

This paper argues that the body of knowledge that constitutes administrative science is a socially constructed product. Intense competition between rival paradigms prevails as advocates of diverse theoretical positions attempt to persuade others of the merits of their own. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30 (1985): 497-513. This content downloaded from 147.235.200.212 on Mon, 24 Oct 2022 07:03:06 UTC. All use subject to <https://www.jstor.org/terms>

In an ambitious proposal for enhancing the state of organization theory, Warriner, Hall, and McKelvey (1981: 173) invited all organizational scholars to participate in formulating "a standard list of operationalized, observable variables for describing organizations." This invitation was designed to overcome problems resulting from the tendency of different investigators to use alternative sets of variables and, consequently, describe organizations of the same type, and even the same organizations, in quite different ways. Thus, Warriner, Hall, and McKelvey (1981: 175) argued that a more accurate representation of organizational phenomena could be achieved by establishing a repository of "pooled data" on operational measures to be used in empirical research. No theory can simply "describe" empirical reality in neutral linguistic terms; all theoretical perspectives are infused by the biases inhering in particular world views. The search for a standard list of variables is, consequently, based on a misapprehension, since differences in perspective between theoretical approaches cannot be resolved through an appeal to "objective" truth. In this view, the lack of standardized measures and variables for describing empirical reality greatly impedes scientific progress and should be rectified.