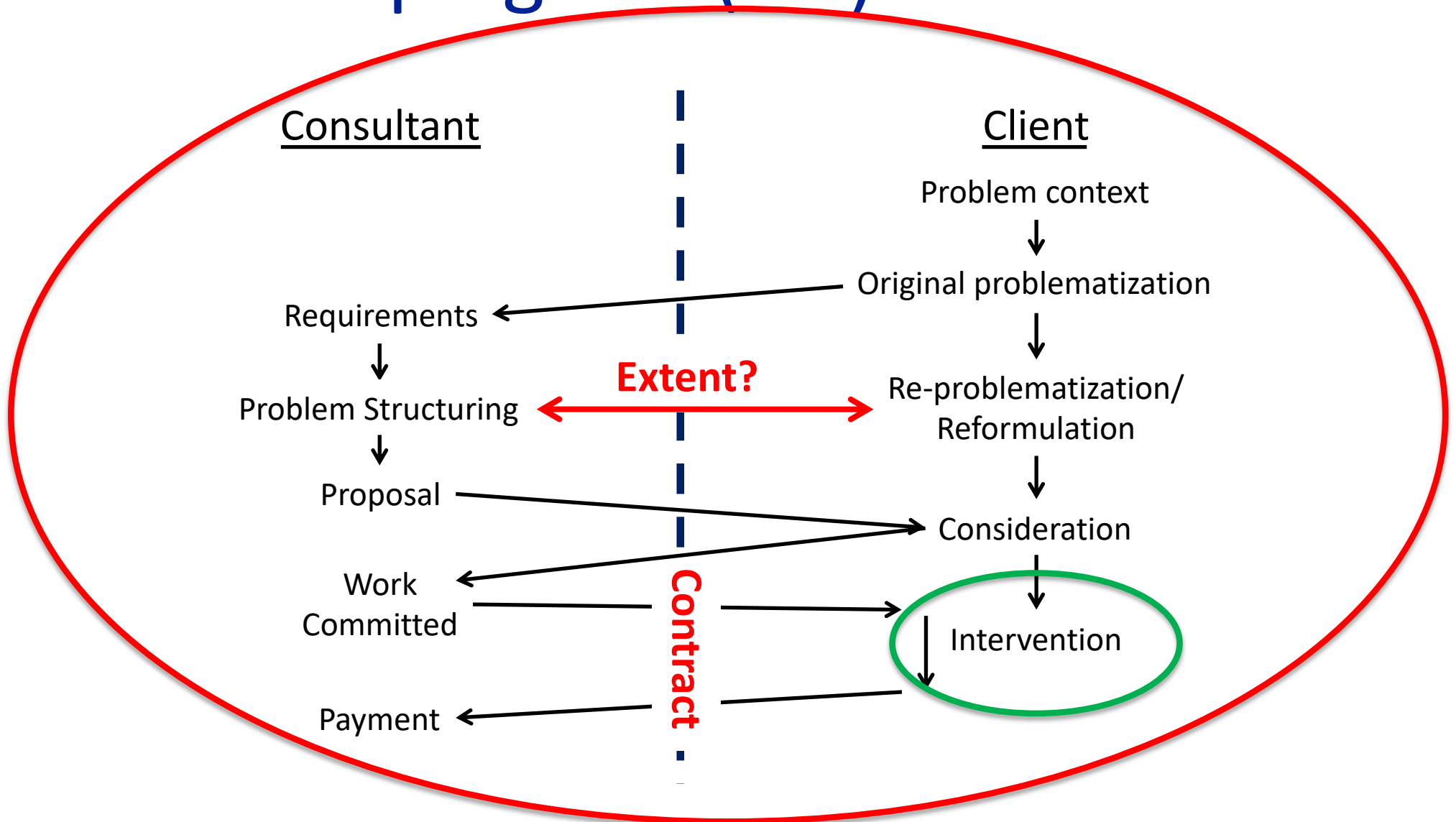
- Habitus, capital and field are in dynamic interplay in everyday OR practice
- Habitus develops as agents start to get a sense of OR practice and learn how to be better consultants and clients - think of the relationship as *co-creational*
- Consider that capital on the left hand side has some effect on the scope of strategic agency on the right hand side
- The application of this theory to OR practice seems entirely *reasonable*



Our Focus

- Not on Habitus... nor on Capitals...
- *Our Focus* is on *Field* – The particular place and particular time of management decision making when dealing with messy problems...the site where social action takes place
- But...

Re-scoping our (OR) Social Field



Field of Social Action – Specificity of Place and Time

- The ‘out of place, out of time’ nature of the workshop used by the Soft OR/PSM practitioner is the context for difficult or exceptional management decision making
- Place matters – workshops are a unique environment/context *distinct* from the business-as-usual situation of the normal working environment → shift in perception about the “rules of the game” supported by the method/facilitator. Being “out of place” and surfacing/backgrounding issues of power
- Time matters – quality of practice depends on habitus/capital, which are in a state of dynamic change from engagement to engagement (episodic). Consultants have a temporary existence in the setting, or could become “embedded”
- Reflective practice and thus methodological learning is *ingrained* in Soft OR/PSM practice (inward looking). What about learning focussed on management decision making (outward facing)?

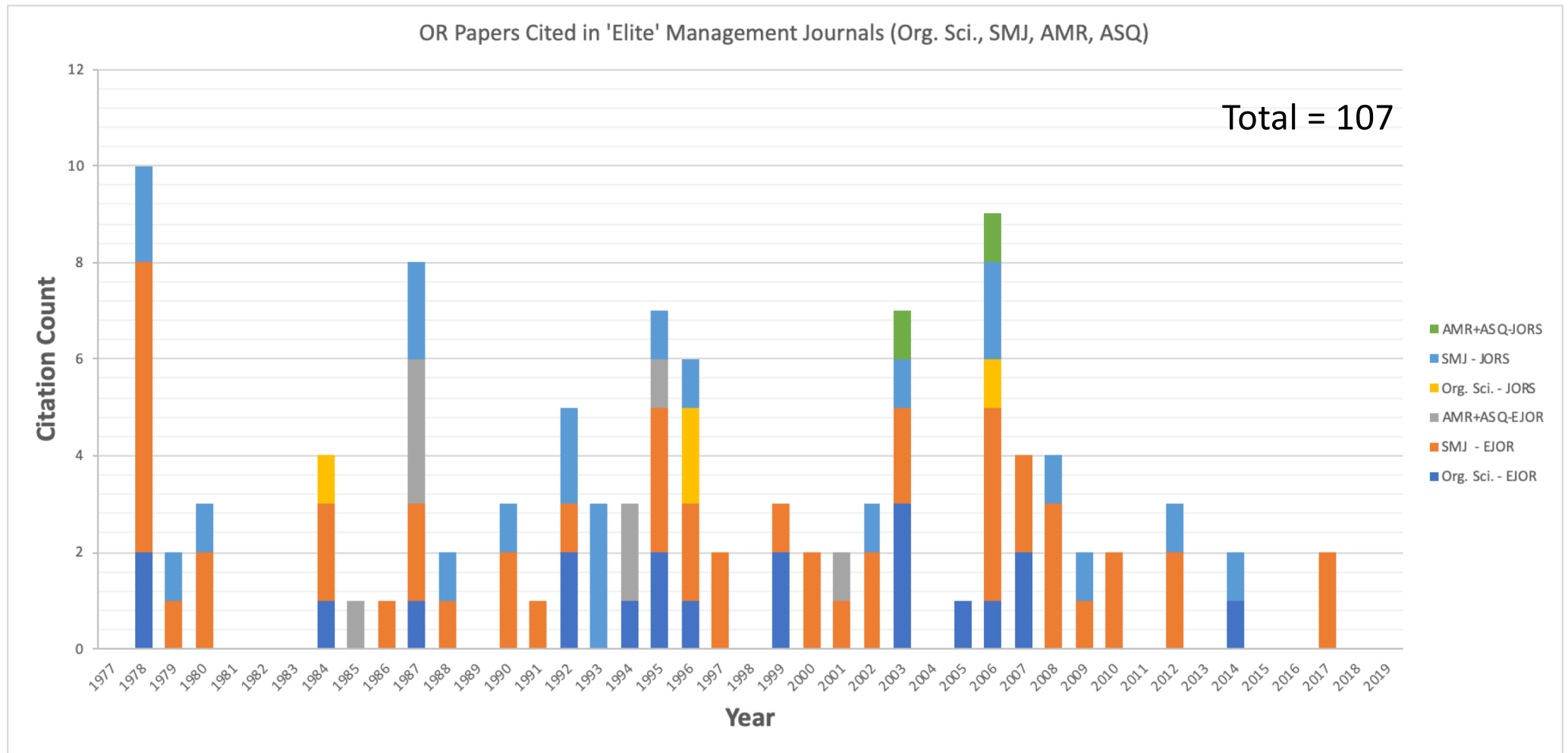
Making outward connections – from Soft OR/PSMs to Management

- Strategy Making grounded in Soft OR/PSMs practice (Ackermann & Eden, 2011a; Ackermann & Eden, 2011b; Dyson, 2000; O'Brien & Dyson, 2007; O'Brien, Dyson, & Kunc, 2011; Ormerod & Pidd, 2006)
- Strategy as Practice grounded in Practice Theory, Activity Theory, Actor Network Theory, Boundary Object Theory...(Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010; Kaplan, 2011; Knight, Paroutis, & Heracleous, 2018; Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Paroutis, Franco, & Papadopoulos, 2015; Whittington, 2006)

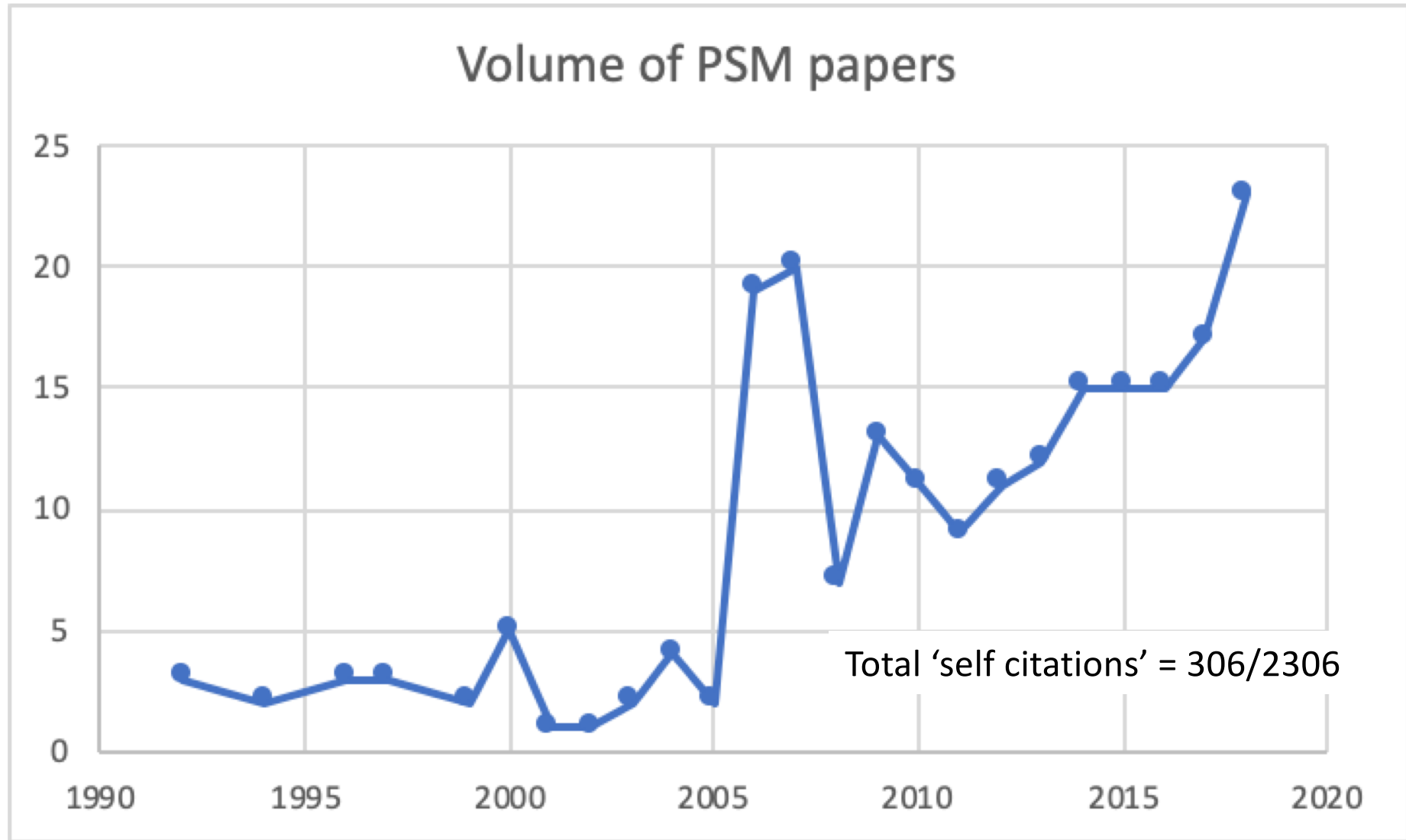
Setting an Agenda – 4 streams underpinned? by Practice Theory

1. Theorising OR practice
2. The ‘Problem Structuring Mentality’ or ‘Everyday Problem Structuring’ in organisations
 - New, despite being ‘taken for granted’. Really highlights capitals, “intellectual athletes” positive outlook, what people “can do”, confidence, expertise, experiencing → experience
3. The unique character of the Soft OR/PSM workshop in which to study non-routine/exceptional management decision making
 - Reflects past debates in OD → OB cf. wider behavioural turn
4. Building links to debates in the management literature e.g. Strategy Making → Strategy as Practice
 - e.g. EJOR: Interfaces to other disciplines

Interfaces to Other Disciplines



Field Self Reference



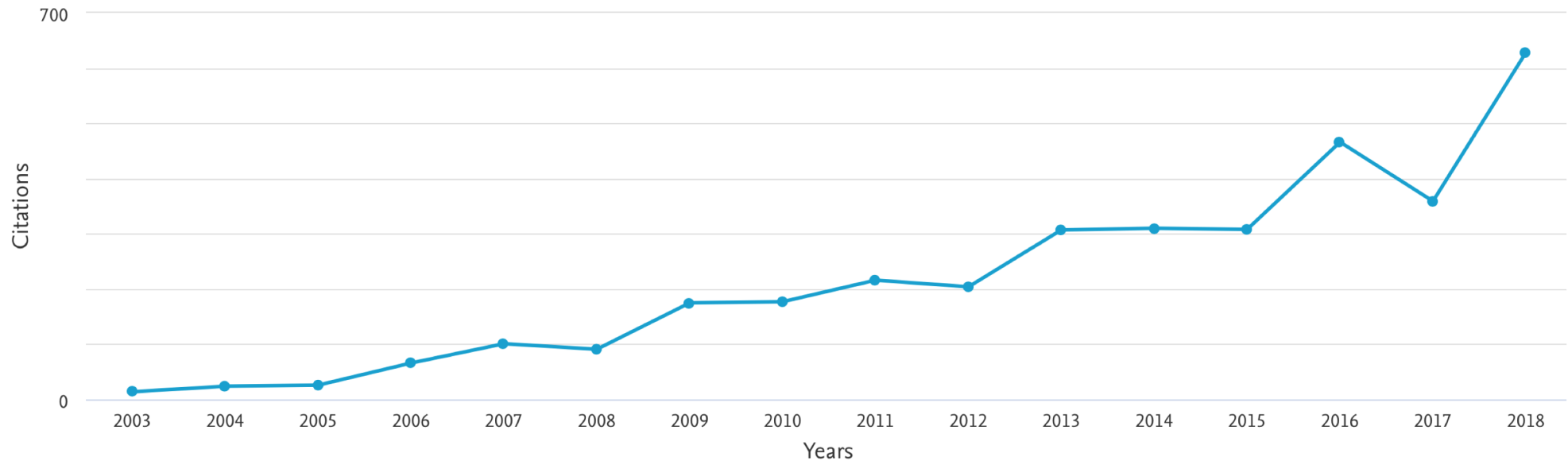
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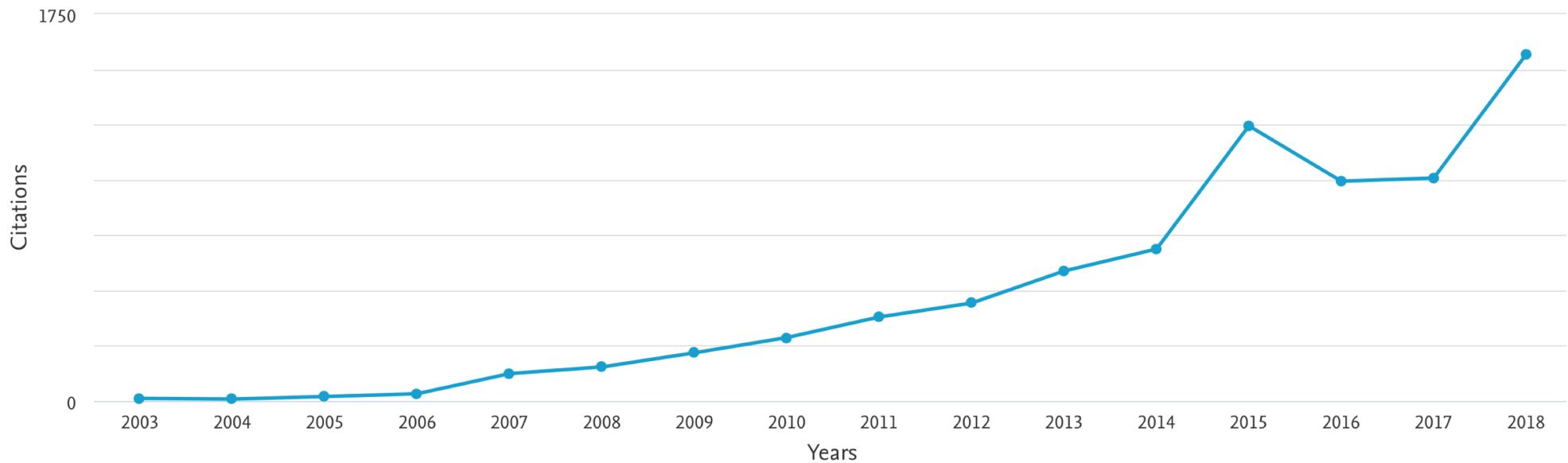
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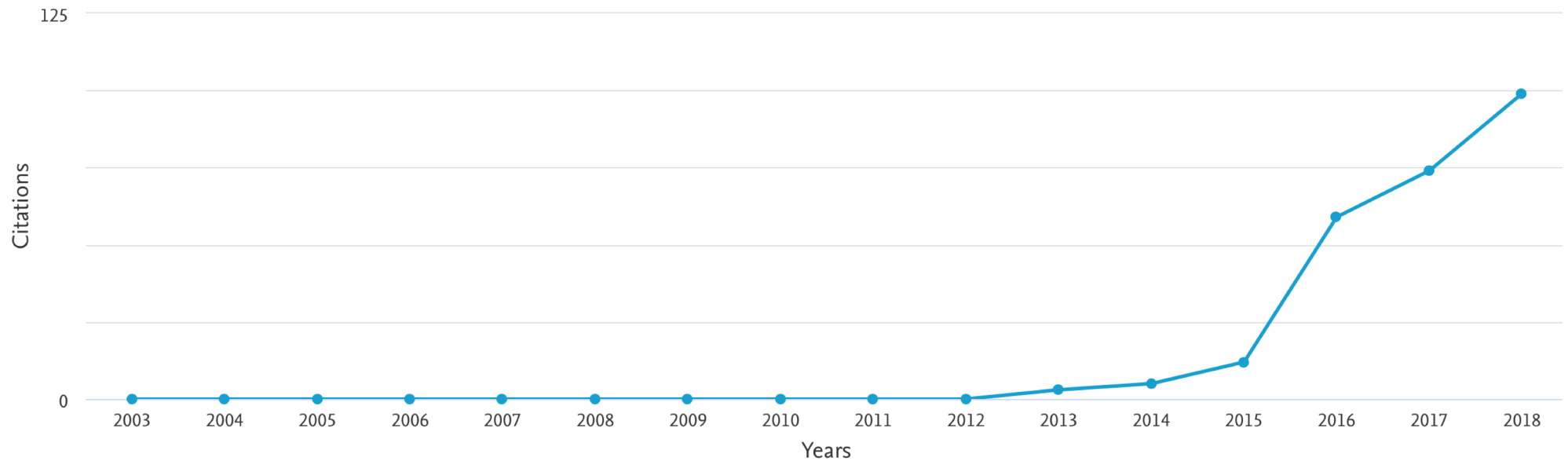
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Provocations for the 'Field'

- Need to redefine or shift the *Field* of OR in the light of the rise of Analytics, ML, AI... (Burger, White & Yearworth, 2019) – a reconnection with the roots of OR (e.g. Ackoff, 1977, 1979 and others, earlier)
- Impact of *Capital* on scope of strategic agency (Burke, 2016). Applying a Bourdieusian lens on the effectiveness of OR practice and the social success of OR practitioners in an organisation (and wider...)
- A greater awareness of the role *Capital* plays in OR practice could have an impact on better ways of developing capital(s) across the OR profession

Conclusions

- Practice theory is an under utilised lens with which to examine OR practice
- Need to develop new sources of data about OR practice suitable for analysis with a Bourdieusian perspective
- Bringing together contributions into a SI of an OR journal (outward facing)
- Making progress requires individual and collective action

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Questions?

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