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The Institutionalization of Management Concepts: A structurationist-political perspective

Abstract

New management concepts keep being discussed in academic studies and business practice. It remains unclear in what way some of them become institutionalized. This is where the article sets out from: The starting point of the analysis is the Sociological New Institutionalism. By means of enlarging its range by a micro political approach as inspired by the Theory of Structuration, acts and political game playing of different agents become the focus of the analysis. Referring to the dimensions of social structures signification, legitimation, and domination, this yields as a result an agent-oriented explanation of processes of institutionalization. The resulting analytical framework is exemplified through the introduction of Diversity Management in Germany.

Keywords

Institutionalization Management Concept Managing Diversity New Institutionalism Organisation Theory

JEL Classification

M10 M12

1 Introduction

There are numerous management concepts in science and practice. They provide design recommendations for management practice, are intended to reduce complexity and contain generalized recommendations for action, which require a specific form of implementation in individual cases (see Staehle 1999, p.78, Ulrich 2001, pp. 86-87). The economic benefits of management concepts are tied to their effectiveness and efficiency, although there are often problems in determining costs and benefits and thus their cost-effectiveness (Tuschke 2005, pp. 53-55, Subramony 2006, pp. 196-197). Their legitimacy benefit stems from the fact that their commitment symbolizes the progressiveness of an organization, with which an attribution of legitimacy of the organizational environment is connected (see Elvik 1996, pp. 341-344).

Management concepts are subject to change over time. On the one hand, established concepts change as part of their application. Causes lie within (eg changes of strategy and / or structure, change of personnel) and outside of organizations (eg socio-social, technological or economic changes). On the other hand, the range of management concepts is changing over time as new challenges and new ideas ensure that new concepts are continually brought into the discussion (see Kieser 1996, Teichert / Talaulicar 2002, pp. 410-411). You can expand the stock of management concepts additively, but also complement or replace established concepts. Overall, this leads to a dynamic, which is reflected in the emergence, establishment, modification and disappearance of different management concepts.

In the past, it has been observed that on the one hand there are management concepts that have become permanently established and thus become institutions. One example is "management-by" concepts (see Staehle 1999, p. 78), which diffused across borders and into the non-profit sector and - under new names - became part of other, more comprehensive management concepts (eg contract management in public administration). On the other hand, there are numerous examples that management concepts have only a limited life. In this context, fashions are repeatedly identified whose popularity has a bell-shaped curve (see Kieser 1996, Abrahamson / Fairchild 1999). As soon as management concepts are taken up, it is unclear how their further development will progress and

whether an establishment will take place in practice; The institutionalization of management concepts has so far been largely unexplored (see Hamel 2006, p. 23), Institutionalization processes are generally influenced by different actors with different goals and interests (see Philipps et al., 2004). This also applies to processes of institutionalization of management concepts, which for example are often shaped by practitioners, scientists and management consultants, as well as other actors in individual cases. The development and dissemination of management knowledge and management concepts takes place in discursive processes between the actors involved (see Thomas 2003). In these processes, it is not least the "rhetoric" of the protagonists of these discourses that determines whether actors are moved to adapt a management concept and thus contribute to its institutionalization (see Kieser 1996, Carter and Jackson 2004, Green 2004, p. ; In places, the discourses of various actors on management concepts are therefore even understood as "language games" (see Astley / Zammuto 1992, pp. 444-452).

Discourses on management concepts fundamentally reflect different interests and objectives of the involved actors; resulting conflicts are therefore (potentially) part of any discourse. Thus, it becomes clear that discursive processes of institutionalization - like every event in organizations - always take place politically, and that power therefore always plays a central role (Clegg et al., 2007, pp. 190-227). Predictions about the course of the institutionalization processes are just as difficult as the answer to the question of which actors and thus which management concepts prevail. This question is relevant, however, since the (sole) reason for their institutionalization can not lie in the utility of the concepts. On the one hand, there are concepts which are credited with a high contribution to increasing efficiency, but whose distribution is subject to limits, while on the other hand there are concepts that can be applied There is a lack of empirical proof of their efficiency and yet they are adapted by numerous companies (see Subramony 2006, p.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to analyze the process of institutionalizing management concepts, taking into account the actors involved as well as their interests and power potential. The article complements the literature in three respects. First, central explanatory deficits of a neo-institutionalist explanation of the dissemination of management concepts that has hitherto dominated at the theoretical level are worked out. Against this background, a theoretical model of institutionalization is sketched, which assumes a structure-theoretical-micropolitical perspective and is suitable for reducing explanatory gaps in sociological neo-institutionalism. Third, this model serves as an analytical framework for an exemplary study of the institutionalization of diversity management, which is a first step into empiricism.

2 Previous findings on the institutionalization of management concepts and explanatory deficits

2.1 State of the art

It is basically conceivable to explain the institutionalization of management concepts on the basis of economic theories. However, this is subject to narrow limits for two reasons in particular: First, (institutional) economic theories provide a "under-socialized" perspective (see Roberts / Greenwood 1997, p. 346), which neglects the social and social framework of institutionalization processes. Secondly, an economic view of the institutionalization of management concepts reaches its limits, since it is equally problematic in science and practice to determine its economic benefit. Against this background, it is almost inevitable to resort to non-economic theories in order to fully explain the institutionalization of management concepts. In principle, different theories come into consideration; Probably the most commonly used in this context are the following:

The behavioral decision theory (see March / Simon 1958, Simon 1976) and the related approach of organizational anarchy and the trash can model (see March / Olsen 1982) focus on the importance of human behavior for the organization of organizations as well on internal organizational processes and structures. On the one hand, however, they do not take account of the societal level - which is important for institutionalization processes - and thus of institutional aspects (see Berger /

Bernhard-Mehlich 2006, p. On the other hand, behavioral decision theory is essentially descriptive and thus does not focus on the theory-based explanation of organizational phenomena.

The analytical unit of evolutionary approaches are neither the individual nor the individual organization. Rather, organizational populations are investigated (see Kieser / Woywode 2006, p. The intra-organizational dynamics that can be identified in the institutionalization of management concepts can therefore not be explained on this basis. This would be more likely with the theory of path dependence (Schreyögg et al., 2003), which would interpret the diffusion of management concepts as the result of organizational paths. However, it does not seem (yet) mature enough for your explanatory potential to be considered superior to other theories.

Micropolitical approaches are based on the assumption that actors in organizations act as well as coalitions of actors with different interests. It analyzes why and how actors act politically and try to assert their interests or goals based on their power with different means and tactics (see Neuberger 2006, p. From the perspective of micro-political approaches, the institutionalization of management concepts in organizations is therefore no longer (only) the result of an economic-rational cost-benefit calculation, but also the result of the assertiveness of particularly powerful actors. However, micropolitical analyzes are usually "actor-centered" (Alt 2001, p. 301) and therefore do not systematically consider the organizational environment that is important for institutionalization processes. Therefore, they are not in themselves suitable for explaining the process of institutionalizing management concepts.

A potential for explaining institutionalization processes is attributed to sociological neo-institutionalism, which deals with the formation and dissemination of institutions. He focuses primarily on the impact of institutional environmental expectations; However, the importance of the actions of actors is taken into account, particularly in extensions of the theory (see DiMaggio 1988), so that the sociological neo-institutionalism is a suitable starting point for explaining social institutionalization processes involving various actors and observing institutionalized environmental expectations. Its relatively large explanatory potential is not least evident in its frequent reception in the recent past (see DiMaggio / Powell 1983, Meyer / Zucker 1989, Fligstein 1996, Lant / Baum 1995, Mayer / Whittington 2002). In Germany, the study of theory has intensified only since the late 1990s. Particular mention should be made of Walgenbach's work (2000, 2001), which examines the introduction of ISO standards in German organizations and the dissemination of Total Quality Management. However, explanatory deficits are also associated with the theory, which have relevance particularly in the context of their application to institutionalization processes. These deficits are elaborated below on the basis of a short description of the macro- and micro-institutional research direction.

2.2 Neo-institutionalist explanation of the diffusion of management concepts: basic statements and explanatory deficits

In the macro-institutionalist perspective, an organization adapts those concepts that its environment expects (see Scott / Meyer 1994, p. This gives the environment legitimacy, which secures the flow of vital resources. Organizations therefore orient themselves (also) to the institutionalized conceptions of their environment by means of a rational, effective and efficient organization (see Meyer / Rowan 1977, p. 341, p. As institutions narrow the legitimate scope for action of organizations, organizational structures and behaviors become more homogeneous. Such an institutional isomorphism is caused by coercion (eg legal rules, social expectations), mimetic processes (eg imitation) and normative pressure (eg professionalization, education and training) (see DiMaggio / Powell 1983, p 150-152). The isomorphism mechanisms, alone or in combination, may be a possible explanation for the spread of management concepts: Organizations adopt successful or perceived successful concepts in order to meet their ideas about modern organizations and ensure their legitimacy.

However, it is also conceivable that organizations only appear to comply with environmental requirements in order to avoid conflicts. They then decouple their structures or the concepts actually used from the institutionalized environmental expectations or contradictory environmental expectations (see Meyer / Rowan 1977, pp. 356-357). In order to hide the decoupling, organizations build legitimization facades by their "speeches", ie their external presentation, deviates from their actual actions; Brunsson (1989) speaks of an "organization of hypocrisy" in this context. Based on the signaling theory (see Spence 1973), this behavior can also be explained economically rationally: The organization sends signals via internal structures or concepts that are not observable from the outside. If the signals are interpreted by their environment as being in conformity with environmental expectations, this has the economic (possibly vitally important) advantage of legitimizing the organization.

In addition, macro-institutionalism by no means rules out economic reasons for the adaptation of management concepts. Rather, DiMaggio and Powell point out that there is a competitive isomorphism besides the institutional one (1983, p. 150). In this understanding, isomorphism (structural equality) results from a competitive adaptation to such requirements that result from the task environment. It is based on the fact that ultimately the best concepts prevail in the competition. The basic assumption here is that organizations generally strive for economically efficient solutions. However, their realization can fail because, in addition to the individual cognitive limits of a rational choice to which Simon (1957) drew attention, there are institutional restrictions in the social context, whereby not all possible concept alternatives can be considered (cf. Roberts / Greenwood 1997, p. 347).

According to microinstitutionalist considerations, organizations themselves create institutions and thereby influence their environment (see Zucker, 1983). Institutionalization describes the process of "consolidation of rules of conduct" (Krücken 2002, p. 228) as well as the final or final state of this consolidation. Tolbert / Zucker differentiate institutionalization processes into three analytically separable phases (see 1999, pp. 175-178).

As part of the (pre-institutional) habituation phase, new concepts are developed in organizations in response to endogenous and / or exogenous organizational problems. While the demand comes from organizations for which the problems result in pressure to act, the offer is created by actors who occupy important institutionalized positions (eg, scientists, consultants, see Scott 2001, p.

The (semi-institutional) phase of objectivation involves efforts to create consensus on the utility of a concept and efforts to further its dissemination (see Tolbert / Zucker 1999, p. Firstly, there is "interorganizational monitoring", which collects information about other organizations, the concepts used there, as well as their benefits and costs. Second, Institutional Entrepreneurs, that is, individuals, groups, or organizations that have the interest, power, and resources to implement a concept (DiMaggio, 1988), pursue "theorizing" activities. In this way, the necessity of adopting a new concept is clarified on the basis of abstract, logical reasoning or empirical examples of success.

In the sedimentation phase, a novel concept is adapted on a normative basis by almost all organizations that have been identified as potential users during the objectivation process. It is then permanently used in a similar form over several generations of members of the organization, surviving its origins, finally becoming an institution and different from fashions (see Tolbert / Zucker 1999, p. 185).

The phase scheme gives the analysis of institutionalization processes a conceptual foundation. It provides a starting point for overcoming the criticism that neo-institutionalist theory can not explain the processes of institutionalization (see DiMaggio 1988). However, there is still a need for research to be found in the theoretical underpinning of the institutionalization analysis and, in particular, in

the question of how institutionalization processes take place within organizations (micro-level). Tolbert / Zucker's argumentation is only at first glance at the micro level: First, as an explanation for the dissemination of objects of institutionalization, they consider imitation processes between different organizations within an organizational field (see Tolbert / Zucker 1999, p. This is based on inter-organizational exchange processes and argued at the cross-organizational level. On the other hand, Tolbert / Zucker regards organizations as sources of institutionalization processes, but understands them - at least implicitly - as monolithic collective actors or corporate actors. How institutionalization processes take place within organizations in which various individual actors act is not the subject of close examination and has so far been addressed without a "theoretical basis" (Walgenbach 2002, p. 182). However, habitualization and objectification are characterized by the actions of individual actors (institutional entrepreneurs). A differentiated analysis of their actions, interests and (political) strategies is, however, also not in the foreground in microinstitutionalism (see DiMaggio 1988, p. What remains unanswered are the questions of how the behavior of different actors is, to what extent, on which basis and with which methods some actors influence institutionalization processes more than others and how political games take place in the context of institutionalization (Philipps et al. P. 648).

2.3 Need for an Extended Theoretical View of Institutionalization Processes

Individual actors play a central role in institutionalization processes, as institutional entrepreneurs within organizations promote strategically initiated, interest-driven institutional change. Since power is a fundamental aspect of any social relationship (see Neuberger 1995, p. 205), institutionalization processes are necessarily political and conflictual. Against this background, institutionalization at the micro-level is not a linear and interest-monolithic process, but an iterative process characterized by power and conflicts of interest among different actors (Philipps et al., 2004, pp. 640-642).

The analysis of institutionalization processes must necessarily be actor-oriented in this context. This is not possible on a neo-institutionalist basis alone, since sociological neo-institutionalism does not place actors at the center of its analysis (see Jepperson 2002, pp. 246-250). Rather, criticism is frequently voiced that the actors' behavior is over-socialized and passive (see DiMaggio 1988, Tolbert / Zucker 1999, p 170, Walgenbach 2000, p 69). However, institutions never completely control the possibilities of action of individual actors, but actors within the framework of existing institutions certainly have degrees of freedom for intentional, political and strategic actions (see Oliver 1991, pp. 149-152; Scott 2001, p. 193). Although DiMaggio's (1988) discussion of institutional entrepreneurs addresses this aspect, it does not explain the interests and sources of power that Institutional Entrepreneurs initiate and enforce institutionalization processes, the relationship between various institutional and external institutional entrepreneurs, and ultimately institutionalization processes take place.

The theoretical view of institutionalization processes thus remains incomplete if it is based exclusively on neo-institutionalism. However, in the Anglo-American literature reflections, actors, power and interests have to be taken into account more than hitherto by linking neo-institutionalist considerations with the structuration theory (see eg Barley / Tolbert 1997).

3 Theory-based explanation of institutionalization processes

3.1 Neo-institutionalism and structuration theory

By assuming the duality of structure, structuration theory bridges the gap between organizational theories that abstract from the institutional context and those that view action as determined by institutional constraints. It is considered to have good suitability in order to combine different theoretical perspectives (see Ortmann et al 1997, p. 322). A connection between the theory of structuration and neo-institutionalism is "obvious" (Walgenbach 2002, p. 183), since - in the same way as Tolbert / Zucker's microinstitutionalist reflections - it is based on a processual viewpoint (see Barley / Tolbert 1997, P. 93). In addition, both theories focus on social practices that are

continuously (re-) produced by acting actors with reference to structures or institutions (see Krücken 2002, p.

The structuration theory explains how social action comes about, how it is embedded in a social framework and how it produces it over and over again. Central to this is the assumption that actors continually relate their actions to social structures, thereby reproducing them ("duality of structure", see Giddens 1997, pp. 77-81). Reproduction means a more or less modified replication. Social structures consist of rules and resources: (1) Rules are not understood as formalized rules but as "procedures of action, aspects of practice" (Giddens 1984, p. 21). On the one hand, they define meaningfulness and provide actors with patterns of interpretation for their everyday actions (structure dimension signification). On the other hand, they serve to justify actions (structural dimension legitimation). Social rules offer actors an action orientation without determining their actions. In this respect, it is generally possible to pursue one's own interests in spite of the influence of social rules that influence the action. (2) Resources give actors power to act (structural dimension domination). While allocative resources relate to man's dominion over nature, authoritative resources refer to domination over other people. Power is required if actors want to implement changes in social structures (see Giddens 1997, p. Institutionalization processes supported by powerful actors - eg. For example, the establishment of new management concepts - in this context is characterized by the fact that institutions "prevail over a feedback process between innovative actors and their social environment" (Deutschmann 1998, p. 14). The feedback process takes place via various modalities (Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1

Dimensions of the duality of structure (based on Giddens 1984, p. 29)

The theory of structuration provides a starting point for reducing the explanatory gap existing in microinstitutionalism and for showing how concepts within an institutional framework continuously (re-) produce and gradually institutionalize in social interactions (see Barley / Tolbert 1997; Walgenbach 2002, p 183-184) or how institutional change generally takes place (see Clemens / Cook 1999). In doing so, it binds institutions and institutionalization processes more closely to the actions of actors than is customary in neo-institutionalism (Ortmann et al., 1997, 329). The (different) power of actors can be analyzed through the structural dimension of domination (see Zimmer / Ortmann 2001, p. Overall, the neo-institutionalism is thus expanded action-theory.

How do these considerations relate to the institutionalization of management concepts?

Management concepts contain generalized recommendations for action, are usually not or only inaccurately codified in writing, therefore require an interpretation or design in individual cases and concretize only by their practical application (see Ortmann / Becker 1995, pp 68-80). Thus, they are reproduced through social actions (modified if necessary). The actions of the actors are embedded on the one hand in social structures that, among other things, consist of institutionalized and action-guiding environmental expectations, legitimized structures and behaviors at an earlier stage, or of already institutionalized and thus legitimized management concepts (see Scott 2001, p. On the other hand, they refer to sources of power, which is why the actions are always micropolitical. The implementation of management concepts thus takes place through daily social practice and is based on what Giddens calls the rule: "procedures of action, aspects of practice" (Giddens 1984, p. 21). Through their institutionalization, management concepts themselves become a (social and possibly also formal) rule for how certain management tasks are fulfilled or how they are "regulated". As a socially created structure, they then limit the degrees of freedom of future legitimate management-related actions (see Giddens 1984, pp. 173-174). However, relationships between structures and actions are in principle open, which is why actions taken by actors can modify or deinstitutionalize concepts at any time, and new concepts can be developed and institutionalized.

On the basis of these preliminary considerations, a structure-theoretical-micro-political perspective is developed as an analysis scheme for the institutionalization of management concepts.

3.2 Development of a structure-theoretical-micropolitical perspective on institutionalization processes

A concretization of the dimensions of the duality of structure from a micropolitical perspective was undertaken by Ortmann / Becker, who explains power as the analytical guiding dimension of structuration (see 1995, p. Power is understood as the control of relevant zones of uncertainty (see Crozier / Friedberg 1979, p. 43, similar to Giddens 1979, p. It is based not only on the structural dimension of domination, but also on the dimensions of signification and legitimacy. In the context of institutionalization processes, power develops via allocative and authoritative resources as well as through interpretive schemata and social norms (see Ortmann / Becker 1995, p. This extension of the structuring scheme shows that organizational processes are influenced by structural conditions in which actions of actors are carried out (see also the examples of modalities in Fig. 2). The developed scheme is regarded in the literature as an instrument for describing and analyzing micropolitical processes in organizations as well as for analyzing processes of norm formation, the formation of social rules and institutionalization in general, which is then (also) understood as structuring (see Ortmann et al., 1997, p. 328). The institutionalization of management concepts, ie their introduction and establishment as a social and possibly formal rule, is thus considered below from a structure-theoretical-micropolitical perspective and thus represents the result of recursive, micro-political games.

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Fig. 2

Duality of Structure and Micropolitical Analysis (Ortmann / Becker 1995, p. 60, modified in analogy to Zimmer / Ortmann 2001, p. 38)

In the neo-institutionalist understanding, institutionalization processes are differentiated into the phases of habituation, objectivation and sedimentation. In the first two phases, dynamic, flexible, and conflict-driven micropolitical games of different individual and corporate actors take place; Ortmann describes such games as innovative games (see 1995, p. These "institutionalization games" are concretized in the following as "habitualization game" and "objectivation game". Their process determines which management concepts prevail. According to Tolbert / Zucker (see 1999, p. 179), the (provisional) institutionalization of a concept on a normative basis takes place in the sedimentation phase without any far-reaching, active actor influence. In this respect it can be assumed that micropolitical games do not characterize this phase to the same extent as the other phases. Therefore, the micro-political analysis of the sedimentation phase is omitted.

Of course, the distinction between habitualization and objectivation games can only be analytical because of the smooth transition of these phases, as described by Tolbert / Zucker (1999), and especially because of the recursiveness of social structures to which the games (yes) relate. Although both phases of play have the same elements (reference to social structures as well as interests and actions of actors), their differentiation is useful to focus on the different contents of the games resulting from the phase description in Tolbert / Zucker. However, against the background of the recursiveness assumption, their results must always be regarded as provisional, since the political games can (again) break up at any time. This is the case, for example, when changes occur in social structures that lead to new constellations of power or changed interests. In the analysis of institutionalization games, it is assumed (simplistically) that actors can have conflicting interests (time-related), for example the interest to institutionalize a new management concept or to prevent its institutionalization. The content comparison of different management concepts in the context of political games is not considered in this context. Fig. 3 summarizes the structure-theoretical-micropolitical and action-oriented perspective on the institutionalization of management concepts;

the curved arrows visualize each recursive relationship and thus the dynamics of the institutionalization process.

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Fig. 3

Basic Structure of Micropolitical Institutionalization Games

3.3 The habitualization game

During the habitualisation phase, Institutional Entrepreneurs are interested in initiating discourse on new management concepts in an organization. On the other hand, there are actors who are not interested in innovations and thus want to prevent the habituation of new management concepts. Potential reasons for this are manifold. The spectrum ranges from economic interests (eg for business consultants who want to sell certain concepts) to the expansion or maintenance of power to personal preferences for or against a concept. Institutional Entrepreneurs who (1) perceive existing problems or construct new problems, (2) on the basis of objective or constructive arguments, argue that management concepts used in an organization reach their limits and (3) make an offer create or take up new concepts. "First, someone in the organization must interpret the internal and external environment of the organization. This interpretation may be based on real or perceived problems of the organization" (Fligstein 1985, p 388, see also Berger / Luckmann 1986, pp. 101-102). Against the background of the developed structure-theoretical-micropolitical perspective, the habitualization game negotiates with reference to social structures whether the organization joins the problem view of Institutional Entrepreneurs.

The individual and collective patterns of perception, mission statements and communication topics, which are characterized by the order of identification, provide actors with patterns of interpretation of reality. At the organizational level, this results in an effect that resembles the effects of organizational culture (see Schein 1992): The perception of problems and problem-solving patterns by actors is far-reaching, in part subject to unconscious (organizational) norms and standards as well as visible cultural aspects such as mission statements thus a cultural bias and is limited from the outset. The order of organization - and as part of it the organizational culture - characterizes the assessment of the management and the management concepts used, the distribution of attention to different action contexts as well as the perception and evaluation of information from the environment (see Zimmer / Ortmann 2001, p. Societal, political, scientific or organizational discourses, which are guided by management concepts, influence the assessment of whether dealing with a concept is "meaningful" (Green 2004, p. 655). The management concepts established in a company also influence the perception of reality, since their application defines problem views and hides alternative perspectives and concepts (see Elvik 1998, page 228). This is done on the basis of the perceived problems within the organization and the resulting demand for management concepts as well as the range of management concepts in the organizational environment (eg in consultations, other organizations), from which (seemingly) suitable concepts for the own organization are drawn can.

Actors evaluate management concepts against the background of the legitimacy order, which makes alternatives seem forbidden or forbidden. Not so much the actual performance of a management concept is important as the benefit attributed to it; Thus, it can not be ruled out that rationality myths are habitualized (see Elvik 1998, p. The legitimacy order includes z. Eg legal rules as well as organizational cultural and social norms. They provide the justification for certain acts or the justification for their sanctioning. Against this background, the selection of management concepts has been reduced to those that are not compatible with the existing system of legitimacy, that is, their use is sanctioned; in contrast, actors favor legitimate concepts.

The dimension domination (structure level) or power (action level) influences the "implementation of the definition of reality and interpretation" and thus (also) decisively the question of which

behavior and which concepts are considered legitimate and finally habitualized (see Walgenbach / Meyer 2008, S. 67). Micropolitical analyzes make clear which (power) resources - as modalities - actors use to support their actions (Crozier and Friedberg 1979, 51-53). Allocative resources are z. For example, the available capital, which can exclude expensive management concepts per se, and the technical qualifications of the actors, which leads to an over- or inferiority to other actors. Authoritative resources consist in the organization of work (over- and subordinate relations, knowledge about processes in the organization) and in leadership (decision-making participation). Institutional Entrepreneurs draw their political actions on these organizational, but always interpretive arrangements, but in a form "as they may [...] in their own interest" (Ortmann / Becker 1995, p. 71). Through inter-organizational relationships with other actors ("Supporting Actors", eg business consultants, academics), Institutional Entrepreneurs can get support for their problem view and receive information about management problems and (new) management concepts. In dealing with this information, micropolitical tactics, such as changing information or selectively distributing it, are generally capable of constructing situations that require management-related change. In summary: A habituation game in the context of the institutionalization of management concepts involves the signification and legitimization of various management problems and concepts as well as the mobilization of allocative and authoritative resources by different actors. The result of the habitualization game can be the beginning of an institutionalization process when actors assert that modified or new management concepts are necessary. However, it is equally possible for powerful actors to prevail who do not want to retain new or modified management concepts, but the status quo. This result is also "negotiated" in micropolitical games, in which these actors ultimately have better or more powerful arguments than those who want to initiate change. Against this background, the differences in power between the actors are of central importance for determining which actors assert themselves in the context of habituation and whether a new management concept subsequently reaches the next (ideal-typical) institutionalization phase.

3.4 The Objectivation Game

In the objectivation phase of an institutionalization process, institutional entrepreneurs try within an organization to further establish habitualized management concepts and defend against criticism. The objective here is to make a management concept an objective and thus no longer questioned component within an organization. However, as there is still no consensus on dealing with a management concept despite habitualization, actors must be expected in this phase of institutionalization, whose interest lies in preventing the (further) establishment of the management concept. In an objectivation game it is negotiated which actors prevail. The actions of the actors recur recursively to existing social structures.

The organizational structure of an organization influences which arguments and which comparison organizations are used in the context of interorganizational monitoring. This applies in particular to the benefit and cost considerations of a management concept: due to the problems of precisely determining the profitability of management concepts, there is considerable scope for interpretation, so that benefits and costs are more or less constructed (see Walgenbach / Meyer 2008, cf. P. 101). Institutional Entrepreneurs use these interpretive leeway as part of their theorizing activities, which represent a "strategy of meaning" (see Strang / Meyer 1993, p. 492). In the process, the high degree of generality of the concepts is highlighted and abstracted from real differences, as this facilitates the communication between different actors as well as the adaptation of the concepts. It also makes them easier to understand and connect. This "popularization" makes the introduction of management concepts attractive for an organization, and the probability of success of theorizing activities increases (see Strang / Meyer 1993, p. 494). As a result, the management concept itself becomes an interpretation scheme of reality, through which logical arguments for and empirical success stories of the institutionalization of this management concept are considered and evaluated. It is thus the medium and result of the actions of the actors and is recursively reproduced in this way (see Ortmann 1995, pp. 335-336).

Activities of the actors in the context of objectivation take place against the background of the legitimacy order: This applies first of all to the selection of companies that represent (potential) comparison partners and whose legitimacy results, for example, from their good reputation, their economic success or their leading position within the group. In addition, empirical evidence of the utility of a concept against the background that companies are legitimized by economic success in particular, provides a justification for implementing a concept (Walgenbach and Meyer 2008, p. Their theorizing activities must also relate institutional entrepreneurs to the social legitimacy order. That can u. a. This makes it possible to refer to discourses conducted outside of an organization via a management concept that is characterized by legitimate actors such as scientists or consultants (see Schmidt 2006, pp. 109-114). In contrast, illegitimate activities ensure that the institutionalization of a concept is slowed down.

In the framework of objectivation, "persuasion [...] also requires the use of specific (micro) political tactics and strategies that are beyond official arguments" (Lederle 2007, p. 35). In principle, Institutional Entrepreneurs can rely on various means of power or resources as modalities between the structural dimension of domination and the negotiation level of power or micropolitics. Allocative resources are, on the one hand, the budgets of the actors that enable or limit the activities of objectivation, for example in the context of obtaining information or cooperation with external experts, and on the other hand their expertise, which in particular determines their argumentation possibilities in the context of theorizing. Through the use of suitable formal methods and instruments, actors can (objectively) objectify unsafe and fuzzy concepts (see Elvik 1998, p. Authoritative resources consist in the political and social skills of institutional entrepreneurs and the associated possibility of forming a coalition, which emphasizes their own concerns. In addition, the "good line to decision-makers" (Zimmer / Ortmann 2001, p. 38) and inter-organizational networking are helpful in order to support (apparently) objective (comparative)

Data (Lederle 2007, p. 24). Against this background, the choice of Supporting Actors, to whom a particularly high legitimacy is attributed, and the formation of a coalition with them, are micro-political strategies by which actors can legitimize their actions.

In summary: In an objectivation game, Institutional Entrepreneurs try to establish a management concept within an organization. Their activities, which are aimed at reaching consensus about the use of the concept, take place against the background of the order of signification and legitimacy. The assertiveness of the actors is decisively influenced by the available (power) resources. As a result of the game of objectivation intraorganisationally, a consensus can emerge about the institutionalization of a management concept. As a result, it is experienced as an objective reality and is no longer questioned. But it is also possible that its objectification fails if it is not in accordance with the order of signification or legitimization and / or the protagonists of its introduction have too little (power) resources. In the objectivation phase of an institutionalization process, the number of users of a new concept increases (see Tolbert / Zucker 1999, pp. 176-178). On the one hand, the institutional entrepreneurs carry a concept to the outside and thereby recursively reproduce their u. a. power based on inter-organizational relations. On the other hand, its increased use increases the pressure to act on organizations that are not yet using it, so that their imitation increases. With increasing acceptance, the concept becomes part of the order of signification and legitimation, whereby its diffusion is recursively promoted.

4 Case study of the institutionalization of a management concept

4.1 Methodology and object of empiricism

An immediate empirical observation of institutionalization processes is difficult. Alternatively, their reconstruction is possible using archive material (Tolbert / Zucker 1999). This is done below to show how the outlined theoretical considerations represent an analytical framework for the empirical investigation of the institutionalization of management concepts. A qualitative empirical

approach is chosen. It is usually exploratory and pursues the goal of understanding social processes better than before (Lamnek 2005, pp. 480-481).

A case study is the introduction of Diversity Management in Germany. The concept has been increasingly used in the United States since the 1980s and increasingly in Germany since the late 1990s. It deals with the handling of diversity in organizations, such as: This results, for example, from the cultural, demographic and organizational characteristics of employees (see Bissels et al 2001, p. The general goal of diversity management is to harness the potential of diversity and reduce its problems (Cox 1991).

The qualitative study used secondary data, which is not uncommon in micro-political analyzes (Alt 2001, p. These were obtained from publications by company representatives as well as from interviews with institutional entrepreneurs of Diversity Management Introduction (see Belinszki et al 2003, Lederle 2007, Fick 2008). The texts used were subjected to a qualitative or structured content analysis in order to identify and summarize key topics and contents (see Mayring 2003, p. Through such a cross-section of the material, the elements of the institutionalization games outlined should be empirically ascertained. This was done with the aid of a category system derived from the theoretical preconceptions, but reflected in the course of the analysis and gradually modified and reduced. The category system was kept manageable, not least because of the exemplary character of the analysis (Figure 4). The categories are taken up in the content analysis in Section 4.3 and are each indicated by italics.

Open image in new windowFig. 4

Fig. 4

Category system for coding

4.2 Diversity Management in Germany

Diversity management has been habitualized in Germany for several years. His "boom-like dissemination" (Gebert 2004, p. 412) becomes clear in a literature analysis of the WISONET database, according to which the number of scientific and practice-related publications on this subject has increased more than sixfold since 2000 (see detailed Suss / Kleiner 2006 , P. 525). In parallel, there was a significant increase in its implementation in German corporate practice. As part of a 2005/2006 written survey of German listed companies and the 50 largest US-based companies based in Germany, a total of 26 companies implementing diversity management were identified, representing 39.4% of responding companies. Striking is the dynamic that the implementation of the concept has experienced since the end of the 1990s (Fig. 5).

Diversity management is not yet a natural management concept in Germany, and at first glance, the number of 26 companies that implemented diversity management in 2005 does not seem particularly high. But this is put into perspective for two reasons. First, these companies are essentially large companies with an average of around 176,000 employees. Second, since the survey many other companies have begun to implement the concept. The habituation of diversity management has accordingly taken place; At present, efforts are being made to objectivate it. These are reflected in the content analysis results presented below.

4.3 Institutionalization of Diversity Management in Germany: A Structural Theory-Micropolitical Perspective

As part of the objectivation game to introduce or intensify the diversity management in individual companies, actors take their actions recursively on the Signifikations- and Legitimationsordnung. These are mainly influenced by different external actors on social, cultural and in part legal norms: (1) Scientists focus on the employment of diversity management, which in addition to the significantly increasing number of publications on this topic also in the increase at conferences and the integration of diversity management into business teaching (see Vedder 2006, p. both contribute to legitimizing diversity management. (2) In addition, there is a clearly identifiable group of

diversity-active companies in Germany (eg Ford, Deutsche Bank, Lufthansa, Telekom), which, as protagonists of diversity management, are part of the institutionalization context of other companies. (3) As trade associations, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and above all the German Association for Personnel Management, shape the perception of diversity management. The latter regularly conducts surveys on diversity management, publishes the results in its own magazine "Leadership" and offers a permanent working group, which serves to connect the member companies. (4) Foundations (eg the Bertelsmannstiftung, the Hertie Foundation and the Böll Foundation) focus on diversity management. By offering public events and continuing education programs on the subject, diversity management is increasingly becoming a part of public awareness. In addition, the foundations, as sponsors of scholars, are providing incentives to deal with the topic. (5) The European Union and the German state have created legal framework conditions in the form of EU directives and - in Germany - the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). On the other hand, national and international government organizations have shaped social norms by publicizing diversity and diversity management in recent years. Corresponding initiatives of the federal and state ministries (see BMFSFJ 2005, Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs 2008) show this as well as the Charter of Diversity introduced in Germany under the auspices of Chancellor Angela Merkel (www.Charta-der-Vielfalt.de), in which about 350 companies commit themselves to creating a non-discriminatory working environment in which equal opportunities exist for all employees. (6) Interest groups are increasingly influencing social norms for employing diversity. By way of example, the "Forum Frauen in der Wirtschaft", the "German Society for Diversity Management" or the "International Society for Diversity Management eV" can be named, each creating a platform for diversity management, raising public awareness of diversity and Want to communicate skills in dealing with diversity (www.idm-diversity.org). With a few exceptions, the role that business consultants play in institutionalizing diversity management is (still) negligible as they have so far rarely specialized in diversity management.

The content analysis of corporate publications shows that institutional entrepreneurs in their respective companies are engaged in sociopolitical discussions on the consequences of demographic change for companies, equal opportunities for women and men in professional life or the business-related consequences of migration (Lambert 2006, Rühl 2007)). By arguments such. For example, that the topic "appeals to the sense of fairness and justice" (Rühl 2007, p. 176), institutional entrepreneurs refer to the social order of organization and make dealing with diversity seem sensible. Numerous companies offensively communicate their diversity activities, for example, via company mission statements, essay publications or the corporate website, thereby becoming empirical examples of success in diversity management (eg Deutsche Bank 2008, Telekom 2008). Some large companies, which deal intensively with diversity and represent diversity management as objectively necessary (eg Ford, Deutsche Telekom, Volkswagen, Lufthansa), become opinion leaders and opinion leaders in dealing with diversity (see Jablonski 2004; Mauz 2004, from the Ruhr 2006, Rühl 2007). From a critically reflective perspective, scientists describe these activities as: "Do good and talk about it, or at least make others talk about it" (Vedder 2003, p. 20). In this way, the concept becomes a self-evident medium on the social macro level (as an interpretation scheme of reality) and the result of the actors' actions (as a management concept). As a result of the comparative inter-organizational monitoring, the "German economy" is under increasing pressure to deal with diversity management (interview partner U7 in Lederle 2007, p. 34). In this context, the "repertoire of interpretations of the discourse [...] 'supplied' and largely taken over by the Diversity Officers is largely taken over, particularly in American-born companies" (Lederle 2007, p. 29). Diversity management is thus - especially in the branches of US companies - a self-evident, action-guiding component of the objective reality. The concept reproduces itself thereby, which contributes to its further objectification in the context of an institutionalization process.

Arguments put forward for the objectification of the concept must endure before the social legitimation order. In large, listed companies, this is unquestionably characterized by the fact that,

above all, economic activity is legitimated. Since it is easier to enforce management concepts that are credited with efficiency, Institutional Entrepreneurs attempt to highlight the economics of diversity management. They emphasize that "diversity management is not a social romanticism", but "strategic considerations [...] closely related to the corporate strategy" and "driven by the market, ie by the customer's wishes" (Rühl 2007, p. 178). As part of their argumentation, institutional entrepreneurs find numerous arguments for how diversity management can contribute to the fulfillment of customer wishes or customer loyalty and thus prove to be in line with the market (see Heuer / Engel 2006, pp. 366-378). Regarding the results of diversity management, Institutional Entrepreneurs assume that diversity management "makes a contribution to the integration of cultural differences within the group" (von der Ruhr 2006, p. 382) or is necessary to "the future"] (Lambert 2006, p. 295). References to exemplary companies, which (seemingly) achieve success through diversity management, are made in order to justify the concept in relation to the top management committed primarily to economic aspects (interview partner U2 in Lederle 2007, p. 36).

The fact that diversity officers are mostly convinced of the economic benefits of diversity management was also demonstrated by their own company survey: 58% of the surveyed diversity officers stated that they fundamentally attribute diversity management to strategic importance and / or cost-effectiveness. However, the vast majority of companies (76%) refrain from systematically controlling the effects they imply (see Süß / Kleiner 2006, pp. 534-535). In this respect, the establishment of the concept seems to bring with it economically legitimate arguments to (apparently) meet expectations regarding the efficiency of management concepts. However, the arguments are based more on intuitive, subjective efficiency estimates than on objective measurements. This illustrates the handling of contradictory environmental expectations, which are directed on the one hand to economic action and on the other hand to the implementation of diversity management, whereby its cost-effectiveness is massively questioned, especially from a scientific perspective (see Süß / Kleiner 2006, p. , (Actors in) Companies build legitimacy facades by showing themselves convinced of the economic viability of the concept, but avoiding its verification. At the same time, they embrace the economic rules of signification and legitimacy that prevail in companies by emphasizing that diversity controlling is "part of a business that acts responsibly in a responsible manner" (Rühl 2007, p. 179). Whether such legitimating facets can be maintained depends not least on whether Institutional Entrepreneurs succeed in avoiding verifications of the actual efficiency of the concept. This is attempted, for example, by questioning the suitability of controlling instruments and key figures (Interview 1 in Belinszki et al., 2003, pp. 290-291).

Institutional Entrepreneurs who want to achieve a positive perception detached from the subjective feeling and the (active) development of a socially shared consensus about the necessity and (apparent) quality of diversity management in objectivation games must assert themselves against opponents who intend to institutionalize the Concept to prevent. For example, experts reported that there is some resistance in the implementation of diversity management, especially from middle management, which is likely to be disruptive. a. questioning the economic viability of the concept (interviews 1, 2, 3 and 5, in Belinszki et al 2003, pp. 281, 308, 315, 347, interviews 1, 2 and 3 in Fick 2008, pp. 48, 51, 59) , In the political game with their opponents, Institutional Entrepreneurs rely on the allocative resources (budgets) available to them in the structural dimension of domination, the amount of which varies widely (Interview 5 in Belinszki et al., 2003, p , P. 179); In addition, in individual cases as a result of external events, they quickly become available (for example, Lufthansa: Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, see Rühl 2007, p. On the other hand, the diversity protagonists have authoritative resources in the form of intra- and interorganisational networks (Lederle 2007, pp. 28-30, Rühl 2007, pp. 180-181, interview 2 in Fick 2008, p. Possible coalition formations underpin their own concerns within the context of objectivation. This is especially true when external experts, such as scientists or members of professional and business

associations, are added to whom legitimacy is attributed (see Lederle 2007, p. Lederer's study (see 2007) shows that diversity officers in companies consciously act in a power-political manner: The company representatives they interviewed state that diversity management or - apparent - occasions for dealing with diversity are part of "organizational discourses". and "micropolitical processes" "strategically", as an "argumentative aid" or as a "means of pressure", in order to obtain consent for their objectives (see Lederle 2007, p.25, p. Within the scope of theorizing, one's own or externally drawn in specialist expertise "is always well received. And convinces "the top management (interviewee U2 in Lederle 2007, p. 36), which in inter-organizational comparison is based on other companies or relies on expert judgments.

The outlined discourse shows the efforts made by the diversity protagonists to objectify the concept. Obviously, attempts are made to make diversity management appear meaningful and (also) to legitimize it economically. Institutional Entrepreneurs have an important source of power, especially in their networking, which emphasizes their own concerns. However, in order for the concept in Germany to become an institution that has not been further questioned, its sedimentation is still necessary, that is to say its permanent application in numerous and heterogeneous organizations.

5 conclusion

The steady emergence and establishment or disappearance of management concepts raises the question of how some concepts become institutions. So far, sociological neo-institutionalism has not fully answered this question. However, a structural-theoretical-micropolitical perspective reduces its deficits. Theoretical progress results, on the one hand, from the stronger orientation towards action and the focus on power-political institutionalization games. At the same time, the neo-institutionalist theory's centralized but poorly developed phases of habitualization and objectification were theoretically substantiated by the connection to the micro-political organization analysis and the idea of a recursive reference to social structures. On the other hand, a differentiated view of the idea of the (re) production of social structures, which is somewhat devoid of content in structuration theory, becomes possible because it has been shown that powerful institutional entrepreneurs primarily refer to social structures through their actions and, so to speak, modify them) reproduce. Empirical progress is made possible by an analysis scheme for the empirical investigation of institutionalization processes, exemplified by the objectivation of diversity management.

However, the limits to which the outlined empiricism is subject should not be overlooked. On the one hand, in the content analysis of the texts or statements, the interpretive reference to the categories of the developed structure-theoretical-micro-political analysis schema takes place. Interpretation errors and thus misinterpretations can not be ruled out. Even if there are indications of political conflicts, another aspect of content analysis lacks the opportunity to find a counterpart to the texts usually written by Institutional Entrepreneurs of Diversity Management. This also applies to the secondary analysis of the interviews, which were conducted by other researchers and possibly with different objectives. Due to the one-sidedness of the available material diverging interests as well as political conflicts and strategies can only be partially understood in the content analysis. Thus, on the one hand, it is only partially possible to analyze micropolitical institutionalization games; Research needs are therefore unmistakable. On the other hand, the exemplary application of the developed analysis scheme, however, shows its fundamental potential for an empirical investigation.

The need for research could be reduced in the future by a more direct and differentiated analysis of micropolitical institutionalization games based on primary data. Case studies are suitable for this (see Lamnek 2005, pp. 298-328), which are often carried out in empirical micro-political research (see Walter-Busch 1996, p. Topic-centered interview interviews would then make sense as a data collection method, as the subject of research is on the one hand rather undeveloped, but on the other

hand there are starting points for interview topics due to the analysis scheme. The use of another qualitative data collection method would also increase the validity of the results. Following the basic idea of qualitative research, information about the developed analysis scheme could then be generated from empiricism in an iterative process of theory formation and verification, which could contribute to its refinement.

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