



critical perspectives on international business

Practice transfer in MNCs: a process of tension and contestation

Toke Bjerregaard Mai S. Linneberg Jakob Lauring

Article information:

To cite this document:

Toke Bjerregaard Mai S. Linneberg Jakob Lauring , (2016), "Practice transfer in MNCs: a process of tension and contestation", critical perspectives on international business, Vol. 12 Iss 2 pp. 102 - 120

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-07-2013-0028>

Downloaded on: 14 November 2016, At: 22:55 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 63 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 99 times since 2016*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2016), "Lost overseas?: The challenges facing Korean transformational leadership in a cross-cultural context", Critical perspectives on international business, Vol. 12 Iss 2 pp. 121-139 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-09-2013-0036>

(2016), "Shareholder activism and the ethical harnessing of institutional investors: The unique case of ShareAction", Critical perspectives on international business, Vol. 12 Iss 2 pp. 189-214 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-09-2013-0032>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:563821 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Practice transfer in MNCs: a process of tension and contestation

Toke Bjerregaard, Mai S. Linneberg and Jakob Lauring
Department of Management, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

102

Received 30 July 2013
Revised 30 June 2014
16 October 2014
21 October 2014
Accepted 21 October 2014

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to further the understanding of how the transfer and adoption of headquarters (HQ)-mandated work practices are shaped by ongoing struggles among the multiple actors of a subsidiary. This paper suggests an alternative perspective for theorizing and researching the management practices and structures that emerge in the face of HQ demands for divergent practice change in subsidiaries, namely, a theory of practice approach.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports the findings of an ethnographic field study in a UK subsidiary of a multinational corporation based in Denmark.

Findings – The study provides a relevant contribution by demonstrating how the degree of adoption of alternative, HQ-mandated work systems undergoes dramatic changes over time due to socially dynamic negotiations and struggles between interest groups in a subsidiary.

Research limitations/implications – A practice theoretical approach unveils the underlying social micro-dynamics that shape the degree to which employees in subsidiaries “internalize”, actively sustain or disrupt divergent practices representing a given contextual rationale.

Originality/value – The practice perspective provides a way for understanding how the practices and rationales that emerge locally in response to HQ-demands are under ongoing (re)reconstruction. It responds to calls for research on why and how contextual rationales, institutional or cultural features, actively are made salient, polarized or convergent, in conflictual practice transfer processes due to local contingencies.

Keywords Practice theory, Tension, Adaptation of practice, MNC, Social process, Subsidiary

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The practice transfer literature in the field of international business (IB) informs us that despite headquarters (HQ)' efforts to standardize and transfer practices across multinational subsidiaries, recipient units do often not respond accordingly. Extant research on work system and practice transfer from multinational corporation (MNC) HQs to subsidiaries across institutional contexts initially demonstrated how transfer processes are influenced by both the institutional distance and the internal relationship between subsidiaries and HQ (Kostova and Roth, 2002; Saka, 2004). However, a growing body of academic work recognizes that the process of adopting alternative work systems is not merely shaped by pre-existing institutional legacies and contextual rationales (Morgan, 2001; Sharpe, 2006) associated with them, but also by local social workplace dynamics (Saka, 2004). A burgeoning stream of IB literature concerns itself with the local factors shaping the process of practice transfer, for instance, how recipients come to either accept or reject the underlying values and rationales of a transferred system (Quintanilla *et al.*, 2008) and translate foreign work systems



(Saka, 2004; Becker-Ritterspach *et al.*, 2010). Contributions show how the cognitive processes of interpreting systems are highlighted in the blending of old and new ways of working (Saka, 2004).

To date, however, the majority of transfer studies and conflict research in the context of MNCs have focused on the outcomes of transfers more than the dynamics of conflictual practice transfer processes, e.g. the escalation of conflicts, as observed by researchers such as Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach (2012, Blazejewski, 2006). The consequence is that potential subsequent shifts in the depth of adoption, which are difficult to explain by static relationships between variables related to, e.g., managerial perceptions or work-system characteristics, are seldom accounted for (Blazejewski, 2006) and research into processual dynamics are warranted (Gamble, 2010; Clark and Geppert, 2011). Replication, adaptation, hybridization, ceremonial adoption and rejection are examples of some potential results of HQ-initiated practice transfer uncovered by previous research (Kühlmann, 2012; Molina, 2012; Collings and Dick, 2011). Yet, social interaction patterns in subsidiaries may change as they continuously get reassessed, affecting the depth of adoption of alternative organizational practices and systems, their maintenance and change, within the different areas and divisions of an organization.

In addition, the bulk of extant research on practice transfer within institutional theory and business systems perspectives, which accords attention to institutional-structural determinants of conflicts and transfers, remains silent on the more proximate motives or interests that inform *why* and *how* actors advance a specific interpretation of or actively comply with or resist specific institutionalized rules, norms and traditions during practice transfers (Karnøe and Nygaard, 1999; Blazejewski, 2009). More research is needed on why the given contextual-institutional or cultural elements become salient, likely to a shifting degree, in the process of practice transfer, given that the contextual embedding of actors does not, by itself, exert a homogenous force in compelling action (Karnøe and Nygaard, 1999; Blazejewski, 2009; Saka-Helmhout and Geppert, 2011). The purpose of this paper is thus to advance academic IB knowledge of transfer processes in MNCs by examining how tensions between opposing contextual rationalities develop over time in a subsidiary while attempts are made to transfer and institutionalize an HQ-demanded managerial practice. Accordingly, we ask:

RQ1. How are multiple actors in a subsidiary involved in constantly coping and working with imposed contextual-institutional complexity in HQ-initiated attempts at practice transfer?

RQ2. How does this influence practice emergence in response to HQ demands?

The research to answer these questions consisted of an ethnographic study examining how the ongoing interaction and struggles among multiple actors over practice transfer in the particular MNC shaped practices that emerged in response to HQ demands for divergent practice change in a subsidiary.

The practice transfer literature often treats subsidiaries as unitary actors, thereby downplaying the role of multiple groups involved in conflictual practice transfer processes (Blazejewski, 2009). Yet, as observed by IB scholars, despite the still prevalent practice in IB research, subsidiaries or branches are not necessarily the most relevant level of analysis for conflictual practices' transfer processes in MNCs (Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012; Blazejewski, 2009; Saka-Helmhout and Geppert, 2011).

Critical IB scholars have lately called for more attention to the negotiations and conflicts among multiple groups of actors and their often divergent motives and interests in MNCs (Blazjewski, 2009). Responding to those calls, we suggest an alternative way of researching the enactment of HQ-initiated changes of practices in subsidiaries, namely, a theory of practice approach (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001; Bourdieu, 1977). Recent practice transfer research has acknowledged the agency of various actors within subsidiaries in resisting, sustaining and translating practices. In advancing a theory of practice approach, this study extends this insight by theorizing how subsidiary actors are involved in an ongoing, and in the present study, a politically motivated, process of actively operationalizing, sustaining and revising contextually embedded structures, rationales and practices. The reported study shows how the strategies deployed by employees and managers in negotiations over transferred work systems are characterized by ongoing adjustments through partisan mutual adjustment (Van de Ven, 1992; Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009).

This study shows how institutional traditions and rationales become salient and polarize in conflictual practice transfer processes as multiple actor groups make them the means to handle a local situation characterized by job insecurity and instability due to strong competition in the local market. The process in the investigated subsidiary may not have escalated into a situation of complete polarization under different local contingencies. This has important implications for theorizing and researching HQ-mandated practice changes in multinational subsidiaries. Hence, the article feeds into the discussion of the contextual and intra-unit constitution of the MNC.

The paper unfolds below in six further sections. First, a literature review focusing on the tensions and evolvement of the adaptation process in connection with practice transfers. Second, a section outlining the methodology. Third, a brief account of the institutional legacies of the relevant business systems. Before the article's conclusion and discussion, the findings are outlined.

2. Understanding struggles over practice transfer in MNCs

In traditional practice transfer studies in MNCs, relatively sparse attention has been accorded to the often tensional process and the actors in subsidiaries that are parties to the conflict (Blazjewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012). This study mobilizes a theory of practice perspective for theorizing and researching the management practices and structures that emerge in face of HQ demands for divergent practice change in subsidiaries. Such a perspective allows for an account of how the enactment, accommodation and maintenance of alternative, HQ-mandated work systems and practices are influenced by ongoing interaction and struggle among the multiple actors of a subsidiary.

2.1 Practice transfer research in the IB literature

One of the central debates on MNCs revolves around the struggling forces demanding a degree of local responsiveness and at the same time global integration (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Edström and Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 1999; Martinez and Jarillo, 1989), for example, as reflected in the localization and standardization of practices. Although this has led to substantial advancements in IB knowledge, the often conflict-ridden processes of practice transfer have received less theorization in this literature (Blazjewski, 2006). By contrast, practice transfer studies have laid out a path of

research into institutional and organizational variables shaping the outcomes of practice transfers (Geppert and Matten, 2006; Kostova and Roth, 2002; Clark and Lengnick-Hall, 2012; Blazejewski, 2006). Factors affecting adopters' acceptance and translation of alternative work systems uncovered by the literature on MNCs comprise the role of institutional carriers, institutional distance and compatibility between old and new systems (Saka, 2004). Researchers have demonstrated how global HQ demands are refracted differentially through the contextual rationalities (Morgan, 2001) associated with different national business systems. Contextual rationality refers to the social embeddedness of rationality of workers and managers in the surrounding business or institutional systems (Sharpe, 2006). According to Whitley (1992), national business systems shape managerial styles and the relationship between management and employees, e.g. whether the taken-for-granted organizational scripts are based on collectivism or individualism and hierarchy or egalitarianism (Lane, 1994). National business systems are characterized by and embedded in different socio-institutional contexts, in particular in terms of national-structural traditions, which offer a basis for comparing the constitution of economic organization across countries (Karnøe and Nygaard, 1999; Whitley, 2007). While IB scholars have demonstrated a country-of-origin effect on subsidiaries and the globalization strategies of MNCs, being shaped by and supporting home country rationalities (Ferner *et al.*, 2000), managerial practices of MNCs are not the result of a simple imposition of a global MNC organizational rationality. Rather, they are influenced through an interactive process of negotiation involving differing contextual rationalities (Geppert *et al.*, 2003).

2.2 Practice transfer as a conflictual process among multiple actors

IB research provides an extensive account of how institutional and cultural distances shape international transfers between HQ and subsidiaries. Comparatively less attention has been accorded to the ground-level conflictual processes that characterize transfers (Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012). It has been argued that the business systems and institutional theory perspectives on constitution structures, policies and practices of MNCs have not offered the agency exerted by actors within MNCs sufficient attention (Karnøe and Nygaard, 1999; Blazejewski, 2009). It has subsequently been shown how local interpretive social processes within individual branches or subsidiaries may potentially generate variegated adoption patterns across subsidiary units despite being exposed to the same national-cultural or institutional context and distance (Saka, 2004; Sharpe, 2006).

IB scholarship has lately dedicated attention to intra-unit factors shaping the often tensional negotiations over transfers at the micro-level (Fenton-O'Creedy *et al.*, 2011; Clark and Geppert, 2006; Blazejewski, 2009). Research has thus provided an addition to the understanding of micro-level factors shaping how managers and employees in subsidiaries assess and potentially internalize the meanings of transferred management systems and practices and their contextual, often-contested contextual rationalities (Saka, 2004; Quintanilla *et al.*, 2008; Sharpe, 2006). Studies theorize organizational members, such as expatriates, as carriers of institutional practices and norms (Harzing, 2001; Saka, 2004; Scott, 2010). Expatriate managers have thus been argued to facilitate the transfer and implementation of alternative institutional practices (Saka, 2004). Nascent research streams are, in this vein, characterized by a movement towards increasingly acknowledging the agency of multiple actors in subsidiaries in actively

resisting, adjusting and promoting transfers of policies, practices and knowledge (Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012; Blazejewski, 2006). The literature thereby unveils the importance of intra-subsidiary processes for overall MNC coordination and control efforts (Blazejewski, 2006).

Taking this point one step further, the present study mobilizes a practice theoretic approach to contextual-institutional and cultural pluralism which considers structures, practices and rationalities of MNCs in a process of ongoing reconstruction (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Jarzabkowski and Fenton, 2006; Bjerregaard and Jonasson, 2014a). In this perspective, institutional structures and practices are continuously being operationalized, sustained and modified, and actors are being mobilized in an ongoing flow that constitutes praxis (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009).

The imposition of HQ demands to implement divergent practices and their contextual-institutional rationales in subsidiaries constitutes a pluralistic context (Jarzabkowski and Fenton, 2006). A practice approach to how actors cope and work with such pluralistic contexts elucidates how “actors interact and accommodate each other’s interests in creating negotiated local orders through partisan mutual adjustments” (Lindblom, 1965; Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009; Van de Ven, 1992). In this manner, we apply a practice perspective to analyze the ongoing politically motivated moves and counter-moves through which organizational actors build locally negotiated orders of legitimate organizational conduct from the divergent contextual-institutional rationales and logics that characterize such situations (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009; Bjerregaard and Jonasson, 2014b). In situations characterized by rivalry of contextual-institutional rationalities and logics, a socially dynamic process, in which some actors attempt to institutionalize and sustain one particular logic, may lead to responses from actors seeking to disrupt that logic and actively maintain a different logic. Tensions between contextual practices, rationales and actors may thus emerge, deepen or disappear over time depending on the dynamics of local social processes. Ongoing social processes in a subsidiary or between units can lead to an escalation of conflicts which may generate structural changes (Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012). Social dynamics that drive such negotiations may include struggles over status, positions and economic capital (Becker-Ritterspach *et al.*, 2010) and involve gossip and envy, and are thus likely moderated by local contingencies.

In summary, responses to imposed systems can have consequences in the interactions among actor groups within the organization as well as over time, which, in turn, may modify a subsidiary’s response and the depth of adoption. Such processes shape whether an HQ-mandated practice representing one particular contextual rationale in an MNC is “internalized” by employees in subsidiaries or actively resisted, i.e. whether the adopters accept the underlying rationales, systems and logics (Quintanilla *et al.*, 2008). Thus, what we would expect to find in the data is that a given practice being transferred, internalized or actively resisted is not merely dependent on an objective “fit” between institutional context and a given organizational practice and not just the relationship between the headquarters and a subsidiary (Kostova and Roth, 2002; Saka, 2004).

3. Research design and the ethnographic study

To study the tensional processes of adoption, one of the authors engaged in a three-month ethnographic field study at a UK-based subsidiary recently acquired by a

Danish MNC in the dairy sector. It has been argued that qualitative research in international business and management has been too heavily influenced by demands on objectivity (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004), whereas in-depth studies can provide new insights into, for instance, micro-reactions in companies (Piekkari *et al.*, 2008). Ethnography is particularly suited for examining micro-social processes within organizations and for highlighting negotiations over meaning and use of practices; such a study can further our understanding of practice transfer and local motives guiding everyday practices in the subsidiary (Geppert *et al.*, 2003), where the MNC represents an arena for obvious contests between groupings relating to or invoking different institutional rationales.

The ethnographic approach enabled us to explore the social processes surrounding the actual adoption and enactment on different levels in the subsidiary (Sharpe, 2006), thereby facilitating the understanding of the level of adaptation and implementation. Moreover, it enabled a mapping of how informants talked about and responded to demanded changes in their daily work. The ethnographic approach is particularly useful to shed light on possible contestations and negotiations of meanings and practices between different groups during institutionalization of an alternative practice. Given the practice theoretic view, this study takes a social constructionist approach which considers cultural and contextual-institutional practices, rationales and identities as (re)constructed in the ongoing social interaction between organizational participants (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009; Brannen and Salk, 2000; Brannen, 2008).

The fieldwork took place before the economic and financial crisis hit Europe and two years after the takeover of the company by the Danish parent company. During the period from the takeover to the fieldwork was initiated, a number of changes and restructurings initiatives took place. Among them were the firing of more than 10 per cent of the company's British employees and a reduction in the number of management levels and management positions. These events were still unfolding when the fieldwork was conducted. At the same time, the subsidiary faced cut-downs due to poor financial performance related to changes in the distribution chain over the past few years and fierce local competition.

3.1 Participant observation

Data collection consisted of participant observation and interviews, which allowed for the investigation of how the changes interacted with group dynamics. Central to ethnographic fieldwork methodology is the assumption that we can often observe a gap between ideals and practices: what informants express and how they actually act. This makes participant observation an invaluable element in the study of responses to practices mandated by a parent company. Spending three months in the local setting, the researcher acquired the ability to recognize and understand the social organization of interaction. Observation was carried out during work hours in the canteen, production facilities and offices and during business meetings. The researcher participated in social gatherings throughout the three months. This continuous observation provided an opportunity to register the process of enactment, negotiation and the influence of HQ-mandated practice change. These processes were observed in daily dialogues between organizational members where different managerial logics were debated in a way that would not have been registered in a formal interview situation. Furthermore, participant observations allowed registration of group

behaviour such as socialization or boundary creation not directly available through interviews. Field notes including mappings of informants' behaviour and interaction were continuously taken. Based on such observations, questions evolved that were explored further in interviews as outlined below.

3.2 Interviews

In total, 90 individual semi-structured interviews were carried out during the three months, 28 of whom were with Danish expatriates and 62 with British host-country nationals; 51 of the informants had managerial responsibilities. All interviews were conducted in the informants' native language and took the form of an open dialogue (Bernard, 1995). The interviews were made in relation to the redundancies and changes made and in retrospective in relation to what had happened the preceding years. In the course of the interview, the development in the relation and communication between expatriates and host-country nationals was taken up, following-up on previous statements or observations that had been integrated in the interview guide which was continuously compiled and adapted (Alvesson, 2003; Fontana and Frey, 1994). Managers were interviewed in their offices, while workers or secretaries were interviewed in vacant team-leader offices or meeting rooms. The Danish nationality of the researcher conducting the field study may have influenced the relation to the interviewees. The Danish informants may have regarded the researcher as an in-group member, whereas some British employees may have been more reluctant to reveal negative feelings towards Danish organization members. However, the researcher presented himself as independent, and a large number of British employees actually saw the interview as an opportunity to air disagreement in an anonymous context and express their discontent.

3.3 Method of analysis

Triangulation of data from interviews, participation, observation and archival data was used to assess the interrelations and recursive process of interaction between the notional and action domains (Flick, 2007). This made it possible to identify how formulated norms and statements deviated from or reflected actual strategies of actions informed by more experience-near interests and concerns. To focus the data collection, notes were created on different themes regarding, for instance, shop-floor interpretation of delegation of responsibilities, i.e. observed social strategies of the staff.

The data material was categorized into recurrent themes, revealing similarities and differences in employee attitudes and action, specifically regarding the changes in practices mandated by headquarters. This was done by means of the qualitative data analysis program Nvivo. An extensive case narrative of more than 400 pages was created. This article is based on the part of the narrative on contextual-institutional rationales and logics and inter-group interaction over practice transfers. Nvivo was used to identify snippets of text related to language and group formation searching across codes.

4. The national context of business systems

Research that draws on the European institutionalist tradition is concerned with how key national institutional aspects of national business systems are assumed significant in understanding local work and management systems, as well as designs in an MNC-wide context and local settings (Quintanilla *et al.*, 2008; Whitley, 1992). Even

though our interest in this research was to understand how practice adoption would be influenced not only by wider institutional legacies but also by local dynamics of social negotiation and contingencies, the national-contextual rationalities of business systems in Denmark and the UK remain a starting point for the empirical analysis.

Unlike Danish corporations, British corporations are commonly described as highly compartmentalized both horizontally and vertically, with very clear boundaries between managers' and employees' tasks and responsibilities (Lane, 1994). Generic skills on the part of managers, professional demarcation and low commitment to firm-specific careers limit the willingness to share authority in the British context (Whitley, 2007). In the case of the Danish context, the majority of an organization's members are highly technically skilled, which typically leads to unclear boundaries between organizational divisions and job functions (Lane, 1994). Also, as a result of the educational system, there are durable differences in the manner managerial skills are developed.

Leaders are characterized by a more masculine leadership style in the UK; for example, Hoppe (2004) points out that in countries such as the Great Britain, "macho" leaders are rather common, while other cultures such as the Danish can be regarded as having a more egalitarian style of leadership. In general, the Scandinavian countries have traditionally adopted a quite distinct egalitarian approach to decision-making and wage setting (Ramirez, 2004). Similar to the point made by Dickson *et al.* (2012), the presumed difference between leaders and followers is reflected in usage: who are termed subordinates in the UK, are more typically referred to as co-workers in Denmark.

It has been suggested that Denmark, being a small country, appears as a hybrid influenced by Germany, the UK and the Scandinavian countries (Andersen *et al.*, 1992). One of the unique characteristics is the combination of high manager retention, with strong career structures and emphasis in generalist, vocational and internal firm-specific training for managers (Ramirez and Mabey, 2005). At the same time, the UK ranks formal qualifications and generalist skills above specific vocational education (Ramirez and Mabey, 2005), providing the two countries with rather different skill profiles of the labour force. Hence, there appears to be less emphasis on educating workers and the involvement of skilled workers in the learning processes of the firm in the case of UK (Becker-Ritterspach *et al.*, 2010).

5. Findings: introducing the Danish egalitarian-style organization

The HQ-initiated practice change process was an attempt to implement a Danish management practice in a subsidiary. This involved structural change initiatives to reduce the hierarchy levels and to strengthen the empowerment of employees. The change process, which the fieldwork followed, was an attempt to replace established structures and practices of hierarchy and control with a system characterized by openness, co-operation and independence. In different terms, an organizational practice, representing an egalitarian rationale typical of the Danish dairy tradition, was to be transferred to the subsidiary company in the British dairy sector, which had up till then been dominated by a comparatively more hierarchical logic. Hence, during the study period, the following initiatives were sought and implemented: reduction of the managerial levels from seven to three; introduction of new dress codes; empowerment of employees; increased training of employees; and the posting of Danish employees in a number of departments.

5.1 *The British resisting the implementation of a Danish-style management practice by actively maintaining hierarchical practices*

When the fieldwork commenced, the subsidiary company had experienced a profit for the first time, but at the same time, there was much insecurity among the employees due to recent mass job cuts. These specific local contingencies of job insecurity and mass job cuts fuelled a conflict between the managers who supported the new egalitarian logic and those who sought to actively maintain the hierarchies. At the same time, it caused friction at the bottom and the top of the company, because not only did the British employees rejoice at the offer of more independence and greater responsibility, they were also sceptical of a management team that implemented the new institutional practice and a flatter organizational structure. According to a Danish manager, the systems for developing a flatter organizational structure were compatible with the new, more democratic and egalitarian logic. As a Danish manager put it:

I had to build my own system, and then when I talked to our coordinator, it turned out that I had “reached just as far” as many of the others, so it really did seem like a Danish system. It reflects very well what we’re doing in Denmark. (Danish manager)

The intention was to implement a system where the manager was to work closely with his subordinates. In general, the company managers were characterized as people who spoke their mind while also being good listeners and leaving their subordinates’ room to develop and take responsibility. However, it was less rosy than one might think. The Danish managers posted at the British company quickly embraced the new management system because it allowed them to develop familiar working procedures which were all about getting the work done without much heed to lines of command and individuals’ positions within the organization. Many of the British managers were reluctant to accept the delegation of responsibilities and competences as the new organizational practice expected of them. They associated this with a Danish managerial rationale, and in general, the workers on the shop floor were reluctant to undergo training or take on more independence unless their wages increased accordingly. Although the local employees had been informed of the implementation of the Danish managerial style, there was a long way to acting on it. As a British manager explained:

In head office we have a lot of senior Danes, primarily in Marketing. I would guess we have around 30 Danes all in all, but they’re facing 2000 British people, and those people say, “we don’t understand what the Danish company culture is, and we would actually rather have a British company culture”. (British manager)

So, the British employees referred to the new system as conflicting with their contextual-institutional rationale for upgrading, and saw a conflict between their perception of the manager’s role *vis-à-vis* the role of the subordinate. For the Danish managers, the training of the employees would facilitate the delegation and the larger degree of independence promoted by the Danish ideal of a flat organizational structure. For many of the British employees, on the other hand, participating in the classes was no positive experience:

This company believes in training. But in the UK, we don’t have the same culture for training. It’s hard to get your people to take training. They don’t see it as a way of life like the Danes. Danes come from a middle society, whereas many British people tend to see things more from

a class perspective; they will expect more of a confrontation. For Danes the training is just a way of life. (British manager)

As a result, the flat organizational structure was implemented and actively maintained where Danish managers were in charge, while it was quickly disrupted and disappeared in those areas run by local managers. The Danes found it frustrating and thought the British were actively “destroying the company”. The degree of the Danes’ influence on the organization concerning the creation and active preservation of horizontal structures was, as it turned out, limited to certain areas and actively disrupted in other areas. As mentioned:

Our management has been replaced many times since (the Danish take over), so it doesn’t really apply anymore. Back then there were flat structures and flat pyramids – no difference between the bottom and the top, but then we got British management again who said “but hey, let’s get the tall pyramids back to reintroduce stratification”. So that was the first thing the British management did. Now we have the tall pyramids again where the way to decisions is long. They’ll (the management) tell you something else, but if you take all the layers and add some new ones [...] In that way there’s always someone in the hierarchy under you that you can kick, and then you get control of those on the floor. That suits the British perfectly. (Danish employee)

The uneven implementation and maintenance of the egalitarian practices in the MNC depended very much on the active change and maintenance work of the management in a particular unit. During the fieldwork, the situation was as follows: by virtue of their skills as managers, some of the Danes managed to influence large parts of the organization with their more democratic ideals; others came into serious conflict with their British colleagues who were trying to actively maintain the hierarchical managerial styles. These conflicts involved mutual stereotypification and increasing polarization accentuating the differences between the British and the Danes and the logics of organization they were associated with as well as ignorance of points of relative similarity. The transfer of an egalitarian management system required a different attitude to management than what the British employees in the subsidiary wanted. Many of the British had noticed that the Danes did not surround themselves with as many formalities as the British. Rather than coordinating and controlling through continuous interaction, the Danes often wanted to exemplify, and they believed that the British employees would be independent enough to take on the job with enthusiasm and responsibility. The Danish managers made use of training and empowerment of their subordinates, and they expected the British employees to work in the most rational manner with minimum formal management input.

I find that the Danes are different from British people in their attitude to work. They expect their employees to do exactly the job they tell them to do, but with us that is not the case. That is why people in Denmark don’t have procedures like we do. They trust people to get things done. (British manager).

5.2 A response of creating and promoting increasingly more “German–Danish”-style management practices and systems

The Danish–British cooperation grew increasingly conflict-ridden; disagreements would arise when British employees failed to adopt the method that seemed most rational to the Danes. These situations made it clear to the Danes that they needed to prepare specific work procedures to ensure that things were done the right way or the

Danish way. As a counter move to the active British resistance, the Danish managers changed their attitudes to their subordinates as a reaction to the lack of opportunities to apply their usual management tools and their superior technical skills in this British context. Contrary to what is conventional wisdom in the field, expatriates do not always act as institution carriers (Saka, 2004). Similar to what Saka (2004) found, there was resistance to the work system alterations. The nature of the study allowed us to follow how the work of expatriate managers backfired when attempting to adapt their management style to the British context, however, unsuccessfully. The managers' perception that their qualifications did not measure up to the situation led to frustration and sometimes the loss of self-control. In their frustration, the Danes would seem very terse, which immediately made the British characterize them as "German Danes"; the British workers would then start obstructing the Danish institutionalization of "German-Danish" procedures. In that way, the Danish ideals concerning equality came to be perceived as an extra, top-down demand:

The flat structure is actually imposed on us here. We are forced into it because of the many Danish managers. Here we don't have a problem with going from one end of the pyramid to the other. In this flat organization you are often confused of who you are working with. The problem in such an organization is that you will experience more extremes both good and bad. If you have more hierarchy, everything will be filtered both good and bad. You will be more protected. (British top manager)

The British thought that the Danish terse, "German-Danish" managerial style had come about because they were only in England for a limited time period and therefore needed quick results. Both Danes and British were surprised at how some of the otherwise very democratic-minded Danish expatriates developed a very terse managerial style when they came to England. It came about in a frustrating cycle of inadequate communication and results, which led to growing tension between the British and the Danes in a situation where the British were increasingly insecure about their positions and tried to gain control by furthering practices that supported their position in the subsidiary. At the same time, the gap grew between the competing contextual-institutional rationales sought, implemented and sustained in the subsidiary.

5.3 British response of actively strengthening and sustaining completely oppositional practices while concealing points of similarity

Danish managers became more direct in their managerial style, as they felt that the more democratic approach had little effect. As a British manager commented, "that pisses people off and makes them do the opposite of what they request". Several British managers actively opposed the restructuring of the organization by acting in direct opposition. For instance, it disappointed the British middle managers that the Danish hygiene standards required them to wear a certain uniform which made them look like their subordinates; this opposed their endeavours to maintain hierarchical management practices which they considered an important tradition in the British dairy sector. The British middle managers responded by changing to shirt and tie the minute the Danish manager left the room, thereby secretly trying to extend their efforts of actively maintaining their hierarchical authority structure and management practice into new areas (Scott, 1990).

In general, there was quite a lot of anxiety among the employees because of the company's poor financial performance, as well as the pressure from a highly competitive

market where the distribution chain had changed over the past few years. The lucrative market for delivery of bottled milk was declining, and the supermarket chains had entered the stage as an expensive intermediary. Heavy competition drove the company into a turbulent period with mass job cuts and some new appointments. Looking after their own positions, each groups in the subsidiary had their own ideas as to the best direction for the company. The presence of the Danish managers in the British company created a precarious situation; not only did the Danes work towards implementing a new managerial logic, they also took over management posts at a time of cutbacks and job uncertainty. Many of the British were unsure as to why the parent company chose to transfer Danish managers to the subsidiary. They were afraid that the Danes had been sent there to spy on and control them, and that more Danes would come so that they would eventually lose their jobs. Mistrust and rumours were fostered due to lack of communication and threats of mass job cuts:

To me it looks like they have put Danes in all the departments. Like the entire department in Leeds, you have got all the marketing people and the marketing director and you have got the finance director and the production director. You have Danes in all the key positions. I think people are afraid they have a different communication system. I am just saying what it looks like to me. (British manager)

The British workers felt particularly insecure whenever the Danes talked to each other in Danish because they feared that they were the object of the conversation. Therefore, many theories went around that the Danes had a widespread, informal communication network to which every Dane across levels, functions and departments, had access, and it was used by the Danish workers to “tell on” their British peers to the Danish managers.

They were scared of being stabbed in the back, even though the Danes denied any differential treatment. Thus, polarization between actors and their created and sustained practices was building – tensions were increasingly interwoven with fear and gossip. At the same time, the Danish workers were very conscious of their own conduct; this was reflected in their trying to adjust their behaviour so that they could argue that, from their perspective, British and Danish workers were treated equally.

The introduction of Danish organizational scripts to the subsidiary led to increasing polarization between the Danish managers posted in the subsidiary and the local British employees who, according to the Danish managers, did not have the ability to adapt to the increased independence and the flatter organizational structure. Both groups accentuated their own skills and promoted management systems favouring their own competences and positions. In other words, the different groups of employees and managers fought to define and institutionalize different ground rules to achieve recognition and to interpret rules and guidelines to fit their personal preferences. Individuals’ opposing efforts to further their own goals and secure their own positions in the organization accentuated and emphasized the differences between the Danish and British contextual rationales, which, under other circumstances, would not affect the organization much. At the same time, the similarities were gradually disregarded. Over time, members from each group came to view the others as being the polar opposite as they actively surfaced and accentuated differences while ignoring and concealing points of similarities; this resulted in growing inter-group tension. This demonstrates how tensions between opposing contextual-institutional rationales and logics may build or decline in intensity over time through ongoing moves and countermoves of actors accommodating each other’s interests in pluralistic contexts (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009).

This social dynamic was intensified by the situation of economic and positional instability in the company derived from the market situation.

6. Discussion

This article delivers insight into how the social processes during the transfer of alternative work systems in subsidiaries affect the degree of adoption over time. Comparative and new institutional perspectives have framed the lion's share of research on the transfer and constitution of practices in MNCs. In this study, we suggest an alternative perspective for theorizing and researching the management practices and structures that emerge in response to HQ demands for practice change in subsidiaries. We apply a theory of practice approach to how actors cope and work with imposed contextual institutional and cultural complexity when a subsidiary initiates efforts to adopt an HQ-imposed alternative management practice. Various additions to the IB literature surface from this study.

First, current research avenues have been characterized by a movement towards acknowledging the agency of multiple actors within subsidiaries in actively resisting, adjusting and promoting transfers of practices, policies and knowledge. Hereby, differential outcomes have been generated across subsidiaries or as intra-branch diversity (Moore, 2003) despite being exposed to similar HQ demands and formal institutional distance. Extending this view, we have suggested a practice-based theorization according to which subsidiary actors are constantly involved in revising, actively sustaining or disrupting structures and practices that emerge locally in response to HQ demands for divergent management practice change. The interactions among the multiple actors that comprise subsidiaries constitute an active process in which institutional practices, rationalities and identities are continuously being created, maintained, disrupted and recreated (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2013, 2009). Illustrating how multiple actor groups cope with imposed institutional or cultural complexity in a manner characterized by politically motivated maintenance acts and counteracts of disrupting contextual rationales and practices sustained by other subsidiary actors through partisan mutual adjustment. In this vein, cross-border friction is not merely a neutral, passive effect of institutional distance (Shenkar *et al.*, 2008; Saka-Helmhout and Geppert, 2011).

Second, this study shows how changes in local social interaction patterns affect the depth of adoption of alternative work systems within the organization. The majority of extant research has primarily provided static accounts of the factors affecting the depth of adoption by recipient subsidiaries at a given point in time by focusing on outcomes rather than the dynamics of conflictual processes that characterize transfers, as observed by Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach (2012). As most research grounded in new and comparative institutionalism has taken a structural over a processual approach to the conflicts that occur during transfers, conflict research may benefit from giving more attention to the dynamics of conflicts as they escalate or fade (Blazejewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012; Clark and Geppert, 2011). The reported study contributes knowledge into the dynamics of social processes shaping the distribution of work practices and norms in subsidiaries. Such processes influence the extent of distribution and adoption of alternative work practices in the various work areas and levels of the recipient subsidiary. As a means of ensuring legitimacy, positions, a degree of certainty and organizational influence in a situation of instability, employees actively surfaced

emphasizing different types of opposition while downplaying points of similarity: between Danes and the British, between departments controlled by Danes and those controlled by the British, between subsidiary and headquarters and between hierarchical and egalitarian traditions of organizing companies in the British and Danish dairy sectors. Consequently, they increasingly viewed each other as representing completely opposing managerial ideals expressed through categories of binary opposition potentially reducing uncertainty and ambiguity (Lévi-Strauss, 1966), but resulting in destructive polarization and a deteriorating process of oppositional political sensemaking (Clark and Geppert, 2011). Tensions between old practices and new HQ-mandated ways of organizing subsidiaries may deepen or disappear over time due to local contingencies, such as rationalization threats. In our study, this process was fuelled and moderated by local socio-material contingencies related to the market situation and subsequent job insecurity, rumours and fear. Global, national and organizational institutions may potentially inform social processes surrounding transfers in MNCs, but only when they are perceived as significant in a particular situation and consistent with more immediate concerns, interests or positions (Blazjewski, 2009; Karnøe and Nygaard, 1999). The study contributes by demonstrating how and why contextual-institutional traditions and rationales become salient and polarize in conflictual practice transfer processes (Blazjewski, 2009). This occurred, in the present case, as multiple subsidiary groups refer to and draw on them in a way that makes the polarization a means to handle a situation characterized by job insecurity, uncertainty and instability due to poor financial performance. The process may not have escalated into a situation of complete polarization and contradiction between groups under different local contingencies where different lines of demarcation could have become activated. Inherent norms or values of institutionalized traditions are not the cause of conflicts escalating around national lines of demarcation in this study, but job cuts related to the weak position of the firm in the local market are. This research thus furthers understanding of how societal influences combine with micro-level organizational conditions in informing conflictual practice transfer processes. A further theoretical addition of this theorization is that the highest level of friction or conflict may not necessarily emerge in the initial phase of enacting alternative systems or practices. Rather, conflicts may dynamically occur and escalate over time due to factors inherent to such processes even producing structural changes (Clark and Geppert, 2011; Blazjewski and Becker-Ritterspach, 2012). More longitudinal research on conflicts during HQ-initiated changes would deepen our knowledge of such processes.

Third, existing research shows that infusing work systems with value is an active process (Kostova and Roth, 2002; Saka, 2004) shaped by interpretive social processes through which employees build perceptions about the efficiency of a practice. However, processes of adopting and sustaining alternative practices are not merely driven by perceptions of efficiency, they are also used by subsidiary actors in everyday acts of contestation and support over work practices aimed at acquiring recognition and resources or securing positions. Subsidiary actors promote different rationalities and logics as they fight each other over resources, etc., thereby, propelling HQ-mandated work structures and practices and constituting what they are at the ground level.

Fourth, it has been argued that, as institutional carriers, expatriates have been able to facilitate the transfer and implementation of alternative work systems and practices (Saka, 2004). Moreover, as is the case with boundary spanners, effective institutional

carriers may also need to maintain ambidextrous organizational legitimacy requiring top management support (Schotter and Beamish, 2011). We found, however, that their roles are highly dependent on local and socially dynamic interaction processes through which expatriates come to be granted a certain status or delegitimized in the eyes of local employees.

Fifth, this study adds to the now burgeoning evidence of global practice transfer as being problematic in itself. Future research may benefit from reassessing the value of the very metaphor of practice transfer. Recent additions to IB research uncover the translation processes involved in the sharing and transformation of practices in MNCs (Becker-Ritterspach *et al.*, 2010). We call for more research that critically examines the scientific usefulness and empirical adequateness of the metaphor of practice transfer.

7. Conclusion

The theory of practice perspective taken in this paper demonstrates how practices, structures and strategies in subsidiaries are in an ongoing process of emergence in face of HQ demands for practice change. The MNC is thus under constant reconstruction through various subsidiary actors' positioned strategies to gain legitimacy, influence or resources (Kristensen and Zeitlin, 2005). The article shows that although contextual rationales shape initial positions in social interaction among employees and the nature of the centrally initiated practice transfers, subsidiary actors engage in dynamic adaptation to and adoption of such practices. For instance, the increasing use of a more bossy style of command cannot be seen as a simple reflection of the antecedents in terms of, for example, contextual-institutional rationales of business systems, but rather as a result of a series of responses and counter-responses of the multiple actors that comprise the subsidiary. As a consequence, the two groups of employees come to stand as polarized, which is not really a given and may not appear in other circumstances.

7.1 Implications

As this study draws on a single organization, generalizations may be limited. However, increasing the number of cases studied does not change the study from "microscopic" to macroscopic. And even a single case can be considered a methodologically fully acceptable approach to establish patterns as long as it meets the established objective.

Students and practitioners of international management should be prepared that in situations of pluralistic organizing demands, balancing, accommodating and revising contextual-institutional practices and rationalities likely require ongoing organizing/strategizing work (Jarzabkowski and Fenton, 2006). When such practices are in a process of ongoing reconstruction, MNCs must constantly coordinate and communicate strategies, structures or practices emerging from within the business (Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2006) rather than merely designing and then transferring policies, systems or practices for multinational subsidiaries unilaterally.

Lecturers in international management, who serve as trainers for organizing of MNCs, should ensure a varied curriculum that reflects the complexity of enactment and managing contextual features of international organizing processes in lived practice and experience. This could, for example, be accomplished through rich practice-near cases in combination with theorization (Primecz *et al.*, 2011; Bjerregaard *et al.*, 2009) that acknowledge, yet potentially go beyond, or at least raise some critical reflection on the extent of the explanatory power of some standard frameworks for classifying cultural or

contextual-institutional dimensions of international management and business that still today form the backbone of many textbooks in this area of teaching and practicing.

References

- Alvesson, M. (2003), "Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: a reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 28, pp. 13-33.
- Andersen, T., Kamp, M., Holt Larsen, H., La Cour, C., Svendsen, L. and Kiel, O. (1992), "Denmark", in Brewster, C., Hegewisch, A., Holden, L. and Lockhart, T. (Eds), *The European Human Resource Management Guide*, Academic Press, London, pp. 185-214.
- Bartlett, C.A. and Ghoshal, S. (1989), *Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution*, Hutchinson Business Books, London.
- Becker-Ritterspach, F., Saka-Helmhout, A. and Hotho, J.J. (2010), "Learning in multinational enterprises as the socially embedded translation of practices", *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 8-37.
- Bernard, R.H. (1995), *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Oaks, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Bjerregaard, T. and Jonasson, C. (2014a), "Managing unstable institutional contradictions: the work of becoming", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 35 No. 10, pp. 1507-1536.
- Bjerregaard, T. and Jonasson, C. (2014b), "Organizational responses to contending institutional logics: the moderating effect of group dynamics", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 651-661.
- Bjerregaard, T., Luring, J. and Klitmøller, A. (2009), "A critical analysis of intercultural communication research in cross-cultural management: introducing newer developments in anthropology", *Critical perspectives on International Business*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 207-228.
- Blazejewski, S. (2006), "Transferring value-infused organizational practices in multinational companies: a conflict perspective", in Geppert, M. and Mayer, M. (Eds), *Global, National and Local Practices in Multinational Companies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 63-104.
- Blazejewski, S. (2009), "Actors' interests and local contexts in intrafirm conflict: the 2004 Gm and Opel crisis", *Competition and Change*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 229-250.
- Blazejewski, S. and Becker-Ritterspach, F. (2012), "Conflict in headquarters-subsidiary relations: a critical literature review and new directions", in Dörrenbächer, C. and Geppert, M. (Eds), *Politics and Power in the Multinational Corporation: The Role of Institutions, Interests and Identities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 3-40.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York, NY.
- Brannen, M.Y. (2008), "Organizational culture in a binational context: a model of negotiated culture", *Anthropology of Work Review*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 9-11.
- Brannen, M.Y. and Salk, J. (2000), "Partnering across borders: negotiating organizational culture in a German-Japanese joint venture", *Human Relations*, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 451-487.
- Clark, E. and Geppert, M. (2006), "Socio-political processes in international management in postsocialist contexts: knowledge, learning and transnational institution building", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 340-357.
- Clark, E. and Geppert, M. (2011), "Subsidiary integration as identity construction and institution building: a political sense making approach", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 395-416.

- Clark, K. and Lengnick-Hall, M.L. (2012), "MNC practice transfer: institutional theory, strategic opportunities and subsidiary hr configuration", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 23 No. 18, pp. 3813-3837.
- Collings, D.G. and Dick, P. (2011), "The relationship between ceremonial adoption of popular management practices and the motivation for practice adoption and diffusion in an American MNC", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 22 No. 18, pp. 3849-3866.
- Dickson, M.W., Castaño, N., Magomaeva, A. and Den Hartog, D.N. (2012), "Conceptualizing leadership across cultures", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 483-492.
- Edström, A. and Galbraith, J.R. (1977), "Transfer of managers as a coordination and control strategy in multinational organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 248-263.
- Fenton-O'Creivy, M., Gooderham, P., Cerdin, J.L. and Rønning, R. (2011), "Bridging roles, social skill and embedded knowing in multinational organizations", in Dörrenbächer, C. and Geppert, M. (Eds), *Politics and Power in the Multinational Corporation*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, pp. 101-138.
- Ferner, A., Quintanilla, J. and Varul, M.Z. (2000), "Country of origin effects, host country effects and the management of human resources in multinationals: German companies in Britain and Spain", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 107-127.
- Flick, U. (2007), "Triangulation revisited: strategy of validation or alternative?", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 175-197.
- Fontana, A. and Frey, J.H. (1994), "Interviewing: the art of the science", in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, London, pp. 361-376.
- Gamble, J. (2010), "Transferring organizational practices and the dynamics of hybridization: Japanese retail multinationals in China", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 705-729.
- Geppert, M. and Matten, D. (2006), "Institutional influences on manufacturing organization in multinational corporations: the 'cherry-picking approach'", *Organization Science*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 491-515.
- Geppert, M., Williams, K. and Matten, D. (2003), "The social construction of contextual rationalities in MNCs: an Anglo-German comparison of subsidiary choice", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 617-641.
- Harzing, A. (1999), *Managing the Multinationals: An International Study of Control Mechanisms*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Harzing, A.-W. (2001), "Of bears, bumble-bees and spiders: the role of expatriates in controlling foreign subsidiaries", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 366-379.
- Hodgkinson, G.P., Whittington, R., Johnson, G. and Schwarz, M. (2006), "The role of strategy workshops in strategy development processes: formality, communication, co-ordination and inclusion", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 479-496.
- Hoppe, M.H. (2004), "Cross-cultural issues in the development of leaders", in Mccauley, C.D. and Van Velsor, E. (Eds), *Handbook of Leadership Development* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, pp. 331-360.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Fenton, E. (2006), "Strategizing and organizing in pluralistic contexts", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 39 No. 6, pp. 631-648.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Matthiesen, J. and Van De Ven, A. (2009), "Doing which work? A practice approach to institutional pluralism", in Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R. and Leca, B. (Eds),

-
- Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organization*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 284-316.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Smets, M., Bednarek, R., Burke, G. and Spee, P. (2013), "Institutional ambidexterity: leveraging institutional complexity in practice", *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 39, pp. 37-61.
- Karnøe, P. and Nygaard, C. (1999), "Bringing social action and situated rationality back in", *International Studies of Management and Organization*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 78-93.
- Kostova, T. and Roth, K. (2002), "Adoption of an organizational practice by subsidiaries of multinational corporations: institutional and relational effects", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 215-233.
- Kristensen, P.H. and Zeitlin, J. (2005), *Local Players in Global Games: The Strategic Constitution of a Multinational Corporation*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Kühlmann, T.M. (2012), "Transfer of German human resource management practices: replication, localization, hybridization", in Stockhammer, P.W. (Ed.), *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization*, Springer-Verlag Berlin, Berlin, pp. 95-106.
- Lane, C. (1994), "European business systems: Britain and Germany compared", in Whitley, R. (Ed.), *European Business Systems*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 64-97.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966), *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Lindblom, C.E. (1965), *The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision Making through Mutual Adjustment*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Marschan-Piekkari, R. and Reis, C. (2004), "Language and languages in cross-cultural interviewing", in Marschan-Piekkari, R. and Welch, C. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for International Business*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp. 224-226.
- Martinez, J.I. and Jarillo, J.C. (1989), "The evolution of research on coordination mechanisms in multinational corporations", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 489-514.
- Molina, C. (2012), "Understanding institutional plurality in multinational enterprises: the roles of institutional logic and social identification", in Tihanyi, L., Devinney, T.M. and Pedersen, T. (Eds), *Institutional Theory in International Business and Management (Advances in International Management)*, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, pp. 399-423.
- Moore, F. (2003), "Internal diversity and culture's consequences: branch/head office relations in a German financial MNC", *Management International Review*, Vol. 43, pp. 95-111.
- Morgan, G. (2001), "The multinational firm: organizing across institutional and national divides", in Morgan, G., Kristensen, P.H. and Whitley, R. (Eds), *The Multinational Firm*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1-24.
- Piekkari, R., Welch, C. and Paavilainen (2008), "The case study as disciplinary convention: evidence from international business journals", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 567-589.
- Primecz, H., Romani, L. and Sackmann, S. (2011), *Cross-Cultural Management in Practice: Culture and Negotiated Meanings*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Quintanilla, J., Susaeta, L. and Sánchez-Mangas, R. (2008), "The diffusion of employment practices in multinationals: 'Americanness' within US MNCs in Spain?", *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 50 No. 5, pp. 680-696.
- Ramirez, M. (2004), "Comparing European approaches to management education, training and development", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 428-450.

- Ramirez, M. and Mabey, C. (2005), "A labor market perspective on management training and development in Europe", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 291-310.
- Saka, A. (2004), "The cross-national diffusion of work systems: translation of Japanese operations in the UK", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 201-228.
- Saka-Helmhout, A. and Geppert, M. (2011), "Different forms of agency and institutional influences within multinational enterprises", *Management International Review*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 567-592.
- Schatzki, T.R., Knorr-Cetina, K. and Von Savigny, E. (2001), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Schotter, A. and Beamish, P.W. (2011), "Performance effects of MNC headquarters-subsidiary conflict and the role of boundary spanners: the case of headquarter initiative rejection", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 243-259.
- Scott, J.C. (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Scott, W.R. (2010), "Reflections: the past and future of research on institutions and institutional change", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 5-21.
- Sharpe, D. (2006), "Shop floor practices under changing forms of managerial control: a comparative ethnographic study of micro-politics, control and resistance within a Japanese multinational", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 318-339.
- Shenkar, O., Yadong, L. and Yeheskel, O. (2008), "From 'distance' to 'friction': substituting metaphors and redirecting intercultural research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 905-923.
- Tsoukas, H. and Chia, R.C.H. (2002), "On organizational becoming: rethinking organizational change", *Organization Science*, Vol. 13 No. 5, pp. 567-582.
- Van De Ven, A. (1992), "Suggestions for studying strategy process: a research note", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 169-188.
- Whitley, R. (1992), *European Business Systems: Firms and Markets in Their National Contexts*, Sage Publications, London; Newbury Park, CA.
- Whitley, R. (2007), *Business Systems and Organizational Capabilities: The Institutional Structuring of Competitive Competences*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, NY.

Corresponding author

Mai S. Linneberg can be contacted at: mssl@asb.dk

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com