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**Micro-Dynamics of Hybridisation in Multinational Companies:
Exploring the Analytical Potential of Structuration Theory**

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to develop an analytical framework for a better understanding of processes of hybridisation. The justification for such an endeavour flows from two reasons. First, mainstream theories that have focussed on the societal or institutional constitution of organisations have largely neglected the multi-contextual constitution of organisations. The hybridisation perspective, in contrast, is particularly suited to fill this gap as it chooses the impact of different contextual influences in the constitution of organisation as its very starting point. Second, while the hybridisation approach offers a promising shift in focus, it has lacked a sound conceptualisation of micro-dynamics of hybridisation. It is suggested that this shortcoming can be overcome by taking advantage of the rich analytical tools offered by of Structuration Theory and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’.

Introduction

Multinational companies (MNC) are probably more than any other organisation multi-contextually constituted. Even if we want to be careful with stating ‘Transnational Corporations’ or ‘Differentiated Networks’ (Bartlett/Ghoshal 1998) to have become empirical reality, it cannot be denied that the transfer of people, organisation concepts and equipment has been constituent for internationalising companies from early on (cf. Dörrenbächer 2003). Transfer has always meant at least for the receiving units some degree of integration or re-embedding of elements that originated from another context. However, although internationalising companies have operated in different institutional or societal contexts for some time, we know remarkably little about how different contextual influences play together in their units’ constitution. Against this background, this paper seeks to develop an analytical framework that helps us to describe and understand the underlying processes of multi-contextual constitution of organisations. The paper is structured as follows:

The paper argues in the first part (Chapter 1) that approaches that have concentrated on the societal constitution of organisations have largely failed to come to terms with the multi-contextual embeddedness of internationalising organisations such as MNC. Especially organisational approaches from Varieties of Capitalism suffer from a conceptual blindness vis-à-vis multi-contextual embeddedness. The challenge is therefore to develop a conceptual understanding and start a careful exploration how different organisational contexts interact (cf. Geppert et al. 2001). In the second part of the paper (Chapter 2) it is argued that hybridisation research offers a conceptual starting point for theorizing the multi-contextual

constitution of organisations. While hybridisation research cannot be regarded as a coherent research paradigm, there is a growing body of literature dealing with the phenomenon implicitly or explicitly, empirically as well as theoretically (e.g. Abo 1994; Boyer 2004, Lillrank 1995; Lorenz 2000; Smith and Elger 2000). Again, despite the substantial diversity in how to define hybridisation there emerges one common theme: To identify the mix and the interplay of different contextual influences in the constitution of organisation. However, while hybridisation research offers a promising change in perspective it has suffered from a result-focus leaving dynamics or processes of hybridisation on the micro-level unexplored. Hybridisation research has started to identify specific mixes of different contextual origins in MNC. At the same time, it has told us little about how these mixes come about. As opposed to only looking at the outcomes of hybridisation, we need to shift our attention to the underlying processes. To capture such processes the paper embarks on a theoretical journey in the third part (Chapter 3). The journey comprises a review of three distinct approaches – Micro-institutionalism, ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ and the Micro-political approach – that have either conceptualised processes of institutionalisation (i.e. the transfer and embedding of organisational elements across spaces) or focussed on the role of actors, power and politics on the micro-level. While it is shown that all three approaches have contributions to make to the conceptualisation of hybridisation processes – particularly the ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ with its metaphor of ‘translations’ – they display substantial weaknesses that stand in diametrical opposition to each other. Part 4 demonstrates (chapter 4) that the aforementioned approaches’ core ideas can be combined and partly synthesised with Giddens’ Structuration Theory. By translating core categories from Giddens’ Structuration Theory to the context of organisation, a framework is developed that considers actors and agency in processes of hybridisation without ignoring their structural embeddedness. The advantage of Structuration Theory is that it neither overemphasises power and ‘resources’ (i.e. the dimension of domination) – as the Micro-political approaches do – nor the operation of highly institutionalised cognitive ‘rules’ (i.e. the dimensions of ‘signification’ and ‘legitimation’) – as is the case in Micro-institutionalism and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’. The paper concludes with the presentation of a framework that sees processes of hybridisation to rest on three steps, i.e. dis-embedding, transfer, and re-embedding of transfer contents. It is proposed that particularly the step of re-embedding relies on ‘translations’ whereby the transfer content as much as the receiving context changes in a ‘dialectical transformation’.

1. Theory Inadequacies in Conceptualising the Contextual Constitution of Multinational Companies (MNC)

A glance through major theoretical approaches concentrating on the societal constitution of organisation shows that there has been little advancement in conceptualising or theorising the multi-contextual constitution of internationalising organisations such as MNC. We may think here of organisation theories such as the Societal Effect approach (e.g. Maurice 2000) or the National Business Systems approach (e.g. Whitley 1999) subsumable under the wider label of Varieties of Capitalism approaches. While these approaches deserve credit for having theorised the societal or institutional constitution of organisations, they have failed to consider the possible multi-contextual constitution of organisations. For example, what does the Societal Effect approach offer conceptually for the case of organisations strongly impacted by different societal systems? More concretely, what kind of societal effects are we bound to observe in a German automobile subsidiary in India? The German effect, the Indian effect, or both effects? In all fairness, it is not a coincidence that the Societal Effect approach is not called National Effect Approach. Major proponents of the approach such as Maurice have even begun to question the nation as the central focal point of the societal. Maurice:

The question of the use of the nation state as a reference point, which emerges as the 'sole locus of societal closure (Théret 1997)', and of the nation as a locus for the expression of societal coherence constitute one of the main challenges for a "re-examined" and developed societal analysis. In particular, it will be necessary to reformulate the notion of "societal" and take into account of the interdependencies between different "societal spaces". (Maurice 2000:35)

Nevertheless, the Societal Effect approach remains unprepared to conceptualise how different 'societal effects' interact, which is particularly problematic for multi-societally embedded organisations such as MNC. Even Lane (Lane 2000; Lane 2001) – who is very sympathetic to the Societal Effect approach – has come to criticise it based on the recognition that corporate actors in globalised companies are embedded in different contexts and may refer to these in their strategic choices to different degrees.

Although societal effects are still evident in the different national routes to globalisation, they will be more difficult to discern in fully globalised companies. [...] These emerging changes mean that corporate actors will no longer be interacting with, and be constructed by, mainly domestic social institutional complexes. Instead, they will be placed in multiple societal environments, and ensuring unavoidable embeddedness in foreign societies will provide them with different and competing social templates to structure their activities and goals. (Lane 2000: 204)

More than the Societal Effect approach is the National Business Systems approach theoretically focused on one context – i.e. the national context – in explaining the constitution of organisations. Although, even here major proponents have come to ask: “what happens when a firm organizes across institutional and national divides? (Morgan 2001:1)” the

programmatic answer (to be read in the introduction of the book 'The Multinational Firm: Organizing Across Institutional And National Divides') indicates a lingering attachment to a single national context, i.e. the country-of-origin:

First, multinational firms are social constructions; in particular, they are built out of specific national institutional contexts that shape how they internationalise. (Morgan 2001:1)

Clearly, the National Business Systems approaches' proponents have started to come up with more differentiated answers in the case of MNC. However, efforts to identify dimensions of influence that go beyond the national – such as the influence of 'transnational standards' on a supranational level by Morgan (2001:225) – have remained the exception, rather than the rule. Particularly Whitley (2001), one of the main champions of the approach remains focused on the mono-contextual constitution of MNC based on the country-of-origin effect (cf. Whitley 2001:61). In short, like proponents of the Societal Effect approach, representatives of the National Business Systems approach could not avoid asking how organisations are constituted when they are impacted by different contextual influences that may even reach beyond the national level. Nevertheless, overall the answers remain conceptually entangled in the mono-contextual origins of the approaches.

A somewhat similar criticism can be voiced against New Institutionalism. While these approaches are diametrically opposed to, Varieties of Capitalism approaches concerning the question of organisational 'convergence' and 'divergence' they equally fail to conceptualise the multi-contextual constitution of the organisations. Here we may ask: which isomorphism constitutes organisation? Is it the isomorphism of the organisational field (i.e. the industry)? Are these fields peculiar to a nation or do they stretch beyond? What is about corporate isomorphism in MNC when headquarters exert isomorphic pressures on their subsidiaries (cf. Westney 1993; Kostova/Roth 2002)? How do different and contradicting isomorphisms play together? Although approaches of the New Institutionalism offer with the terms 'double isomorphism' (Walgenbach 2001:339), 'institutional duality' (Kostova/Roth 2002:216), 'decoupling' or 'ceremonial adoption' (Meyer/Rowan 1977:356) conceptual starting points of how multi-contextuality is organisationally digested, the multi-contextual constitution of organisation is surely not at heart of what the approach is focussed at. In contrast, it is argued here that multiple isomorphisms are the rule rather than the exception and that how organisations come to terms with them requires comprehensive conceptualisation and empirical inquiry. Walgenbach (2001) criticises along similar lines that Makro-Institutionalist approaches have neglected the wide range of possible organisational responses to institutional pressures and points to insights from Oliver (1991) who has lined out a variety of "strategic

responses to institutional processes” including behaviours such as: ‘acquiescence’, ‘compromise’, ‘avoidance’, ‘defiance’ and ‘manipulation’ (Oliver 1991:145).

We can summarise that organisation theories focussing on the societal or institutional constitution of organisations have not only empirically neglected the inquiry of multi-contextual constitution but have been ill equipped to deal with the phenomenon conceptually. Particularly, Varieties of Capitalism approaches remain reluctant to go beyond a mono-contextual nation-based analysis even in the case of MNC. Part of the reason for this reluctance may lie with fact that the approaches originate in cross-country comparative studies. With some justification, these approaches have criticised ideas of universally optimal forms of organisation and have convincingly shown that organisations are largely constituted by the different societal or institutional systems. However, in doing so, particular types of organisations – such as MNC – that are by their very definition embedded in different context dropped out of sight. What is more, even where multi-contextual constitution is not being denied, we are still missing conceptualisations on the integration, the interaction, and the interplay of different influences. Interestingly, other authors have also voiced this criticism. Dörrenbächer (2003: 151) highlights the one-sidedness of Varieties of Capitalism approaches. In his view, these approaches suffer from a bias towards country-of-origin-effects. Possible heterogeneity of home-country influences as well as the impact of home- and even third-country-effects on organisational constitution are hardly considered (Dörrenbächer 2003: 154). Dörrenbächer proposes that apart from market-structural and institutional influences, firm-specific influences have to be taken into account (Dörrenbächer 1999). Dörrenbächer’s critique points to the same direction: The problem of conceptualising the constitution multinational organisations mono-contextually.

2. Hybridisation Perspective: An Emerging of Multi-contextual Approach

The Hybridisation Perspective offers a suitable conceptual vantage point to understand the multi-contextual constitution of internationalising organisations. The etymological origin of the word ‘hybrid’ – meaning in its Latin root ‘of two origins’ – already signifies the change in perspective. In organisational research, hybridisation refers to the emergence of mixed or new organizational forms based on the impact of different contextual influences. It can hardly be claimed that hybridisation research has come to present an independent and coherent research paradigm at this point¹. Part of the reason for this state of affairs is attributable to do the fact

that authors who have touched on hybridisation (sometime explicitly and sometime implicitly) originate from different schools of thought (e.g. labour process, French regulation) and research methodologies (ethnographic approach to statistical surveys).

The first empirical studies on hybridisation probably date back to the 1980s when Japanese companies set up overseas manufacturing sites. Most of these so-called transplants were founded in the wake of trade friction between Japan and the US. The crucial question that concerned researchers at the time was (e.g. Florida/Kenney 1991, Kenney/Florida 1993, Kumom 1994, Wilkinson/Morris/Munday 1995, Humphrey 1995, Pil/MacDuffie 1999): Would Japanese companies be able to replicate their home-grown concepts and philosophies in a new contexts? Would they be able to imitate the concepts and practices that were celebrated – by Womack (1990) and others – as universally superior and applicable? In the aftermath of these Japanese transplant efforts a stream of literature emerged can be termed *Transplant Research* or first generation hybridisation research. The inherent concepts of hybridisation are largely similar and empirical observations follow similar patterns (e.g. Adler et al. 1998, Mishina 1998, Babson 1998). Typically, these studies mirror the effort by a Japanese automobile company to transplant a production template (often the blueprint of a mother plant in Japan) as far reaching as possible to another country. While the Japanese parent company is willing to compromise or adapt its template in some respects (because of different host-country contextual conditions), it is uncompromising where it touches the essence of the production model. Moreover, the transfer has generally one source only, i.e. the parent company driving and co-ordinating the transfer. Although local adaptations do trigger some hybridisation of the model, the model's core is successfully imitated (cf. Kenney/Florida 1993, Morris/Wilkinson 1995, Adler et al. 1998, Mishina 1998, Rutherford/Parker/Koshiha 2001). However, in addition to this mainstream of hybridisation research another body of empirical research can be identified. In these contributions the contextual origins and driving forces that give rise to particular hybrid outcomes are reconstructed as multiple, changing and fuzzy (e.g. Dankbaar 1998, Fleury/Salerno 1998, Jürgens 1998, Pil/Rubinstein 1998). Instead of asking 'which aspects of a given transferred model have been modified?' the question becomes more one of 'which influences and sources contributed to the development of a given (hybrid) organisational form?'. Hence, empirical contributions concerned with questions of hybridisation not only differ whether the term of hybridisation is used in the first place but also how hybridisation is empirically and

¹ This is also the reason why the preferred terminology is here 'hybridisation perspective' and not hybridisation theory.

conceptually looked at. Placed on a continuum we find at the one end the classical Japanese transplant literature based on template transfer (one source, unidirectional flows) plus subsequent adaptation/hybridisation and at the other end a fuzzier picture where hybridisation is seen as a permanent confluence of a variety of ideas originating from and driven by a multitude of sources. What is implicitly and sometimes explicitly understood as hybridisation varies, therefore, between the poles of a uni-directional and linear process of model transfer and adaptation on the one hand and a more circular, multi-sourced dynamic of permanent and overlapping transfers or flows on the other.

Now, while the empirical studies cited are a valuable first step and provide a host of explanatory factors (e.g. strategic intent, global models and industry branch tendencies, country-of-origin, host context, transfer content, entry mode, economic success etc.) that potentially affect *hybridisation results*, they often remain descriptive and under-theorised. Only few authors take the pain to define hybridisation or other related terms. There are only a few elaborate contributions trying to grasp hybridisation conceptually (as for example Boyer 1998). More importantly, there are even less contributions trying to go beyond a mere *result perspective*. Dörrenbächer's (2002) is right in stating that processes of hybridisation have hardly been looked at and remain a black box. Despite a number of interesting contributions (e.g. Lillrank 1995, Lorenz 2000, Smith und Elger 2000, Sharpe 1997, Dörrenbächer 2002, Becker-Ritterspach et al. 2003) that may be fed into an understanding *hybridisation processes* no systematic effort has been made to thoroughly theorise such processes. Even authors who have spearheaded the *Hybridisation Perspective* and its terminology such as Abo (1994) and Boyer (1998) have failed to offer a process perspective. The latter leave processes of hybridisation unexplored by abstractly stating hybridisation to be the outcome of an 'application-adaptation dilemma' (Abo 1994) or the outcome of the compatibility between the "requirements of a model of production" of a firm and the "constraints and opportunities of the local institutions" of the host country (Boyer 1998:34). Irrespective all conceptual shortcomings and differences in theoretical backgrounds, the authors cited share a shift in perspective. They shift their attention to the mix and interplay of different contextual influence in the constitution of organisation.

3. Micro-institutionalism, Scandinavian Institutionalism and Micro-politics: A Journey towards Conceptualising Processes of Hybridisation

The starting point of our journey towards conceptualising processes of hybridisation is the idea that the multi-contextual constitution of organisation is rooted in the meeting of elements

from different contextual backgrounds. Understood as a process this ‘meeting of elements’ relies at its core on the de-contextualisation or dis-embedding of a *transfer content* (e.g. organisational actors, concepts or practices), its transfer across time and space, and its re-contextualisation or re-embedding. Hybridisation research has offered a promising shift in perspective. It has made, however, little effort to analyse and understand the underlying processes that give rise to specific results of hybridisation. By contrast, this paper argues that we can only fully understand the results of hybridisation if we analyse processes of hybridisation at the micro-level and refer to the agency of actors.

Micro-Institutionalism and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ – both strongly founded on ideas of Constructivism and New Institutionalism – deserve the credit for having dealt with processes of institutionalisation (and de-institutionalisation). As such, they are rewarding stages in our journey and have contributions to make to the question: How and under which conditions de-contextualisation, transfer, and re-contextualisation of organisational forms and practices take place.

Micro-institutionalism

Zucker and Tolbert two main advocates of the micro-variant of New Institutionalism have concentrated on processes of institutionalisation rather than their content or state (e.g. Zucker 1977, 1991; Tolbert/Zucker 1994, 1999). Zucker’s early work (1977) is mainly concerned with the question how “different degrees of institutionalisation in constructed reality” influence “cultural persistence” at the micro-level (Zucker 1991:83). In three distinct small groups experiments she is able to show, that the ‘transmission’ of ‘cultural understandings’ or ‘acts’ as well as their ‘maintenance’ and their ‘resistance to change’ is related to the degree of their institutionalisation, i.e. the degree to which ‘acts’ and their meanings are perceived as factual or objective reality. Now, the degree to which ‘acts’ or ‘cultural understandings’ are perceived as such, very much depends on the social ‘setting’ into which they are embedded. For:

The meaning of an act may be perceived as more or less exterior and objective, depending on the situation in which the act is performed and/or depending on the position or role occupied by the actor. (Zucker 1991: 86)

By systematically varying settings (i.e. mere personal influence, organisational embeddedness, and office occupation) in which ‘cultural understandings’ or ‘acts’ are to be transmitted, maintained, and changed by actors, Zucker experimentally simulates different degrees of institutionalisation. Zucker’s experiments demonstrate that variations in the perceived ‘exteriority’ and ‘objectivity’ of an ‘act’ or ‘cultural understanding’ – as a result of different setting into which they are embedded (i.e. in a way different degrees of perceived

legitimacy) – influence processes of institutionalisation. What is more, Zucker’s findings also allow for conditions (i.e. under low degrees of institutionalisation) under which ‘differentiation’ or change is more likely to occur than ‘isomorphism’ (Zucker 1991:105).

In a later historical study, on *‘The Diffusion of Civil Service Reform’* Tolbert and Zucker (1983) show that the diffusion and adoption of ‘formal organisation structure’ follows different dynamics depending on varying levels of institutionalisation. Their core finding is that with increasing institutionalisation and legitimacy of structural forms their diffusion increases and actual internal requirements become less important as a reason for their adoption. In their 1994 paper *‘The Institutionalization of Institutional Theory’* Tolbert and Zucker seek a further theoretical specification of institutionalisation processes. Based on Berger and Luckmann (1967) they come to understand processes of successful institutionalisation as a triad of ‘habitualization’, ‘objectification’, and ‘sedimentation’ (Tolbert/Zucker 1994: 15-16).

Earlier phenomenological analyses of institutions, then, suggest at least two sequential processes involved in the initial formation of institutions and in their spread: habitualization, the development of patterned problem-solving behaviours and the association of such behaviours with particular stimuli; and objectification the development of general, shared social meanings attached to these behaviours, a development that is necessary for the transplantation of actions to contexts beyond their point of origination. At a later point in their analysis, Berger and Luckman suggest an additional aspect of institutionalisation; one also identified by Zucker and termed “exteriority”. Exteriority refers to the degree to which typifications are “experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact” (Berger and Luckman n 1967: 58). It is related to the historical continuity of typifications (Zucker 1977), and in particular, to the transmission of typifications to new members who, lacking knowledge of their origins, are apt to treat them as “social givens” (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Tolbert 1988). We refer to the processes through which actions acquire the quality of exteriority as sedimentation. (Tolbert / Zucker 1994: 15-16)

However, while the core message in more recent studies remains the same, (i.e. that with increasing ‘objectification’ and ‘institutionalisation’ the ‘diffusion’ of organisational structure becomes easier and ‘variance in implementation’ decreases) the focus shifts to collective actors (Tolbert/Zucker 1994; Tolbert/Zucker 1983cf. Zucker 1988). Instead of actors in organisations, organisations as actors move to the centre of attention.

Now, what can we draw from Micro-institutionalism with respect to processes of hybridisation? What does it tell us about the process steps of dis-embedding, transfer across time and space, and re-embedding? First, the Micro-institutionalist approach tells us something about preconditions for dis-embedding and transfer. Based on constructivist thought, Tolbert and Zucker see ‘objectification’ as a prerequisite for transfer or ‘diffusion’. It is argued, that only if habitualised behaviours find expression in general and shared social meaning is a “transplantation of actions to contexts beyond their point of origination” possible (Tolbert/Zucker 1994:15). In other words, only if organisational practices find expression

(dis-embedding) and are turned into some degree of inter-subjectively shared meaning – for example in the form of policies or concepts – can transfer commence. Second, the Micro-institutionalist approach suggests a strong relationship between the degree of institutionalisation of organisational transfer content and its transfer rate or occurrence. In practical terms it explains why we find certain organisational solutions industry-wide (e.g. kanban systems in the automobile industry) no matter where we go on the globe. Third, the Micro-institutionalist approach lines out conditions under which the re-embedding of transfer contents is likely to meet lowest levels of resistance and variance. That is, the more a transferred element is institutionalised and ‘infected with legitimacy’ the fewer alternatives are being perceived and the less scope there is for interest driven politics seeking alternation. Varying institutionalisation levels of different transfer contents suggest that some are more subject to critical evaluation, modification than others are. Finally, different degrees of institutionalisation are not only relevant for transfer contents (e.g. an organisational concept) but also for receiving contexts. This implies for re-embedding that the higher the degree of institutionalisation of a ‘social behaviour’ or a ‘cultural understanding’ in a receiving context, the more difficult will be its replacement with an institutionally distant transfer content.

Zucker’s cognitive approach to institutionalisation gives us first clues of how to conceptualise processes of hybridisation. However, while the approach serves as a starting point it has a serious limitation with regard to our conceptual goal.

The approach hardly discusses what happens when elements from different contextual backgrounds meet that are both high on institutionalisation. While we learn a lot about conditions of successful transmission and maintenance of ‘acts’ or ‘cultural understandings’ we learn little about reasons of failure and situations where bargaining starts because degrees of institutionalisation are low or different sets of involved actors do not share the same perceptions of social reality. No doubt, the Micro-institutionalist approach has discussed the relevance and role of actors as well as actors’ interests in institutionalisation processes – for example in the form of “champions“ or “interest group advocacy“ (Tolbert/Zucker 1994:17). At the same time, the role of individual actors, power, and micro-politics has not been systematically conceptualised and explored as constitutive for all steps of institutionalisation (cf. Tolbert/Zucker 1994, 1999). While we can relativise – especially for Micro-institutionalism – the assertion that new institutionalist approaches neglect actors and interest altogether (cf. Wicks 2001; Walgenbach 2001, DiMaggio 1988) it is still true that actors and interest – even if considered – have generally taken the form of auxiliary constructs without solid foundation in agency theory. Apart from the fact that the Micro-institutionalist approach

lacks a serious deliberation of agency and power, it is – like its Macro-institutionalist counterpart – more interested in ‘persistence’ and ‘imitation’ than in change and hybridisation. The lingering focus on stability goes hand in hand with a neglect of de-institutionalisation processes and situations where instead of ‘diffusion’ and ‘imitation’, resistance and change occurs. It is noteworthy that proponents of the approach themselves have come to raise this complex of problems.

In other words, the theoretical accomplishments of institutional theory are limited in scope to the diffusion and reproduction of successfully institutionalised organisational forms and practices. Institutional theory tells us relatively little about “institutionalisation” as an unfinished process (as opposed to an achieved state), about where institutions come from, why some organizational innovations diffuse while others do not, and why innovations vary in their rate and ultimate extent of diffusion. Institutionalisation theory tells us even less about deinstitutionalisation: why and how institutionalised forms fall into disuse. It would be surprising if so young a body of work as the institutional approach should have solved these problems in short time. I would suggest, however, that we are unlikely to solve them with our current conceptual apparatus. To progress in this area, it may be necessary to bring interest and agency more centrally onto the institutional stage, to recognize, in Gouldner’s (1954:27, 237) words, that institutions have never developed and operated without the intervention of interested groups, groups ... which have different degrees of power” and that the persistence of an institution is often the “outcome of a contest between those who want it and those who do not.” (DiMaggio 1988:12)

Even when an organizational form becomes institutionalized, its diffusion is rarely complete. Successful institutionalization of a new form at the local level often required a process of constituency-building and interpretation, replicating the process at the system level. To the extent that the distribution of interests represented in the bargaining process and the bargaining positions of the holders of these interests differ across locales, central institutional forms will be subject to local modification. Such local modifications represent the pool of potential innovations that may themselves diffuse to organizations throughout the field. (DiMaggio 1988: 16)

Though even key proponents cast doubts over the notion of ‘diffusion’, they have shown only modest effort to analyse comprehensively under which conditions organisational practices and structures fail to ‘diffuse’.

Interestingly, these limitations have been the point of departure for another stream of literature. While this body of research could be more aptly termed a Translation approach, their proponents have termed it ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ (Czarniawska/Sevón 1996:3). The approach builds on New Institutional thought but goes beyond the ‘diffusion concept’ by seeking to capture processes of de-institutionalisation as much as processes of institutionalisation.

Scandinavian Institutionalism

‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ revolves around the ‘metaphor of translation’. The approach strongly rests on the seminal work of Callon and Latour (e.g. Callon und Latour 1981; Callon 1986) and a deliberate rejection of the New Institutional notion of ‘diffusion’. The object is to capture both, institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation.

The “Scandinavian” institutionalism espouses the basic tenets of the new institutionalism and addresses the issue of change in a different way, due to its closeness to the slightly different pragmatic tradition – that of Thurman Arnold. [...]. Describing organisations as a combination of

change and stability assumes paradoxicality of organisational life [...]. The dynamic focus is maintained: the processes, which attract our attention, are processes of identity formation and deconstruction, rule establishment and rule breaking, institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. (Czarniawska/Sevón 1996:3)

In contrast to New Institutionalism, the focus is on the dialectic relationship between isomorphism and metamorphism. Sévón (1996) and Sahlin-Andersson (1996) present this idea exemplarily. The authors argue that it is pointless to distinguish strictly ‘imitation’ (isomorphism) from ‘innovation’ (metamorphism). For ‘imitation’ can hardly be conceived without ‘translation’ and bears the seeds of ‘innovation’. Conversely, we cannot imagine innovation without imitation, that is, without reference to something existing and its ‘translation’ to new circumstances. This train of thought comes out nicely in the following citation from Sévón:

Imitation, hence performatively defined (Latour 1986), becomes a process of translation with a specific focus on conceptualising. This performative definition fosters description of an organization picking up an idea, translating it into something that fits its own context, and materializing it into action. The result of this action may or may not be similar to the idea that was originally conceptualized by the imitating organization. In other words, whatever is spread is not immutable; it may change in an ongoing process of borrowing ideas or practices in a chain of actors. Latour states that: According to [the model of translation]..., the spread in time or space of anything claims, orders, artefacts, goods is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it. The faithful transmission of, for instance an order by a large number is a rarity in such a model and if it occurs it requires explanation (Latour 1986:267). The image of imitation as an ongoing translation of transforming organisations differs from the diffusion model: in a translation model, the initial force of the first actor in the chain is no more important than the hundredths. Furthermore, it is not possible to know where or when the process concludes; parts of an idea that is spread in time and space may turn up in quite new circumstances. Furthermore, it becomes less meaningful to distinguish between new (discovery, original, innovation) and old (copy), as the model of diffusion does. (Sevón 1996:51-52)

For the context of hybridisation the work, ‘Travels of Ideas’ by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) is probably the most informing. Czarniawska and Joerges’ point of departure is the search for sources of organisational change. In their view, processes of organisational change are continuous loops of translation. In these loops, ideas are translated into ‘objects’ or ‘quasi-objects’, which in turn are translated into ‘action’. If an ‘action’ is repeated and stabilises, chances are that it rises above a passing fashion into an enduring institution.

We watch ideas become quasi-objects, transgressing the barriers of local time and entering translocal paths, becoming “disembedded,” in Giddens (1990) terms. We watch them again, landing in various localities, becoming “re-embedded,” materialized in actions, and – when judged successful – becoming institutions, only to occasion anew the generation of ideas. (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996:23)

Once more, it is stressed that ideas can only travel and be translated to new contexts if they become ‘objectified’. The authors discuss different possibilities of ‘objectification’ (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996). “The simplest way of objectifying ideas is turning them into linguistic artefacts by a repetitive use in an unchanged form, as in the case of labels, metaphors, platitudes (Czarniawska /Joerges 1996:32).” Apart from ‘objectification’ as a

prerequisite for transfer – which is also central to Tobert and Zucker’s (1994) approach – it is the ‘translation metaphor’ that moves us beyond New Institutionalism. The ‘translation metaphor’ is so rewarding for a conceptualisation of hybridisation processes because it implies change in two directions, when two distinct elements meet and are turned into one. For example, when actors pick up an idea and integrate it into their cognitive system, the required translation causes a dual change. In the process of translation, not only the idea changes but also the cognitive system itself. Czarniawska and Joerges:

It is important to emphasize, once again, that the meaning of “translation” in this context far surpasses the linguistic interpretation: it means “displacement, drift, invention, mediation, creation of a new link that did not exist before and modifies in part the two agents” (Latour, 1993:6), that is those who translated and that which is translated. (Czarniawska /Joerges 1996:24)

Rottenburg (1996) operates with the same idea of what we could also call dialectic transformation. In his contribution ‘When Organization Travels: On Intercultural Translation’ Rottenburg demonstrates that when an idea or ‘a thing’ travels to a new context, the idea as much as the context will undergo transition. Referring to Callon’s (1986) and Callon und Latour’s (1981) ‘Sociology of Translation’ he sketches out:

Translation aims at the appropriation of an external thing, which is then given another function, an altered meaning and often a new shape in the new context. The constructivist ‘sociology of translation’ as advocated by Michael Callon and Bruno Latour (1981; Latour, 1986) offers an image which can help us to understand the appropriation and contextualization processes. While the classical anthropological diffusion model (Ratzel 1896) assumes that ideas and artifacts move through social space and across borders under their own steam, it is more accurate to imagine this process as a kind of ball game. Only if the actors catch the ball and pass it on, i.e. if they collaborate, can the game continue. In the case of the movement of ideas and artifacts through time and space, each actor therefore takes the thing into his or her own hands and gives it the shape and direction that best corresponds to his/her context and intentions. In this way we move from transmission of a thing that remains the same to the transformation of the thing. [...]. In the same way that the appropriated elements are transformed, the context also changes. It is permanently taking in new elements, so that conditions slowly alter. (Rottenburg 1996:214-215)

The citation underlines that the re-embedding or re-contextualisation of a transferred substance goes hand in hand with its transformation. More precisely, only if actors tie transferred elements into their systems of meaning and conduct, give them a meaning, function, or form – which must not be the original – can we say re-embedding has succeeded. Translated back to our conceptual goal we can understand processes of hybridisation as follows: Organisational hybridisation is constituted by translation processes, wherein certain transfer contents are transferred, translated, and thereby re-embedded into a new context. As a result – or better because of the translation – both the receiving organisational context as well as the transfer content undergoes change. Again, at its core hybridisation is a dialectic transformation. The receiving context changes the transferred content as much as the transferred content changes the receiving context. Hybrid means then that the newly emerging

organisational forms or practices are neither pure imitations nor pure novelties. Instead, they bear traces from different context without mirroring them exactly.

To be sure, the ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ can contribute substantially to a better understanding and conceptualisation of hybridisation processes and will be referred to later in the paper. Yet, similar to New Institutionalism we find only little consideration of the role of power or power relations in translation processes. Power and power structures are either passed over (Sévon 1996; Forssell/Jansson 1996) or treated as inscribed or hidden in “taken-for-granted political structures“, “ideological control (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996)“ and “social control (Sahlin-Andersson 1996)“ or in “dominant reality definitions“ (Rottenburg 1996). No doubt, good amounts of translation processes probably unfold beyond conscious individual or even collective control (Meyer 1996). Translation processes are of course anchored in unquestioned cognitive schemas that reflect hidden power structures. However, power structures also operate in the open. We can easily imagine that translation processes coincide with open conflict and diverging interests. While the power relations influencing processes of translation may be asymmetrical, insights from the Micro-political approach teach us that even the seemingly powerless are never all without power.

In other words, which ‘function’, ‘meaning’ or ‘form’ an ‘external thing’ acquires upon arrival in a new context not only flows from unquestioned schemas or unambiguous reality definitions but may also be subject to bargaining and conflict between actors with different interests and resources to put through their version of translation. What is more, as cognitive orders and reality definitions exhibit varying degrees of institutionalisation (Zucker 1991) and maybe ambiguity (depending on the societal sphere concerned and probably also the positioning of social actors) we can expect differing translations variances and differing levels of contestation in translations upon arrival of an ‘external thing’. Hence, cognitive and normative orders in the receiving context rarely suggest only one translation and even if they do, we may pose the question, which underlying power structures support this translation.

We can summarize that the Micro-institutionalist approach as well as ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ – both at their core constructivist approaches – treat power and politics only on the sidelines. At no point are they comprehensively theorised as constitutive elements of institutionalisation or de-institutionalisation. This identified neglect leads us to look at a third body of approaches that concentrate on actors, agency, and politics at the micro-level.

Micro-political Approaches

To reach a better understanding on the role of power and politics in processes of hybridisation we turn to Micro-political approaches (e.g. Burns 1961/1962; Crozier/Friedberg 1993,

Bosetzky 1995; Ortmann 1995; see also contributions on micro-politics by Neuberger 1995, Küpper/Ortmann 1992, Alt 2001). Like other organisational processes, processes of hybridisation do not take place in power vacuums. We therefore need to ask about the actors (or coalitions of actors) involved, who has an interest and drives a transfer, how are different actors affected by specific transfers contents and what resources can they draw on to influence the process of re-embedding (which may even amount to re-embedding failure). Despite all difference between Micro-political approaches, (see Alt 2001 on this) they all provide analytical tools, which sensitize us for the role of power and politics in processes of hybridisation. Central analytical categories in the offering are resources, interests, strategies, games, coalitions, negotiation, as well as actors etc. (cf. Alt 2001). Hence, equipped with such analytical tools we may find hybridisation to be a power-asymmetrical process of bargaining or even conflict, the outcome of which reflecting the balance of power or the resources of different actors to influence the process in their interest.

Now, in this context particularly those Micro-political approaches are appealing that relate organisational agency to the structural level (e.g. Crozier und Friedberg's strategic organisation analysis). For we need to ask: How do structural conditions (particularly the organisational) constitute different interests or rationalities of actors and their conduct?² And, on the other hand: How do structural conditions in an organisation define and distribute possibilities – for example through definition of relevant resources and their systematic allocation to organisational positions – to pursue those interests? While Micro-political approaches focus by definition on the agency level, it would be wrong to maintain their overall neglect of the structural conditions (cf. Alt 2001). At least we can see among prominent approaches such as Crozier/Friedberg's (1993) or Ortmann's (1995) approach, conceptualisations of the structural embeddedness of political conduct. Crozier and Friedberg (1993) for example discuss the question how structural constraints affect the actors' strategies and chances to win in organisational games. They refer to different resources (e.g. individual, cultural, economical, and social) actors can draw on flowing from their position in a 'structured field'. They also point to inequalities in resources-referability based on different positions within a field (Crozier/Friedberg 1993: 44). Crozier and Friedberg explicitly consider the connection between the structural features of an organisation – which are seen to be more than the organisation's formal structure – and the actors' strategies of conduct. The structural features of the organisation constitute the organisational actors ability to gamble by

defining ‘trumps’ and ‘stakes’ of the game. The ‘trumps’ and ‘stakes’ structure the play-strategies as well as what is to win and to loose (cf. Crozier/Friedberg 1993: 47-48). Crozier and Friedberg’s Micro-political approach shows that organisational conduct is enabled and constrained by the structural features of the organisation. At the same time, they hint that structural features are no immutable facts but rather the outcome of human conduct itself. Similar to Giddens (1992), the authors suggest that structural conditions are sediments of past games that may well become the object of contestation in future games (Crozier/Friedberg 1993: 43).

Nevertheless, the under-conceptualisation of structural embeddedness of agency remains a weakness in Micro-political approaches – even in Crozier/Friedberg’s approach. By contrast, it is held here that the ‘structure’ actors can refer to has to be conceptualised more comprehensively. The structural embeddedness of actors extends beyond their more or less deliberate or rational referability to resources. It extends to their referability to cognitive schema based on their structural position. Now, while cognitive schema and resources may not always be neatly separable and probably constitute each other, they are analytically distinct categories. It is no coincidence that a number of authors who developed and dealt with Micro-political approaches have placed Giddens – who considers rules and resources as constituent for structure – at the end-point of their discussions (e.g. Neuberger 1995; Ortmann et al. 1997).

Moreover, the attractiveness of Structuration Theory lies with the fact that it embraces the level of agency – including a consideration for power and resources – but extends beyond a mere micro-level and the political. Hence, while Giddens’ theory allows the integration of micro-politics, it is no original Micro-political approach.

In summary: Micro-political approaches have ignored that wide areas of social reality and organisational reality – as a part of that – do not rise to being the object of micro-politics because of high degrees of institutionalisation and unquestioned social consensus. While the dimension of power and politics is overstressed, the limitations of what is politicised and politicise-able remain unexplored (cf. Ortmann 1992: 21). We see little consideration that the reach of the politicised and politicise-able is limited because certain organisational forms and practices are so deeply institutionalised that they do not become the object of debate. We may even assume that what moves to the fore of micro-political debate has the paradox effect of stabilising other aspects – in their ‘taken-for-grantedness’ – that are pushed into the

² In asking such a question, we could for example explain what Deutschmann et al. (1995) have identified as “structural egoisms” in organisations.

background simultaneously (probably like an iceberg). In overall conclusion of our journey, we may state that the strength of the Micro-political approach is the weakness the Micro-institutionalist and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ and vice versa.

4. Developing a Conceptual Framework to Capture Processes of Hybridisation

In the following paragraphs, we shall try to develop a conceptual framework to capture processes of hybridisation based on core ideas of Structuration Theory and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’. Such a framework should consider actors and agency without ignoring the structural level. With the concurrence of agency and structure, Structuration Theory also helps us to overcome micro-macro oppositions. Moreover, Structuration Theory offers a comprehensive conceptualisation of structure. It neither overemphasises power and ‘resources’ (i.e. the dimension of domination) – as Micro-political approaches do – nor the operation of highly institutionalised cognitive ‘rules’ (i.e. the dimensions of ‘signification’ and ‘legitimation’) – as is the case in Micro-institutional and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’. Finally, Structuration Theory highlights the terms of ‘space’, ‘locale’ and ‘positioning’, which is instructive to understanding different actors’ referability to ‘rules’, ‘resources’ as well as their rationalities in processes of hybridisation. In the following paragraph, core terms of Structuration Theory are ‘translated’ to fit the organisational context. After that, a final conceptual framework to capture processes of hybridisation is suggested.

4.1 Translating Structuration Theory to the Organisational Context

Social Systems

According to Giddens social systems are reproduced patterns of interaction over time and space. They are “[t]he patterning of social relations across time-space, understood as reproduced practices “(Giddens 1984:377). Giddens stresses that systems are no structures as such, but have structures. It remains somewhat unclear in Giddens perspective how different kinds of systems relate to each other. However, it is fully compatible with – if not implied by – Structuration Theory that systems not only differ in their spread over time and space, but also interpenetrate (cf. Giddens 1991a). Giddens also points out that systems vary in their ‘systemness’, their internal unity and that it may be difficult to detect the boundaries of a systems. It is therefore fair to say that we are dealing with an open system approach. The location of system in time and space has great relevance with regard to the opportunity and intensity in which differently located actors can take part in system constituting interactions.

Coming back to MNC, which are systems of a substantial spread over time and space we may state that despite all developments in transport, and communication there still is a marked gravity of interaction in particular locations and less interaction across vast geographical spaces. The strong reliance on management transfer in MNC bears proof that it is difficult to uphold interaction across distance and that interaction intensity is dependent on the spatial location of potential interaction partners.

Structure

For Giddens structure exists only as ‘memory traces’ and as ‘instantiated in action’ (Giddens 1984). Structures are ‘rules’ and ‘resources’, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. ‘Rules’ and ‘resources’ are further differentiated. ‘Rules’ are "generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life (Giddens 1984:21)". They comprise ‘rules of signification’ and ‘rules of legitimation’. Just as ‘rules’, ‘resources’ are divided into two subcategories comprising ‘authoritative’ and ‘allocative resources’.

'Structure' can be conceptualized abstractly as two aspects of rules -- normative elements and codes of signification. Resources are also of two kinds: authoritative resources, which derive from the co-ordination of the activity of human agents, and allocative resources, which stem from control of material products or of aspects of the material world. (Giddens 1984: xxxi)

While ‘codes of signification’ constitute the cognitive order of a social system, ‘codes of legitimation’ or ‘sanctioning’ constitute the normative order. As opposed to ‘rules’, ‘resources’ are different sources of power. ‘Allocative resources’ imply power over material objects ‘authoritative resources’, by contrast, allow power over humans. However, while it may be already analytically difficult to tell apart different structural components of Giddens theory, the problem is aggravated when applied to empirical data. For example, codes of signification tend to be closely intertwined with normative elements. Similarly, ‘allocative’ and ‘authoritative resources’ may be difficult to distinguish. How are we to label the resources money or knowledge, for example? Do these resources constitute power over material objects, people, or both? Ultimately, the problem lies with the fact that power over material objects and power over people constitute each other.

Structure and Agency

The idea of the ‘duality of structure’ is at the heart of how Giddens captures the relationship between structure and agency. His goal is to overcome the dualism between structure and agency by arguing that both aspects are two sides of the same thing. Structures are manifested in a virtual form as ‘memory traces’, based on past agency. At the same time, these virtual structures operate as media for future conduct. It is then only in actual conduct, that structure

is manifested beyond virtual existence. Structure is thus, both ‘media and outcome’ of practices constituting social systems (Giddens 1984).

For structuration theory, the moment of the production of action is also that of its reproduction. Structure is not external to the individual but rather almost internal, as memory traces. Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity, and the duality of structure is always the main grounding of continuities in social reproduction across time and space. (Giddens <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/FAQs.htm#Struct01> (2004-06-01))

To make the analysis of the ‘duality of structure’ handy, Giddens suggests the methodological trick of bracketing. This essentially implies that the ‘duality of structure’ can be analysed from two sides based on bracketing one of the two at a time. More concretely, there can be either an ‘analysis of strategic conduct’ (agency analysis) while bracketing an ‘institutional analysis’ (structure analysis) or vice versa. The core idea is here again that structure and agency are no irreconcilable opposites, but two moments of the same thing. Put differently, while ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ are the focal terms in ‘structural analysis’, they coincide with the actors ‘knowledgeability’ and ‘capability’ on the level of ‘strategic conduct analysis’ (cf. Neuberger 1995:291). Hence, analysing the ‘duality of structure’ from strategic-conduct-perspective, involves asking about the actors’ ‘knowledgeability’ and ‘capability’. Now, ‘knowledgeability’ is based on two aspects the ‘discursive’ and the ‘practical consciousness’. The ‘discursive consciousness’ refers to “[w]hat actors are able to say, to give verbal expression to, about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action” (Giddens 1984:373). It is basically the human ability to consciously reflect. The ‘practical consciousness’ on the other hand is “[w]hat actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively” (Giddens 1984:373). With the concept of ‘practical consciousness’ Giddens has created a term that allows for intentional conduct without assuming that such conduct must always be driven by conscious reflection (Neuberger 1995:298).

The reflexive capacities of the human actor are characteristically involved in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct in the contexts of social activity. But reflexivity operates only partly on a discursive level. What agents know about what they do, and why they do it -- their knowledgeability as agents -- is largely carried in practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being. (Giddens 1984:xxiii)

In line with this, Giddens proposes that the majority of conduct takes the form of habitual action or routine and is based on knowledge at a pre-conscious level. As part of Giddens symmetrical concept, the actors’ conduct is not only founded on ‘knowledgeability’ but also on ‘capability’. The term ‘capability’ is closely intertwined with Giddens concept of power. An actors’s ‘capability’ is based on his or her ability ‘to make a difference’, “the possibility that the ‘agent could have acted otherwise” (Giddens 1981:163). Surely, the actors’

‘capability’ to act or ‘make a difference’ cannot be understood without reference to the structural level, i.e. the repertoire of resources actors can draw on. Finally, Giddens repeatedly discusses the role of ‘the unconscious’ as a third level of human consciousness. Human conduct cannot be fully comprehended by referring to the ‘practical consciousness’ and the ‘discursive consciousness’ alone. In drawing on Psychoanalysis, Giddens refers to ‘the unconscious’, as deeply rooted motives of human conduct. According to him, the most elementary motives are geared toward anxiety avoidance and needs satisfaction (cf. Ortmann et al. 1997:318). In this last motivational respect, we may infer that actors seek above all anxiety avoidance and needs satisfaction with regard to the three dimensions of ‘Signifikation’, ‘Domination’ und ‘Legitimation’. That is through securing their identity, through securing their self esteem/social approval, and through securing their reproduction and chances of living.

Organisations as Special Social Systems

An important step in translating Giddens’ theory to organisation research begins with the definition of organisations as special forms of social systems. Ortmann (1997) has made a comprehensive effort to translate Giddens Structuration Theory to the context of organisation studies. For Ortmann organisations are ‘systems of organised conduct’. That is, structuration unfolding in organisations happens to a substantial degree in a reflected manner. With Ortmann:

Organisation is structuration that has lost its naiveté, its naturalness, its innocence - reflexive structuration. This reflexive structuration finds its pinnacle in the formality of modern organisation, in formalized constitutions and procedures, which are of great importance for the coordination of conduct. (Ortmann et al 1997:315, my translation)

Organisational structures exist only in the conduct of actors and furthermore as a virtual order in their memories and expectations. Organisations are for us those social systems within which conduct is coordinated and controlled through reflection, that is, through reflection upon its structuration. The formulation and establishment of rules and the allocation of resources are based on reflection, that is: in the case of organisations, structuration is the – although only partially intended – results of a reflection aimed at expediency. (Ortmann et al 1997: 317, my translation)

In other words, organisational structures are largely – although never all embracing – the object of reflection and deliberate shaping. This is not to deny that a good amount of organisational structuration retains its ‘innocence’. Ortmann argues further that organisations, as ‘systems of organised conduct’, have like other social systems cognitive and normative orders. Accordingly, we can identify organisation specific ‘rules’ of interpretation and evaluation, symbols and myths (cf. Ortmann et al. 1997: 321). Similarly, actors can draw on organisation specific ‘resources’. As examples of ‘allocative resources’ Ortmann mentions: production factors, manufactured goods, and capital. ‘Authoritative resources’ are by contrast:

work procedures, work hours, and compensation. We could add to Ortmann's list of resources: age, sex, qualification, skill, or authority to issue directives.

Now, it is important to note that resources have no universal validity. Their relevance as resources is always peculiar to specific social systems. This is not to say that actors in organisations can draw on one set of relevant rules and resources only. To claim this would deny the interpenetration of different systems. Hence, actors have the possibility to refer to different structures as they are embedded in different systems at once. Whittington (1992) has also hinted at actors' degrees of freedom in referring to different sets of rules and resources. He argues in the example of 'Managerial Agency' that such degrees of freedom spring from two sources. The first source lies with the fact that social systems' 'rules' and 'resources' are ambiguous. The second source results from the fact that actors have the possibility to refer to different set of 'rules' and 'resources' based on their multi-system embeddedness. Referring to "Giddens' concern for intersection and tension between different social systems" Whittington states:

It is by active exploitation of the tensions between divergent structural principles that managers gain their agency. These tensions inform to principle forms of managerial agency. The first stems from the internal ambiguity and plurality of the rules governing the reproduction of particular sets of social structures. In complex systems, actors must exercise discretion in interpreting their immediate roles. The second form of agency stems from the external contradictions between a system's intrinsic structural properties and the alien rules and resources either imported by actors through their multiple organisational memberships or introduced by necessary relationships with other cross-cutting systems of activity. (Whittington 1992: 704)

It can be imagined that the referability and relevance of different sets of 'rules' and 'resources' is particularly manifold and contested in organisational systems – such as MNC – that interpenetrate with different societal systems.

Locales, Positioning, System and Actor

Giddens defines a 'locale' as "the physical settings of social activity as situated geographically" (Giddens 1990: 18). 'Locales' have clear boundaries that function to concentrate interaction (Giddens 1992: 431). Now, the positioning of organisations (or their various units) in geographical space is of particular relevance to understanding patterns of interaction. For the interaction, which is, constituting organisational system is concentrated in specific 'locales'. Interaction across wide geographic distances (or different locales), in turn, requires special mechanisms of bridging space. However, Giddens' term of 'positioning' surpasses its geographical connotation.

Fundamental to social life is the positioning of the body in social encounters. 'Positioning' here is a rich term. The body is positioned in the immediate circumstances of co-presence in relation to others: Goffman provides an extraordinarily subtle but telling set of observations about face work, about gesture and reflexive control of bodily movement as inherent in the continuity of social life. Positioning is, however, also to be understood in relation to the seriality of encounters across time-space. Every individual is at once positioned in the flow of day-to-day life; in the life-span which is

the duration of his or her existence; and in the duration of 'institutional time', the 'supra-individual' structuration of social institutions. Finally, each person is positioned, in a 'multiple' way, within social relations conferred by specific social identities; this is the main sphere of application of the concept of social role. The modalities of co-presence, mediated directly by the sensory properties of the body, are clearly different from social ties and forms of social interaction established with others absent in time or in space. (Giddens 1984: xxiv-xxv)

Based on Giddens (1984) or even Crozier und Friedberg (1993), we may not only ask about the geographical positioning of actors but also about their positioning in time and social space. Hence, we need to ask, in which different social systems actors are embedded or originate from (societal system, family, organisations etc.), and which positioning they have therein, in a geographical, chronological, and in a social sense. Clearly, actors are at the same time embedded in a variety of systems and occupy in these different positions (cf. Whittington 1992).

The systemic positioning of an actor corresponds with an actor's referability to specific sets of 'rules' and 'resources'. The structural positioning enables and restricts actors' perceptible and performable actions. However, apart from the general positioning of an actor in the societal system at large (Crozier und Friedberg refer here to positions in structured fields) we may want to inquire in the case of organisational systems what different positions derive from geographic, functional and hierarchical differentiation. The detection of organisational positions and the positioning of various actors therein is particularly relevant to understand which actors refer (or can refer) to what sets of 'rules' and 'resources' and why. After all the allocation of and the referability to 'rules' and 'resources' is in organisations at least the partial result of deliberate or reflexive structuring.

Now, a problematic concomitant of Giddens' focus on structure and agency is that actors slip a bit to the sidelines (cf. Neuberger 1995). In contrast, it is proposed here that the concentration on actors and their systemic positioning is key to understanding organisational processes of hybridisation. It is argued that we gain a sharper picture of hybridisation if we re-centre actors and try to understand their logic of conduct and rationalities by analysing their organisational positioning. For it is held that the actors' logic of conduct and rationalities in organisations springs largely from position-related referability to 'rules' and 'resources'. This is also a reason why we find contradicting logics of conduct and rationalities in different organisational spaces (i.e. again based on geography, function, and hierarchy).

Systems Crossing and De-Routinisation

The concept or term of 'routine' has a key role in Giddens' theory. 'Routines' are for Giddens the building blocks of day-to-day social conduct. He defines them as:

The habitual, taken-for-granted character of the vast bulk of the activities of day-to-day social life; the prevalence of familiar styles and forms of conduct, both supporting and supported by a sense of ontological security. (Giddens 1984:377)

For the context of hybridisation research, it is rewarding to pay attention to two related terms: ‘critical situations’ and ‘de-routinisation’. ‘Critical situations’ are for Giddens situations in which the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of institutionalised routines are threatened or collapse (cf. Giddens 1992:112). Although Giddens discusses very dramatic cases of ‘critical situations’ such as collapse of routine of inmates in concentration camps, we could also imagine less extreme degrees of ‘critical situations’. For example, when actors – such as expatriates – traverse large geographical distances and enter into unknown social systems they may also experience ‘critical situations’. Actors realise in a system that is new to them that their ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ are inappropriate or irrelevant. It shows them that their ‘knowlegability’ and ‘capability’ is not universal but system specific. Upon crossing systems, routines that are soaked in ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (furnished with high degrees of institutionalisation) are challenged. Actors who meet from different systemic backgrounds in organisations experience ‘critical situations’ and ‘de-routinisation’. The individually experienced ‘de-routinisation’ emerges as incongruence between behavioural expectations and actual conduct. It may results in experiences where even most basic taken-for-granted practices are called into question.

4.2 Processes of Hybridization as Re-structuring Translation

Based on the foregoing discussion an analytical framework is finally presented that equips us with the analytical tools to sketch processes of hybridisation. The core analytical categories used are derived from ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ and Structuration Theory. Following basic Constructivist thought (or Micro-institutionalist thought as presented above) processes of hybridisation to are seen to rest on three steps:

1. A specific transfer content becomes detached or dis-embedded from the specific structural context of chronologically and spatially situated system.
2. The transfer content traverses a spatial and chronological distance.
3. The transfer content arrives and is re-embedded into a new structural context of a chronologically and spatially more or less distantly situated system.

Now, particularly the first and the last step are viewed as ‘translations’, without which, neither dis-embedding nor re-embedding can take place. However, while a full cycle of hybridisation relies on all three process-steps the analytical focus will be here on the last. For it is the step of re-embedding that ultimately constitutes the multi-contextual constitution of organisations.

Transfer Content, Translation Requirement and Transfer Vehicles

To understand the steps of dis-embedding, transfer, and re-embedding as sequences of translations, we should first specify transfer contents. For it is held that depending on the kind of transfer content different translation sequences and transfer vehicles are needed. In contrast to Micro-institutionalism and ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’, it is maintained that the step of dis-embedding does not always require ‘objectification’ or the translation of ‘ideas’ into ‘objects or quasi-objects’. In other words, certain transfer contents may be dis-embedded and transferred, without being inter-subjectively shared between, or discursively accessible for actors. We may think here, of ‘tacit knowledge’ (Nonaka/Takeuchi 1995). Hence, non-objectified content can be transferred through actors who hold it. In this case, translation sets in later, i.e. the moment when the transferred actor himself hits the new ground and applies his knowledge to a new structural context. Based on the idea that the transfer content influences the translation sequence or transfer requirement we shall try to distinguish different transfer contents by referring to Giddens (1984) and Ortmann (1997).

Concepts of Organisation (or Structuration Concepts)

Concepts of organisation or structuration concepts (terms are used interchangeably) are discursively accessible or objectified transfer contents. If we define organisations – in line with Ortmann (1997) – as ‘reflective structuration’, then we can understand concepts of organisation, as the codified expression of a more or less encompassing reflective structuration effort. In this sense, structuration concepts are no ‘rules’ (or ‘resources’) as such but are what Giddens (1984) terms ‘codified interpretations of rules’. Apart from ‘codified interpretations of rules’ structuration concepts may also comprise codified definitions of resources as well as conditions of their referability. Put differently, concepts of organisation are codified interpretations of ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ and as such manifestations of reflective structuration efforts. Alternatively, in the language of Czarniawska and Joerges, (1996) concepts of organisation are ‘quasi-objects’ or objectified ‘rules’ and ‘resources’. As ‘quasi-objects’, concepts of organisation can be transferred independently of specific actors. Now, if efforts are made to apply concepts of organisation to new structural contexts they will have to be translated again cognitively by concrete actors and translated into situation specific conduct.

Tacit Knowledge (or ‘Knowledgeability’)

Tacit knowledge refers to the actors’ ‘knowledgeability’ and ‘capability’ to act, which is located at the level of the practical consciousness (Giddens 1984). In the organisational

context it comprises of the tacit rules(-knowledge) and the non-reflected repertoire of resources actors refer to in organisational practice. As opposed to concepts of organisation, it is crucial that tacit knowledge is actor-bound. As it is embedded with actors, it can only be transferred with actors themselves. Further, to make tacit knowledge discursively accessible it needs to be translated. It thereby takes the form of a concept, i.e. ‘codified interpretations of rules’ and ‘resources’ (Giddens 1984). The translation of tacit knowledge or its ‘objectification’ is a precondition for actor-independent transfer.

Material Artefacts (or Allocative Resources)

Apart from organisational concepts and knowledgeable actors, material artefacts (or allocative resources) are a third basic form of transfer content. While material artefacts – such as production equipment – are frequently transferred in combination with tacit knowledge (i.e. knowledgeable actors) and organisation concepts, they can be theoretically transferred without the other two basic forms of transfer content.

The distinction between different transfer contents also triggers the question about their respective vehicles of transfer. Apart from actors as carriers of transfer content, we may also think of an array of non-human transfer-vehicles (books, documents, electronic files, trucks, ships, and aircraft etc.). However, non-human transfer-vehicles can only carry ‘objectified’ transfer content, i.e. either concepts of organisation or material artefacts.

Transfer and Re-embedding

To understand the results of hybridisation we may start the analysis of hybridisation processes by asking what is being transferred and who induces a transfer. A transfer can be induced and motivated from many sides. Actors in the headquarters of an MNC may have imposed a transfer. Similarly, local actors in the subsidiary, may have actively sought a transfer (from other parts of the company, from suppliers, management bestsellers or management consultancy etc.). In an empirical analysis of hybridisation processes, we may start our inquiry by reconstructing or asking:

- Which actors, of which systemic positioning wish to transfer out of what interest or rationale a transfer content?
- If and how does the systemic positioning of actors structure transfer interests, transfer contents and abilities to transfer?

To be sure, these questions are not to state that transfers must always take place as an intended and consciously reflected act. Transfers can certainly vary between the poles of an intended and consciously reflected transfer of discursively accessible transfer contents (e.g.

concepts, policies etc.) and a much less consciously reflected transfer of tacit transfer content (e.g. transfer of practices) through day-to-day interaction between actors. Now, let us turn to the embedding of a transferred content.

The embedding of transfer contents is not merely cognitive process within isolated individuals but above all a collective process. Interacting actors, who refer to different rules and resources, come to more or less shared assessments of what the meaning, function, or application of the transferred content should be. From the perspective of Structuration Theory we have to ask how a given transfer content conflicts or harmonises with the structure of domination, signification, and legitimation of the receiving context. For it is important to note, that transfer contents always mirror – at least to some degree – structural features of their systemic origin. These structural features are important because the receiving systems (i.e. actors as well as systems of conduct) are already structured (admittedly, to different degrees, which explains why some companies prefer site set-ups in no-man’s-land). Hence, the crucial questions for embedding processes of hybridisation are:

1. What do the structural implications of a transfer content mean for the existing local structuring? Do the structural implications of a transfer content stand in contrast with the ‘structuration’ of the receiving system? Does the transfer content confirm or question ‘rules’ (of signification and sanctioning) or the existing distribution and validity of ‘resources’ (allocative and authoritative)? Alternatively, all the way down to specific actors: What does the transfer content mean for a specific actor’s identity, social esteem, and chance of reproduction? Does the transfer affect different systemic positions (e.g. organisational function, hierarchical position, geographic location) differently and how does this translate into different motivational situations and interests?
2. Which ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ can actors draw on – based on their systemic positioning – to translate transfer contents into their cognitive systems and what coalitions do they form to influence translations in the social context in their interest? How does the position related referability to ‘rules’ and ‘resources’, enable and constrain translations at the individual as well as at the collective level?

The re-embedding of transfer contents means both, the cognitive translation as well as translation into actual conduct of a concrete chronologically and spatially located social system. A process perspective ideally implies analysing patterns of interaction over a period of time. Based on different points in time different kinds of actors have different

involvements and windows of opportunity to make their influence felt. The structures - the 'rules' and 'resources' – they can refer also change with the passing of time.

Moreover, the analytical framework presented here allows us to conceive of re-embedding not only and not always as a consciously driven process accompanied by micro-politics. Instead, the framework suggested here, allows us to imagine situations where actors share judgements and seek to 'imitate' a concept from another context (no imposition) and still do not 'succeed' in truly imitating it (although they may think they do). And, even if we find something seemingly imitated, we may have to look closer and ask if it has the same meaning for the actors at the receiving end. In this context, Van Maanen and Laurent (1993) present the very illustrative case of Disney Land being transferred to Japan. In this example, the park's cleanliness – as a vital part of the concept – had a completely different meaning to its American visitors as compared to the Japanese visitors.

Even under the condition of 'low politics' (or high institutionalisation) amongst members in a receiving context, are translations needed to re-embed a transfer content. Re-embedding, in turn, is only possible by translating an 'external thing' to and within the abilities and constraints of existing cognitive schema and patterns of interaction of specifically located system. This process of translation leaves neither the transfer content nor the receiving system unchanged. Hence, with 'Scandinavian Institutionalism' and Structuration Theory processes of hybridisation are at their core re-structuring translations.

Conclusion

Giddens himself suggested that Structuration Theory - rather than being an empirically testable theory – should inform empirical research by providing sensitising analytical categories for social research (Giddens 1991b: 213). In a similar way, the presented framework above equips us with a tool kit that sharpens our view and makes us see if, how, and why organisations come to mirror different contextual origins. It provides us with a host of questions that may help to uncover how processes of hybridisation unfold. It involves asking to our empirical data:

- What are the transfer contents, what are their systemic origins, and what transfer vehicles are being used?
- Where is the transfer process induced and who are the driving actors?
- Which actors of which systemic positioning take part in the processes of transfer and embedding?
- What structural aspects are affected in the receiving system?

- What kind of affectedness and motivational situations can we observe for individuals or groups of actors resulting from the transfer?
- Which ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ can actors refer to – based on their systemic positioning – to evaluate, interpret and influence individual and collective processes of translating an imported thing into their systems?
- Finally, how do both, transfer contents and structures of the receiving system, change in the process of translation?

The outcome of these translations – this is the core argument here – will rarely result in neat imitations. Instead, it is suggested that if transfer contents are successfully re-embedded into a new context we will observe hybrid solutions. We will see ‘dialectic transformations’, where neither the transfer content nor the local context will be the same. Through processes of transfers and re-embedding, systems become ultimately multi-contextually constituted. While we may observe this phenomenon in any kind of organisation, it is assumed that MNC are particularly prone to a multi-contextual constitution.

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