



ACADEMY OF
Management

Learning & Education

Responsible Ontological Work: Guidance for Doctoral Education and the Ontological Turn

Teaching Material based on:

Laasch, O. (2026). Responsible Ontological Work: Guidance for Doctoral Education and the Ontological Turn. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*,

The author consents and encourages other scholars to use this material for their teaching.

Pedagogical Note

These slides offer an introduction to ontological work as a foundational element of what it means to be a responsible academic. Salient uses are:

- Doctoral education.
- Continuous professional development for experienced academics.

As such, they are well-suited for courses at the postgraduate level, including but not limited to research philosophy, philosophy of science, responsible academia, academics in society, responsible research.

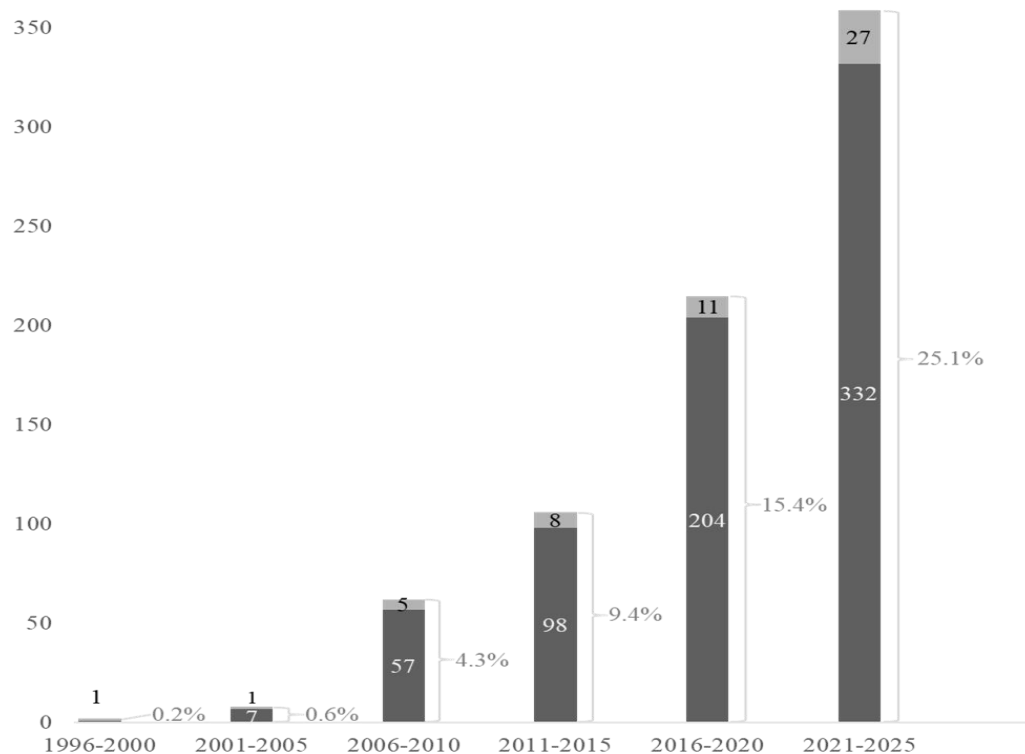
Please feel free to get in touch with us for any feedback, questions, or collaboration:

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Demands of the ontological turn

Essential attention to ontological matters.

Ontology has moved from background philosophy to everyday research practice.



Legend:

■ Number of ontology-focused publications per period

■ Number of ontology-embedded publications per period

% Share of ontology publications to all AoM publications per period

The doctoral challenge

Students often learn the what of ontology, but struggle with the how of practicing it responsibly across supervisors, reviewers, coauthors, and communities.

Epistemic responsibilities to society

Produce knowledge that is robust, useful, multi-perspectival, and continuously questioned — not narrow, biased, or dangerous.

Moral responsibilities to research communities

Cultivate respectful, empathetic, inclusive interaction with colleagues, participants, editors, and reviewers.

Demand in one sentence: ontology is no longer only a philosophical backdrop; it is part of everyday academic conduct.

Seven ontologically responsible practices

The paper's practice bundle of "responsible ontological work"

Responsible ontological work is the effort of cultivating one's own beliefs about reality and engaging others' beliefs responsibly.

These seven practices bundle epistemic responsibilities to society with moral responsibilities to research communities.

Responsible ontological work

Appreciation

Emancipation

Dialogue

Symbiosis

Alignment

Inclusion

Politics

Appreciation

Seeing other ontologies in their own right

1

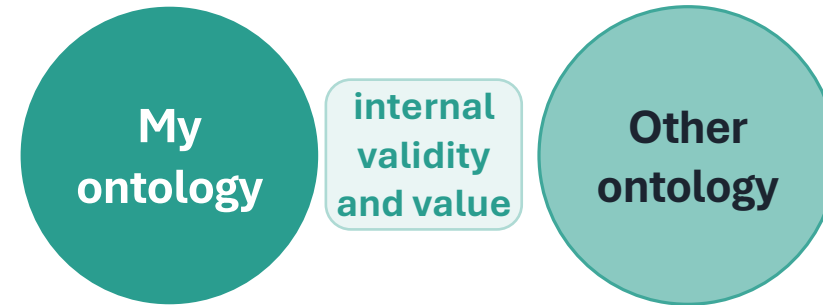
See other ontologies on their own terms.

Assess the internal validity and value of multiple ontologies in their own right and work across ontological boundaries rather than collapsing them into one “correct” view.

Cultivates

- richer, more resilient understanding of a phenomenon
- respect for the legitimacy of others’ beliefs about reality

Counter-practice: onto-centrism



Appreciation begins by recognizing internal coherence before inter-ontological disagreement.

Emancipation

Owning and expressing one's ontological foundation

2

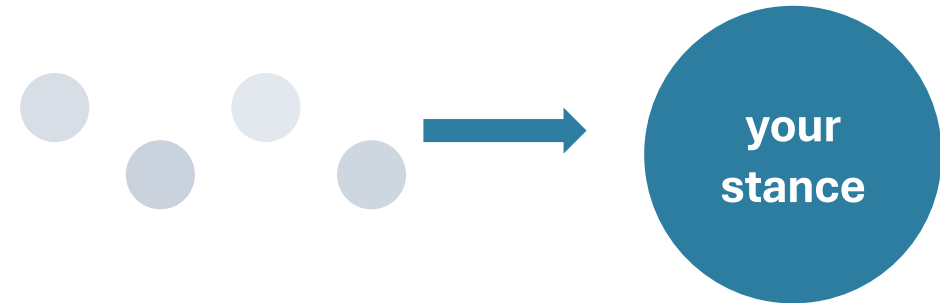
Own the ontology that fits your research.

Build and stand by your ontological commitments rather than hiding them inside dominant traditions or adopting them strategically for approval.

Cultivates

- authentic theorizing and independent researcher identity
- self-determination against suppressive ontological norms

Counter-practice: onto-mimicry



Difference with integrity — not fashion mimicry.

Dialogue

Speaking across ontological language communities

3

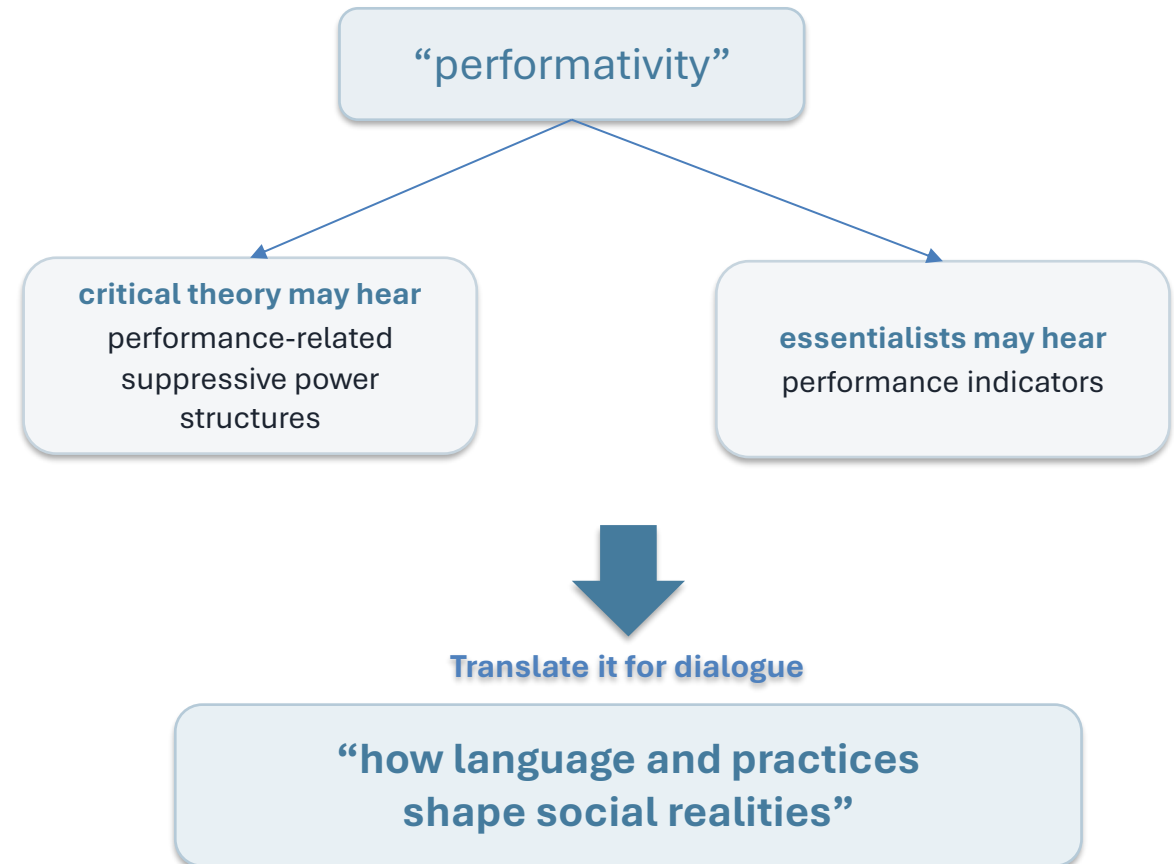
Translate across ontological language communities.

Engage in generative exchange by clarifying how others are using key terms and by communicating your own assumptions accessibly and respectfully.

Cultivates

- knowledge cross-fertilization between paradigms
- mutual understanding rather than paradigm competition

Counter-practice: ontological chicken-ducking



Symbiosis

Borrowing ontologies with reciprocity and care

4

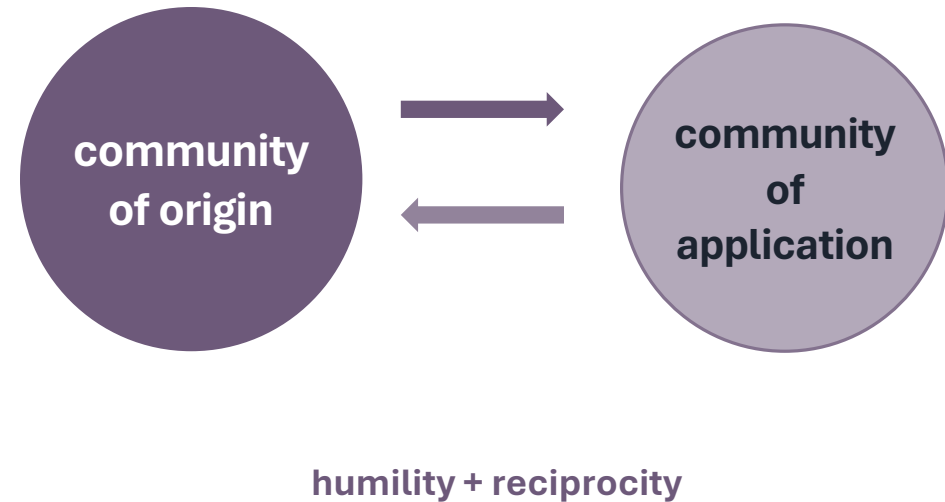
Use borrowed ontologies with humility and reciprocity.

Responsibly use beliefs about existence from one community in another context while acknowledging, honoring, and nurturing the community of origin.

Cultivates

- productive knowledge integration across communities
- care, acknowledgment, and respect for the ontology's origin

Counter-practice: ontological misappropriation



Alignment

Matching ontology and research design

5

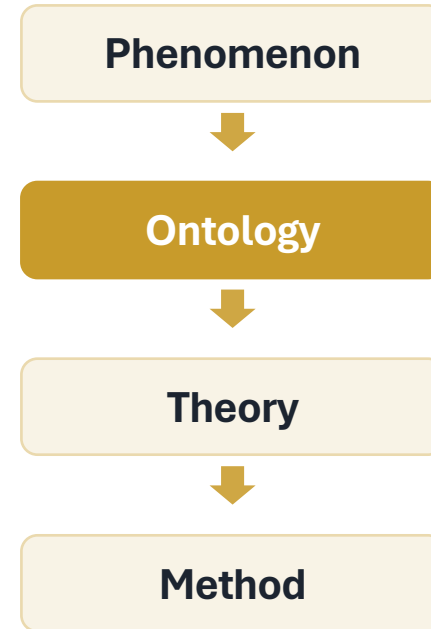
Match ontology with phenomenon, theory, and method.

Combine ontologies with appropriate research design elements so the entire study is internally coherent and capable of producing robust knowledge.

Cultivates

- more trustworthy, internally consistent research designs
- stronger theory–method fit at the ontological level

Counter-practice: ontological misalignment



Good design is ontology–theory–method fit, not only theory–method fit.

Inclusion

Researching phenomena through their multiple existences

6

Study phenomena in all the ways they exist.

Conduct research that accounts for the multiple modes in which a phenomenon exists, rather than drawing a narrow line around only one mode of existence.

Cultivates

- fuller theoretical representation and richer explanation
- voice for marginalized or redlined existences

Counter-practice: ontological redlining

narrative

visual

phenom
enon

structure

embodied

Politics

Promoting ontologies that can generate alternative realities

7

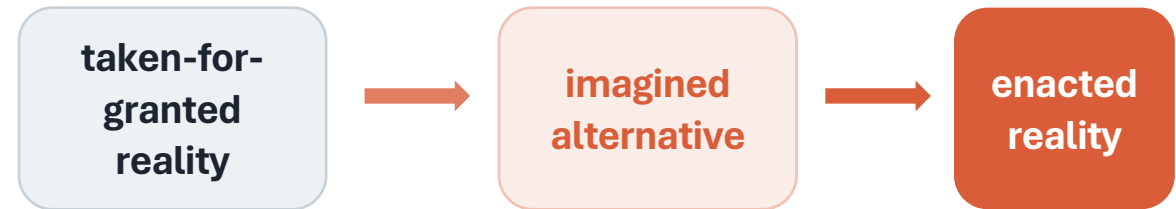
Research can help bring alternative realities into being.

Promote beliefs about a phenomenon that can help generate a more desirable reality instead of treating the present one as natural and unavoidable.

Cultivates

- ontological imagination and normative agency
- capacity to challenge harmful “naturalized” assumptions

Counter-practice: onto-determinism



imagination • normativity • action

Two competences make ontological work possible

Ontological reflexivity and ontological empathy

Ontological reflexivity

The competence to become aware of one's own ontological beliefs and understand how they shape cognition, research choices, and interaction.

Key move: Know and nourish your ontological self.

Ontological empathy

The competence to tune in to other people's beliefs about reality and respond in tune, even across disagreement.

Key move: Hear and respond to other ontologies on their own terms.



Appreciation

Emancipation

Dialogue

Symbiosis

Alignment

Inclusion

Politics

Pedagogy can build them one practice at a time, while their value transfers across the full bundle.

Responsible ontological work in the era of AI²

Anti-intellectualism + pervasive artificial intelligence

AI²

AI² = the paper's double meaning of "AI"

One force attacks scholarship from the outside; the other transforms it from within.

Anti-intellectualism

- attacks credibility, reason, expertise, and funding
- thrives on vagueness, post-truth, and emotional polarization
- increases the need for ontological clarity and solidarity

Pervasive AI

- AI now enters research, review, teaching, and administration
- the paper is cautiously hopeful about AI supporting reflexivity and empathy
- but AI still lacks genuine responsibility and understanding

Pedagogical implication: doctoral education must teach responsible ontological work more — not less — in times of AI².

Conclusion

What to take into doctoral education and research practice

1 The ontological turn creates new demands

Ontology now shapes everyday research conduct, not just abstract philosophy.

2 Seven practices operationalize responsibility

Appreciation, emancipation, dialogue, symbiosis, alignment, inclusion, and politics turn ontological competence into practice.

3 Two competences sustain the whole bundle

Ontological reflexivity and ontological empathy are the durable capabilities for responsible scholarship in human and AI-shaped settings.

Final takeaway

Researchers do not just have ontologies; they become responsible scholars by learning how to practice them responsibly.

For discussion: which of the seven practices seems most challenging in your own research setting?