
Editorial

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Tobias Hallensleben holds a Master of Science degree in Sociology, Psychology and Pedagogy from University of Jena. His research activities are focused, amongst others, on the institutionalisation of reflexive practices in processes of organisational change and the genesis of reflexivity as personal competence in the life course and organisational socialisation. He works as a Research Assistant at the Chair for Socio-Economics and Entrepreneurial ResponsAbility at the Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen, Germany.

Matthias Wörlen studied sociology, economics and business administration in Stuttgart. His research interests lie in the area of reflexive accounting and socio-economic assessment of sustainability and innovation. He had the opportunity to focus these issues as research assistant, political advisor and business consultant at Universities in Duisburg, Chemnitz and Friedrichshafen and at the Regional Parliament of Baden-Wurtemberg and for the RefCor GmbH in Munich. He made a number of international conference presentations in this thematic field especially concerning methods and possibilities of reflexive accounting of knowledge and innovativeness, social-capital effects and relationality.

Reflexivity is a common reference point in modernisation theory (Beck et al., 1994; Luhmann, 1984; Sandywell, 1996), developmental psychology (Piaget, 1974, 1977; Kohlberg, 1976; Engeström, 2008), critical social theory (Habermas, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Jessop, 2003), the philosophy of science (Gouldner, 1970; Bunge, 2009) and organisational learning (e.g., Argyris and Schoen, 1996). Some of the work is

on critical self-awareness of social research, concerning premises, values, and unintended consequences of intervention, like the work of Alvesson and Sköldböck (2000) or Gouldner (1970). However, this is not our focus here. For us, reflexivity is an important feature of *critical thinking, critical self-reference and pluralism* in individual development and institutional change. While in the theory of reflexive modernisation Beck (1992, 1994) and Giddens (1990) portrait reflexivity as a more or less ‘digital’ alternative to fundamentalist reactions on new risks and contingencies in the modern world, we find different forms, levels and qualities of reflexivity in social practices and attitudes, cultures and institutions. And while the majority of reflections on reflexivity as mentioned above shares a focus on methodological issues (the embeddedness of the researcher in the observed social context), this issue shall explore particularly capability-issues – more specifically, innovation capabilities of organisations as well as the ‘inclination’ of individuals to develop and learn in changing organisational structures and processes.

We would like to invite readers of this special issue to a debate on reflexivity as a dimension of epistemic culture in daily life, and here in a special focus on its role in institutional and personal capabilities related to innovation. Focusing on the co-evolution of epistemic styles, problem solving activities and organisational structure, we want to stimulate discussion on conceptualisations of reflexivity (including similar approaches, e.g., mindfulness) and treat the various ways in which reflexivity might enable people and institutions to participate in change-processes more successfully. A deepening engagement with reflexivity – so the initial thesis of this special issue – opens up new perspectives on the complex character of organisational reality. It calls for reimagining usual ideas of innovation and learning, including the questioning of principles of ‘old modernity’ and its model of Weberian purposive rationality.

If modern organisations can be described as continuously changing systems, in which fixed points of reference and taken granted truths are rapidly eroding (while new conditions do not replace former amount of ontological security), the question arises how to balance that with the individual need for certainty? If this tightrope walk requires and reveals elements associated with organisational capabilities, which forms of individual capabilities and subjectivity are appropriate to that?

Thus, a reflexivity perspective on organisational change and organised learning raises a range of further questions like: Which mindsets, self-conceptions, and epistemic cultures of organisations foster resilience in coping with new organisational contingencies? Where do they come from? What can conceptions of reflexivity contribute to the understanding of change capabilities and inabilities, to the explanation of progress and failure? How to conceptualise, identify, measure, and evaluate qualities and levels of reflexivity – in organisational cultures and in subjectivity? What are impeding forces against reflexivity, and what can they contribute to the understanding of epistemic defence mechanisms, immunisations against learning, and inertia?

Drawing on social theory as mentioned above, reflexivity can be reconstructed on at least three levels: societal, organisational and personal. Here, in this special issue, we concentrate on the relation between the organisational and personal levels, with some references to the ‘upper context’. On all these levels, reflexivity can be conceptualised as a property, characteristic or pattern of epistemic culture – or as a capability. The articles in this issue reflect that spectrum of understandings.

As a socially embedded personal competence and epistemological style, reflexive perceiving and acting can be described (and then operationalised) as an ability to take up

a *self-observational* perspective on one's action and perception; an awareness of *perspectivity*, of being *situated* inevitably. It comprises an attentiveness of unintended *side effects* of own and others activities and/or a high readiness to accept *ambiguity* and alternative interpretations of social reality (e.g., skepticism concerning 'one best ways', *pluralism*). Referring to the notion of critical thinking, we do not understand it as another word for creativity. Conceptualising its contribution to capabilities, we mean the willingness to critically evaluate own ideas and practices, even different options to innovate; furthermore, the ability to cope with uncertainty and constant change, and to decenter from one's own perspective. That enables people to critically learn about their own actions, e.g., interventions in social systems, particularly with respect to unintentional effects. On this micro-level, reflexivity as personal competence can be operationalised, for instance, in practices of knowledge consumption and (e.g., preferred extent of certainty), in the degree of conformity (e.g., attitudes towards deviants), in ways of self-relation (e.g., self-monitoring, self-critique), or in the use of rules (e.g., strict versus critical).

In the same way, organisational cultures 'reflect' reflexivity in observable epistemological practices like 'strong' project management, in forms of discourse, in the acceptance and appreciation of diversity, in ways of knowledge absorption, in modes of interpreting rules and routines and forms of dealing with conflict. Institutional reflexivity can be observed in procedures and management tools that (might) contribute to the revision and innovation of previous rules and practices, e.g., by analysing the consequences of own action, contentious criticism of unquestioned routines, or supporting decision makers against path dependent processes. These (and other) criteria are part of an elaborated, empirically proven approach that offers an applicable framework to classify and measure the 'inclination' of organisations (profit and non-profit) for change in all dimensions (Moldaschl, 2005, 2007). With this concept, the innovativeness of firms or organisations in general is addressed as it focuses on the question, how firms keep their procedures and premises open to revisions. Obviously, there is some overlapping with practices described by Weick as *mindfulness* in high reliability organisations (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001; Weick and Putnam, 2006).

Drawing that distinction allows for and requires questions on the relation between organisational and personal reflexivity, particularly in a longitudinal, processual perspective. This means to introduce an *evolutionary* perspective as an access to understand micro-macro-relations between organisational and personal capabilities – and inabilities. It means to study processes of *co-evolution*. How do these individual and organisational fragments of change capabilities co-evolve and recursively foster or hinder each other, upwards or downwards, anabolic and katabolic? How to describe that co-evolution in terms of mutual reinforcement or repulsion, socialisation and selection? How do organisations with a higher need for innovation, change and adaption acquire, select, use and train their employees? What about persons with a higher capability and need for variation and intellectual freedom than the organisational culture offer, in which they find themselves: do they adapt, or choose between voice and exit? Under which conditions does that occur? How big can the tensions become, and what about organisational and professional sub-cultures, e.g., in departments of controlling vs. R&D? Not to continue with questions on the embeddedness of such micro-macro-relations in divergent national and regional cultures.

Of course, these perspectives offer and call for a deeper understanding and critique of existing competence theories, personal ones as well as organisational ones, like in strategic management (competence-based view, absorptive capacity, etc.). Furthermore, they open a new way to evaluate and to compare approaches to competence assessment, and to develop new ones based on operationalisations of reflexivity.

Most of the articles in this issue refer to papers presented on two conference streams we hosted in 2013: 'Reflexivity as a capability in political innovation and social change' at the 8th International Conference in Interpretive Policy Analysis (University of Vienna) and 'Reflexivity: Advances in the Study of Organisational Change' at the CMS Critical Management Studies Conference in Manchester. We addressed three types of theoretical questions: theory-based indicators for innovativeness on personal, organisational and societal level; relations and differences between critical thinking on these levels; and relations (and contradictions) between critical management studies, socio-economics and social governance.

The first article 'Creating innovative work practices through reflexive interventions' of Klaus-Peter Schulz, Anu Kajamaa and Hannele Kerosuo differentiate reflection as action, and reflexivity as a feature of social actors/systems. Reflexivity is seen as a major factor for organisational innovativeness because it is a 'transcending of communicative reflection to a level of analysis of systemic contradictions'. Looking for manifestation of reflexivity that foster innovation they introduce the notion of 'reflexive interventions' as collective actions that give consideration to systemic effects of change, learning and innovation.

The article 'Reflexivity in the 'productisation' of services' written by Mikko H. Lehtonen, Katriina Järvi and Tiina Tuominen develop a reflexive perspective on their study on service productisation in knowledge intensive work contexts. Analysing their empirical material they distinguish three forms of reflexivity: Firstly, self-reflexivity as a formalised first order observation that leads to knowledge codification. Secondly, structural (institutional) reflexivity as an observation of one's institutional environment, which entails interpretation and sense-making about side-effects of knowledge worker's own actions. And thirdly, reflexive institutionalisation of new practices, build on an informed and more or less critical standpoint concerning the implementation or application of standardising procedures.

In their paper 'Institutional and personal reflexivity in processes of organisational learning', Tobias Hallensleben, Matthias Wörten and Manfred Moldaschl present their co-evolutionary capability approach, based on Moldaschl's theory of reflexivity, the original point of reference for this issue: They portrait some prominent and competing understandings of reflexivity and their relevance for research on learning, social change, and innovation. Their capability approach was designed to study the co-evolution of epistemic practices and cultures on the organisational (institutional) and the personal level in compatible terms of reflexivity. The application and the heuristic potential of this approach are demonstrated in two case studies in knowledge-intensive industries.

Angela Wroblewski's article 'Individual and institutional reflexivity – a mutual basis for reducing gender bias in unquestioned practices' presents a study on gender biases in appointment procedures at Austrian universities analysing the gap between equal treatment directives and their application. Like Hallensleben et al., she works with the concept of institutional reflexivity of Manfred Moldaschl, complemented with an idea of personal reflexivity brought up by Yancee Martin. Her study gives an excellent example for organisational hysteresis because of structural as well as inter-subjective reasons and

the need for engagement in both – personal and institutional reflexivity – to foster organisational ‘changeability’.

In Klaus Neundlinger’s article ‘Immaterial common goods and institutional reflexivity’ the combination of different areas of knowledge is the main factor for organisational productivity and innovativeness. Combining speech act theory with a reflexivity perspective he asks for communicative mechanisms that foster mutual understanding between technical and managerial knowledge workers. He argues that the handling of performativity of organisational speech acts requires reflexivity to balance out illocutionary effects (action advices) and perlocutionary effects (sense-making) of organisational communication.

Stephen Allen’s article ‘Reflexivity for sustainability: appreciating entanglement and becoming relationally reflexive’ takes the form of a philosophical essay about the ontological base of reflexivity. Based on Gergens postulation of a strongly embedded relational self, he criticises the common understanding of reflexivity as being basically individualistic. Allen argues that especially in the face of problems of sustainability there is a need for ‘relational reflexivity’.

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