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Meta-Corporate Real Estate Management: Some preliminary thoughts

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper advances the concept of meta-Corporate Real Estate Management (metaCREM) as an adjunct to existing knowledge work in the field. It argues for its existence and relevance, and suggests a number of areas where research with such a focus could occur to advance knowledge in the field.

Method: The method is what might be called a 'reflective argument' based on the authors' lengthy engagement in the field and their recent metatheoretical work on CREM.

Findings: MetaCREM is identified together with multiple meta-objects that are forms of meta-work applicable to metaCREM. This established that meta-work already occurs in CREM. A landscape of potential areas for research was identified that encompassed existing work and potential areas of future endeavour.

Implications: The paper's implications are largely for theory and theorisation. Relevance to practice is secondary through potential improvements to theorisation of problems that may flow on to practice.

Keywords

Corporate real estate management, Knowledge production, Metatheory, Research, Theory,

Introduction

Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) is an emerging real estate and business management discipline. It has been emerging over the last 25 to 30 years with many authors citing Veale (1989) as a starting point. CREM is emerging on two fronts. The first is as an area of application within a domain or context of practice. The second front is one of theorisation, which is largely academic but not exclusively so because the field has a long tradition of practitioners adding to theory.

A dynamic practice context exists as research's empirical domain in which to theorise. That dynamism occurs on at least four fronts. One front is the business environment. A second is the business itself that contains the CREM function; a third is the real estate market from which CRE and CREM services are sourced; and a fourth is the emergence and evolution of CREM practice itself.

Theorisation in CREM occurs with, at least, one eye on theory's practical application:

- Directly to practice as normative advice; and/or
- Increasingly as an evidence-base for practice in line with principles of evidence-based practice.

This theorising is relevant work for an emerging field, especially so when there is an associated strong body of practitioners. By that, we mean that there is an established professional body into which the academy 'intrudes'. Also, that there is a large number of practitioners and a relatively small number of researchers. This established body wants or needs theory to explain what it does. This has given rise to practitioner theorisation, which is a good thing as it is suggestive of reflective and reflexive practitioners (Schön, 1983).

The result of this practically-focussed theorisation is 'substantive theory', by which we mean having substance (separate and independent existence is the applicable dictionary definition) and also permanence; Theory that is solid, robust, and useful for advancing the body of knowledge (in the case of CREM, the Corporate Real Estate Management Body of Knowledge – the CREMBoK) that results

from knowledge production efforts in the field. There are indications that this production is increasingly rigorous – which is appropriate in and for a maturing discipline.

Nevertheless, it has been observed by the authors that an amount of substantive theorisation addresses the same concepts or produces roughly comparable theorisations. At times this occurs without any or very little reference to previous theorisation of that concept. There may be various reasons why this apparent replication of theory occurs. These include the fundamental knowledge production processes in a management-type field where researchers can operate autonomously without this harming their reputations and their prospects for career advancement (Whitley, 2000), and the evolving practice in CREM that, over time, requires different theorisations. Examples of these multiplicities of theorisation include: 14 or 20 CRE alignment models (the number depends on the basis of selecting the sample) (Heywood and Arkesteijn, in press) and several categorisations of how CRE relates to organisations, for example as types of assets (like productive asset, or capital asset) or the role that CRE plays in organisational economies. Arguably, each of these theories represents a different substantive theorisation but without understanding how the categories and models were arrived at it could be possible to assume that they were the same thing or completely different things.

This situation points toward there being a problem that CREM does not yet have the means to address its differences in substantive theorisation. This suggests a knowledge gap in and about its knowledge production methods. Therefore, the paper's objective is to advance a preliminary conceptual basis that is useful in addressing these observed differences in substantive theory and theorisation; that is the concept of metaCREM and its associated 'meta-work'¹. As such, these constitute preliminary thoughts on the application of this thinking to the field that can be developed further in the future.

Hereafter, the paper reviews the knowledge production challenges in CREM that have given rise to the observed differences in substantive theorisation. These, presently, seem to inhibit addressing this problem. Next, the paper suggests a possible way forward, theoretically, by advocating a metaCREM concept and a suite of related objects (meta-objects). These are then defined to give a body of possible meta-work that could be used in the field. A brief overview of some meta-work in CREM to date precedes the outline of some possibilities for research as a metaCREM research agenda. The approach's implications for knowledge production are outlined before concluding with a statement of the paper's contribution.

Knowledge production challenges in CREM

A number of challenges can be observed in how CREM goes about its knowledge production (which may also be called 'science') and which affects the capacity to resolve differences in substantive theory. Some of these challenges are our own observations, others have citation support.

One challenge which is general to all CREM theorisation is that CREM is an emerging field of research and practice² that needs theory that is useful for advancing the field's body of knowledge – what we term here as 'substantive theory'. With theorisation's relationship to an evolving body of professional practice that theory faces demands from and has requirements of relating to and being applicable in that dynamic body of practice. Given that relationship an amount of CREM theorisation has been about understanding that practice, as it is by way of core fundamental concepts, as it is by way of current state of practice and as it is, which is undifferentiated as to whether they are core foundational concepts or more contemporaneous statements of current practice. An amount of this theorisation has been normative as guidance for practice and, more so in the past than currently and which was the result of reflexive theorisation rather than being empirically-based.

A second challenge (also a general challenge for the field) is the dynamic context for CREM which continually needs 'new' theory applicable to the changed and changing circumstances. This dynamism can lead to revisiting topics theorised in the past in attempts to develop currently relevant theory.

¹ In this paper hyphenated meta- is used as an adjective to the affiliated word rather than a prefixed stem for a compound word denoting a higher order thing. When that occurs meta- is used to form a single word even though this later produces some odd word forms, like metadataanalysis.

² As a rhetorical aside, just when does it move from being 'emerging' to 'established'?

A third challenge for CREM is the scarcity of dedicated academics globally (Varcoe 2010). This is a general challenge for the field and also one specific to this research problem. Academic capacity has been augmented by 'general' property researchers 'dropping in' to this specialised property discipline (and usually 'dropping out' again). Augmentation has also occurred through the parallel field of Facilities Management (FM), though the relationship between CREM and FM, and any overlaps or replication is left an open question at this point. Academic capacity has also been augmented by practitioner theorisation, as previously noted. This can be seen in the origins of many of the (now) academic journals relevant to the field, for instance *Journal of Corporate Real Estate* and *Facilities*. The *Corporate Real Estate Journal* currently appears differentiated by this practitioner theorisation focus.

Because of this scarcity of academic theoreticians, arguably, the field tends to operate as one where individuals are prone to operate in isolation; metaphorically like 'islands', notwithstanding their connection to the wider body of research from using existing literature in their work. In this metaphor it is possible that individuals exist as isolated, scattered 'micro-researchers' (a bit like micro-landmasses found in parts of the Pacific Ocean). Possibly clustering could occur making the metaphor a bit more like researchers being an archipelago though the proximity and degree of closeness is unspecified here. Such individuality evident in knowledge production can also be a consequence of the nature of the knowledge production enterprise itself in management type fields (Whitley, 2000).

A fourth challenge, which is specific to this problem, can exist in agreeing what the focus of knowledge production is to be. With the scarcity and emergent-ness it is arguable that substantive theory is by far the most urgent and important task. It is possible to argue, as some have done in other fields that 'pausing' to examine the nature of knowledge production is both a distraction and a waste of time when substantive theorisation is a much more pressing task (from Ritzer (1988)). While this argument has some validity under the conditions noted in CREM, it is also not reasonable that a field ignores or overlooks the basis of its knowledge and knowledge production methods.

A possible way forward

Addressing the problem of how to resolve differences in substantive CREM theory is constrained, as suggested above, by the field's conditions of knowledge production where it is not always clear what is the knowledge production need, its dynamic context, the scarcity of resources to apply to the production, and whether there is even a problem at all.

In spite of that, we think that there is a way forward to address the problem, and in doing so contribute more broadly to knowledge production efforts in the field. In part, this suggestion on how to go forward arises from the authors' work on an interpretive, hermeneutic analysis of part of the CREMBoK – effectively developing metatheory. To strengthen that particular interpretation, the authors investigated metatheory. Reviewing the metatheory literature revealed a 'meta-world' of conceptualisations and approaches to examine knowledge production in a field.

This reflection on the authors' work gives rise to the paper's methodological approach – one of 'reflective argument'. Based on that reflection and additional scholarship, as noted, an argument is made for the metaCREM conceptualisation.

While acknowledging the importance and urgency of substantive theorisation it is also important that an emerging field reflects, sometimes and to a degree, on how it goes about its knowledge production and the resultant knowledge itself. It is not necessary for everyone to engage in it; nor is it necessary for it to occur all the time. But some consideration can be useful and indeed necessary to improving a field's knowledge production.

This reflection, called 'meta-work' here as preliminary, working nomenclature that will be refined and expanded on in due course, constitutes an important reflexive practice for any discipline but arguably more so for an emerging one. Such reflection has several benefits. It can increase the 'theoretical self-consciousness' (Ritzer, 1988) of those theorising in a field. That increased consciousness can make more explicit the factors – internal and external, intellectual and social – that are influential on and which underpin theorisation (Ritzer, 1988). Once these factors are explicit they are more readily critically analysed. This can create knowledge about theories' cognitive structures, the intellectual

community that share similar theories, and theories' changing nature and context. Self-consciousness in a field can itself produce better understanding about your own theory, competing theories, and increased self-critique. All this can be instrumental in improving a field's theory and ultimately the field itself (Ritzer, 1988).

Defining meta-, metaCREM and meta-work for CREM

'Meta-' as a prefix has several meanings but the most relevant here is having a 'nature of a higher order or a more fundamental kind' (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*). Comparable, philosophical uses are also evident. One is related to the properties of the prefixed word, for example, metalanguage refers to the properties of the language under study (Honderich, 1995). A second relates to the philosophical study of the prefixed field, for instance metaethics, metalaw and metalogic (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*; Honderich, 1995). A third usage refers to understanding the components of a system under study, as for metalogic (Honderich, 1995). Other relevant meanings include 'coming after' and 'overarching' (Ritzer, 1988). All of these are relevant to these considerations. This 'meta-world' suggests a number of relevant and different types of meta-objects. There is some contingency in these definitions given these some preliminary thoughts on the concepts. The intention in this paper is to point towards a vein of knowledge work and provide something of an entry point for further examination. Should this examination develop further then it is expected that the following definitions we provide will, undoubtedly, be refined.

As the head meta-object would be the 'meta-field' itself, for instance, metascience (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*), metasociology (Ritzer, 1988) and metaethnography (Nye et al., 2016). This would be, based on the definitions above, the study of an intellectual field's higher order properties that would reveal fundamental components, structures and systems. It is left open here whether this established overarching prerequisites for doing theory in the field, or post-theorisation examined the field's theory. This will be addressed below.

It is also possible to consider the meta-field belonging to the field itself, if that does not set up seemingly unresolvable contradictions. For example, metaethics is 'the philosophical study of the nature of moral judgement' (Honderich, 1995, p.555) where it is not so much concerned with 'what actually is right or wrong' (which is ethics) but is 'concerned with the meaning or significance of *calling* something right or wrong' (Honderich, 1995, p.555) (our emphasis). In this example, both are ethical questions but the latter more precisely is metaethics being concerned with the meaning of moral terms and the basis of such judgements.

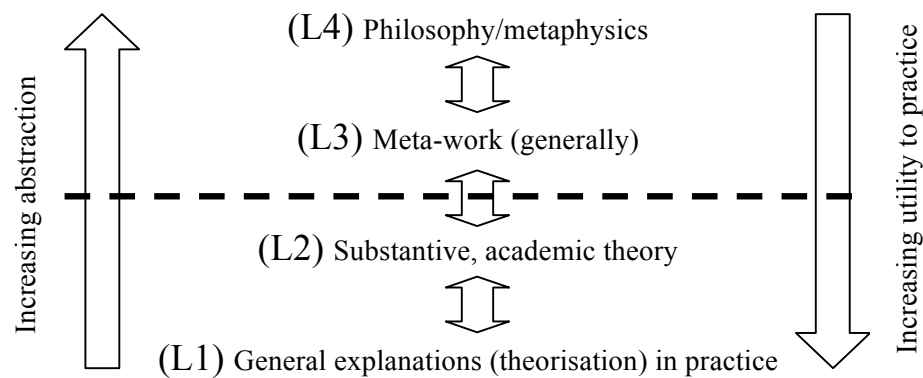
In CREM, the logical label for its meta-field is '**metaCREM**'. This is based on the social science of 'management,' being the practice, and more relevant here, the 'science' of the 'administration of business concerns or public undertakings' (after *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*). We suggest that it is not metaCRE, even though the CRE acronym is often taken to be the field's name. This is because we distinguish between the object of management (CRE) and the management actions to achieve benefit from the object (CREM). It is possible to conceive metaCREM as part of CREM (as was noted above for ethics) but more precisely metaCREM attends to the fundamental, higher order bases of CREM theories and concepts.

A possible hierarchy of metaCREM

Reflections on both academic and practitioner theorisations suggests multiple levels of theorisation or knowledge production in CREM (Figure 1).

At the lowest level in the figure, CREM practitioners have been observed seeking general, mostly anecdotally-based explanations of what they do for themselves and their fellow practitioners. This theorisation of practice connects directly to practice and the organisational world that is practice's focus. There, the material world (CRE) and the human activity systems of and in organisations are the stuff of CREM practice. (after Ormerod (2010)). This theorisation seems *ad-hoc* and informal. At best, it would be the product of Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner's knowledge production

Figure 1. A suggested hierarchy of CREM knowledge production efforts



The next level (2nd order or level theory) is that of the academic, scientific world producing substantive theorisation from the empirical domain of CREM practice. It is characterised by more rigour and formal application of reliable research methods as knowledge production techniques.

The next level (3rd order or level theory) is one of meta-work for metaCREM – that the paper suggests consists of metatheory, metastudy, metaanalysis and metamethods.

The top, 4th order level is that of philosophy and metaphysical thinking in the field where questions about the nature of knowledge and reality are considered. Given the quest for fundamental bases to knowledge production it is likely that deep philosophical questions of epistemology and ontology will be encountered. Epistemology is the understanding of what we hold as true beliefs (knowledge) and how we hold them (Honderich, 1995, Greco and Sosa, 1999) with ontology being understandings about the nature of existence and categorical structure of reality (Honderich, 1995). It is true that in probing the foundations of knowledge that these can become relevant. Nevertheless, we believe that it is possible to metatheorise without constant recourse to such considerations. Certainly in CREM it seems possible, as Ritzer (1988) suggests to engage in more modest but still productive aims of studying existing theory to improve its robustness, to better understand how it arose, and the presuppositions that inevitably occur in theorising

Obviously as the levels are ascended increasing abstraction is found together with decreasing direct utility to CREM practice. For some, this distancing from practice is a good reason to avoid moving to such higher levels of thinking. We do not agree which is why we suggest that all the levels are relevant. There is a place for this higher level thinking but the figure places this in context showing the relationships and where possible feed-up and trickle-down influences are possible. The ultimate objective in applying all these types of thinking is better knowledge, and better theory. This has benefits in and of itself. However, in a discipline that has a focus on changing and managing the physical world and its human activity systems the ultimate purpose of theory is to change the world and the systems for the better and to be better at changing and managing them.

Multiple meta-objects in meta-work

In meta-work for CREM, as so for other fields when they engage in meta-work, there are other types of meta-objects evident. The following is a brief overview.

Metatheory

Metatheory is arguably the primary product or purpose of meta-work as a second level meta-object (theory being the first level). At least two perspectives on metatheory are evident (Ritzer (1988) citing Turner (1986)).

The first perspective lays down and prescribes the pre-requisites for doing theory. Here, it is taken that theory cannot occur (advance) before fundamental questions are resolved as to the basis, the form of knowledge and metaphysics. Arguably this is said to be 'putting the cart before the horse', that is

back-to-front. Doing so sets up possibilities or conditions for theoretical paralysis where deep(er) philosophical questions are focussed on at the expense of useful substantive theory. Such a focus in a small field like CREM that has distinct and strong practice connections would be:

- As disruptive for theorisation in CREM, as critics of metatheory fear, as noted in the challenge above where this was discussed; and
- A distraction and possibly an isolating mechanism between a small academy and larger practice body that might consign the academy to irrelevance.

The second perspective takes established theory as its subject matter examining that theory after its development. This work sets out to understand that theory, for example, the knowledge it produces (and ignores), assumptions that have been made in theorising, cognitive structures deployed, theorists theorising, and the means of knowledge production (Ritzer, 1988). This would constitute a formal study of a field's theory and theorisation.

The latter does seem useful work for and in CREM. As noted above, not all the time, nor by everybody, but for an emerging field such reflection should, at the very least, enhance the self-consciousness in theorising which can enhance the quality of both theory and theorising. It is likely that more reliable, more robust theory is produced based on prior multiple studies.

Consistent with the second perspective, Ritzer (1988) suggests four types of metatheory for sociology based on 'intellectual-social' and 'internal-external (to the field)' dimensions. It is possible that comparable types may be found in CREM, but the work on that still needs to be done.

Metatheory has also been used to denote macro-level theorisation that seeks to integrate knowledge and knowledge production across fields as an antidote to what is seen as 'widespread disciplinary and methodological fragmentation' (Bhaskar et al., 2016, p.6). These include such 'heavyweight integrative metatheories' (p.7) as critical realism (associated with Roy Bhasker), integral theory (Ken Wilber) and complex thought (Edgar Morin). Clearly such concepts are beyond the scope of this paper but are included here to indicate where thinking about meta-things can lead.

Metastudy

There are various possible meanings for this term. In its most general usage there is some logic to the term being the superset of types of studies producing metatheory. Alternatively, and this seems to be the case in qualitative research, metastudy is a study that combines qualitative studies into metatheory (Nye et al., 2016, Chamberlain, 2007). This distinguishes them from quantitative metastudies which more accurately can be called metaanalyses (see below). Within qualitative studies there appear distinctions between those that aggregate data to produce more robust findings and better theory, and those that require interpretation of the disparate findings produced by disparate methods that are almost inevitable with qualitative studies. This latter, interpretive approach has been termed *metasynthesis* to distinguish it from the more purely data aggregative *metastudy* (Nye et al., 2016, Melendez-Torres et al., 2015). Metasynthesis requires specific methods like 'reciprocal translation which conceptually is the understanding of one study's findings in terms of other studies' findings in an effort to develop syntheses that are consistent across included studies' (Nye et al., 2016, p.61) (see also Melendez-Torres et al. (2015)).

Inevitably there will be implications for methods adopted to conduct metastudies and metasyntheses, notwithstanding the variety already evident in such work in other fields where they are more widespread. These methods include things like the reciprocal translation mentioned above, and hermeneutic, interpretive work that extracts constructs from studies and subsequent dialectic work that compares and contrasts studies based on those constructs (Ritzer, 1988). More defined search methods will be required for studies to be included, for example SPIDER (Sample/ Phenomenon of Interest/(research) Design/Evaluation/Research type) or PICO (Population (or problem)/ Intervention (or exposure)/Comparison/Outcomes) (Cooke et al., 2012).

Metaanalysis

Adopting metastudy as the terminology for qualitative aggregations assigns combinative quantitative studies to metaanalysis (Chamberlain, 2007). This seems to be the conventional use of that term, for

example in work like Danesh, et al. (2000) and many others that aggregate quantitative studies. It may be possible within combinative quantitative studies to distinguish between *metatdataanalysis* where data sets are aggregated (Ritzer, 1988), and more general metaanalysis where quantitative findings are combined.

In CREM, its theoreticians rarely seem to produce purely quantitative studies which could allow metaanalyses to be conducted. The nature of the CREM phenomena and common research methods appears to mean that metastudies and metasyntheses will be most likely. Which type would depend on the studies that are available to combine.

Metamethods/methodology

Another meta-object relates to possible metamethods and metamethodologies³ that sit beyond and above methods and methodologies adopted to develop theory. As such, these particular meta-objects justify and guide those methods choices. Metamethodologies could include an empirical approach, Positivism, Interpretivism, and Pragmatism. There could be some challenges with metamethods where, for instance, a circular argument occurs where the method is invoked in the metamethod, and an issue of 'infinite regress' where a method requires a justification from a metamethod which requires a justification from a metametamethod, and so on (Ormerod, 2010).

MetaCREM efforts to date

Having argued for a metaCREM it seems necessary to examine efforts to date to develop this metaCREM. The following is not exhaustive and arguably is biased by the authors' familiarity with their own work. To more fully document this would require a metastudy in its own right. Rather, what follows is intended as leaven (as in yeast for dough) for considerations of meta-work in CREM.

The authors have been developing metatheory for CRE alignment based on earlier work (Heywood, 2011; de Jonge et al., 2009), which themselves constituted forms of metatheory. Not all the outputs from the authors' work are yet available. (Heywood and Kenley, 2008), while advancing a substantive theory in a Sustainable Competitive Advantage Model for CRE, also organised 162 practices into 11 domains of practice that arguably is a form of metatheory. Jensen & van der Voordt's (2017) value-adding work similarly seems to be contributing substantive theory at the same time seeking a fundamental rationale for CREM and FM work which could qualify it as metatheory. Work to constitute CREM as a demand-side entity within the real estate world (Szigeti and Davis, 2000, Heywood and Kenley, 2010, de Jonge et al., 2009) could also be considered as metatheory given the work's aim of defining a fundamental basis to CREM. Heywood and Kenley (2013) took an axiomatic approach to the role of CRE in organisations' economies. 'Axiomatic' is the indicator of seeking foundation theory to define CRE's purposes. Notionally comparable to other such classifications the repetition of such theorisation, as noted at the outset, sets up the argument that more metaCREM work needs to be done.

It is an open question, because it also needs a metastudy of its own, whether CREM textbooks are metatheory. It is possible that they are partially metatheory where there is synthesis of existing theories. It is also possible that they are not metatheory when they are 'just' collections or summations of the field as an aid for practice or education.

Towards a possible research agenda

Having argued for and hopefully established a case for metaCREM, what could be meta-studied? The following is something of a landscape plot to establish a potential research agenda in metaCREM. This is not necessarily a representative list of suggestions as it is informed by the authors' reflections – it is not a meta-study itself. It is, however, organised on the basis of the four areas of dynamism noted at the outset plus core CREM competencies and knowledge production, itself. Some of these could be allocated to several categories but the most obvious one is used here.

³ The terms are used interchangeably by Ormerod (2010).

The business itself

1. The axiomatic nature of CRE in organisations because several, superficially similar ones have been suggested, for example Bon (1994), and Liow and Ingrid (2008), as asset types or roles in the organisational economy (Heywood and Kenley, 2013).
2. Classifications for categorising strategic CRE, that is, which CRE is strategic, tactical or operational. These are necessary and useful for deciding the focus and amount of management attention. Also, the types of real estate products that could be applicable and whether to keep or dispose of the CRE. These seemed to be important in the 1990s as CREM emerged out of historical, reactive Taskmaster stages (Joroff et al., 1993) when the quantum of CRE held became important as part of arguing for the importance of CREM. That quantum of property was not always best used, or even required for productive ends and such categorisations were useful for directing attention and actions. More recent classifications seem linked to real estate products, for instance own strategic, lease tactical and service offices for operational level properties.
3. Impact of CRE on firm financial performance. A number of separate studies in the 1990s occurred with mixed results. A synthesising study, if not already in existence, could be useful, notwithstanding that the field seems to have ‘moved on’ from such deliberations.
4. Alignment states. Various studies have looked at alignment in health settings, universities, and different countries. These have tended to be standalone, individual studies. Whether these can be aggregated to show whether there are differences or similarities in things like drivers, CRE strategies CRE responses, states of alignment by industry, organisations, nationality, and the like could be investigated. This could establish whether alignment, as a phenomenon, is generic, contingent, or idiosyncratic, and in what way it is those things. Various authors have postulated relationships, for example, Nourse and Roulac (1993) that are not necessarily empirically founded (evidence-based) notwithstanding the veracity of the (often) reflexive theorisation in those papers.

CRE market – products and services

5. Workplace effectiveness. Multiple studies exist with mixed results. Various, almost ideological positions seem evident that vary from ‘these are the latest and greatest thing’ to ‘these are ‘bright satanic offices’ (Baldry et al., 1998). New Ways of Working as a specific sub-focus within workplace effectiveness could be metatheorised by aggregating the number of studies already completed.

Evolution of CREM

6. Who has been theorising and where they are located. Potentially, these point towards whether there were possible schools (types of archipelagos), but to better establish that needs investigation of interconnectedness between researchers and commonalities of conceptualisations and theories used. Examples of possible schools as a preliminary indicator are a ‘use’ school that see CRE’s importance in a useful operational asset, and a ‘ownership’ school where CRE is all real estate owned by corporations partly for use and partly as investments. The former seems focussed in Europe and the latter in (East) Asia and which seems to draw on CREM’s financial emphasis that was evident in North American CREM research in the 1990s such as Ball et al. (1993) and Elayan (1993). These statements should not be taken as definitive at this time but merely as indicators of what meta-work could reveal.
7. Continuity of themes over time. For instance, in arguing for the relevance and currency of CREM to organisations various reasons for relevance have been suggested, for example, dynamic business conditions and globalisation. Haynes and Nunnington (2010) is but one that has done this. However, a historical understanding suggests some of these themes can be traced back to at least the Industrial Revolution. Sure the themes’ manifestations and real

estate products will have changed but such long-term analysis may suggest that some of these 'latest-and-greatest' themes could be enduring, core themes of CREM.

8. Formally defining the CREM Body of Knowledge (CREMBoK). This is inferred in many textbooks. A couple of attempts have been evident so far (Chotipanich, 2004; Heywood and Kenley, 2008) but more could be done with these. An extension could be to test the textbooks as metatheorisation.
9. The relationship between CRE and related fields – are they the same thing or different, and how are they the same or different? Consequential settling of the name for the field could occur – CRE or CREM or something else?

Core CREM competencies

10. Discounted cash flow (DCF) models for financially analysing own-lease decisions. Previous work (Heywood and Nanayakkara, 2016) identified at least 6 DCFs whose results do not uniformly support, financially, the same tenure options.
11. Quantitative meta-analyses, where they exist, to produce more robust knowledge from aggregated datasets.
12. Value-adding as metatheory. Early impressions suggest that it could be a mix of substantive theory and metatheory.

Knowledge production

13. Epistemological and ontological bases of knowledge production. These could/should be linked to methods given these are interconnected. A meta-study here could start with a study of methods and work up to the other two.
14. Basis of the field's 'science' as per Whitley's (2000) observations that management 'science' works with researchers operating independently with little by way of inter-dependencies.
15. Practitioner theorising – how, methods, assumptions and the like – which is the lowest level noted in Figure 1.

Benefits of metaCREM

Meta-work in CREM is (or could be) a legitimate, useful and necessary part of CREM's knowledge production that helps to transition CREM's emergent status to being an established, mature discipline, because it could produce the following benefits:

- A more self-conscious approach to knowledge production that is likely to increase its intellectual rigour even further;
- Revealing CREM's fundamental dimensions by moving beyond the immediacy of the, not unimportant, attendance to practical problems in the empirical domain; and
- Commensurate with the above, more consistent substantive theory is possible. Where there are different but compatible current theorisations it may be possible for more complex theorisation from aggregating and integrating previous work.

MetaCREM would draw on those fields where meta-work is more common for methodologies and philosophical bases.

These arguments for a metaCREM are not to suggest that everyone should rush into working in that mode. To do so, given the scarcity of CREM researchers, would make metaCREM a distraction given the amount of required and necessary substantive theorisation, as some suggest of meta-work generally.

Summary/Conclusion

This paper has advanced the concept of metaCREM (Levels 3 and 4) as an adjunct to existing knowledge production efforts in the field (Levels 1 and 2). Stimulated by observations of what appeared to be replication of theory and informed by the authors' own metatheorising, the paper

argues that metaCREM and other meta-work related concepts could be useful in the field's knowledge production efforts. Various concepts were examined and then meta-work as a whole (Level 3) was located within a hierarchy of knowledge production efforts (Levels 1 to 4). Then it is argued how they are related and potentially mutually beneficial. An outline of some areas of investigation was given as a basis for a possible metaCREM research agenda.

The paper has been framed as some 'first thoughts' on the concept of metaCREM. It became evident during the paper's development that there is much scope for meta-work in CREM – as metatheory, in different types of studies, and other approaches that can benefit the field's knowledge production. We hope that these first thoughts prove stimulating to others in CREM theorising.

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