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Title of the suggested paper: *Multi-rational management of pluralistic organizations under conditions of institutional complexity. The case of special needs schools in Switzerland*

Description of content of the paper:

The suggested paper draws on neo-institutional theory (Meyer, Rowan 1977; DiMaggio, Powell 1983) and the institutional logics perspective (Friedland, Alford 1991; Thornton et al. 2012). According to this perspective society is constituted by different institutions with corresponding, different institutional logics that shape the rationality of actors both in organizational fields and in organizations (Friedland, Alford 1991, p. 251). The presence of different institutional logics respectively rationalities leads to situations of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al. 2011) or multirationality (Schedler, Rüegg-Stürm 2013). Organizations that face different rationalities from their internal and external constituents are called pluralistic organizations (Kraatz 2009, p. 72; Battilana, Dorado 2010; Pache 2011). Such organizations have to address different, potentially conflicting rationalities in order to secure legitimacy and hence resources from all their relevant internal and external stakeholders.

The paper argues that special needs schools in Switzerland are typical cases of pluralistic organizations. Their management teams are confronted with multiple rationalities from their internal and external constituents that they have to address. Therefore, the paper elaborates on the question how the management teams of six special needs school in Switzerland deal with the multirationality, caused by the different rationalities of their internal and external stakeholders, in order to keep up the decision process within the organization and to secure legitimacy and resources from the external stakeholders of the special needs schools.

Based on empirical evidence (see *section on research method below*) the paper finds that the managers of the six special needs schools in Switzerland are confronted with four overarching rationalities both internally (i.e., employees) and externally (e.g., public school, governmental supervisory body, school psychologists, politics etc.) of the organization: rationality of the special needs education, economic rationality, bureaucratic rationality and rationality of the family. These rationalities may simultaneously act upon the decision process of the management teams leading to situations of multirationality. However, whereas the literature usually assumes that different rationalities lead to conflicts (e.g., Greenwood et al. 2011), the empirical evidence of the paper suggests that multirationality in the context of special needs education may also manifest itself as an enriching or indifferent relationship between different rationalities.

Managers of special needs schools in Switzerland are found to apply a broad set of practices to deal with multirationality. The identified managerial practices can be clustered into three broader concepts. The first concept strives to capitalize on the differences of the rationalities in order to find innovative ways of dealing with challenges. The second concept aims to reduce the conflicts that may arise from the different rationalities by applying strategies of mitigating and reconciliation. The third concept

combines practices that tend to increase the indifference zone of rationalities in order to minimize their boundary points. Hence, the practices applied by the managers of special needs schools seem to link back to the different occurrences of multirationality described above.

Furthermore, the paper identifies three intra-organizational conditions that seem to influence which type of practices managers of special needs schools apply in response to multirationality: position of power, capacity and identity. The first condition refers to the relative power of the management teams vis-à-vis both the internal constituents (i.e., employees) and the external stakeholders of the special needs school. The second condition accounts for the observation that the identified practices require different capacities of the management teams (e.g., know-how regarding rationalities, commitment, time etc.) that are not necessarily equally distributed. Finally, the third condition relates to the impact of the identity of an organization on the management team's choice of practices to respond to multirationality. In particular, the history of the special needs schools seems to influence the choice of practices.

Research Method:

The empirical evidence for this paper is gained through a qualitative-interpretative case study of six special needs schools in Switzerland (Schwartz-Shea, Yanow 2012; Ragin 1987) that results in a grounded-theory model (Gioia et al. 2013). The data consists of 46 transcribed interviews (528 pages of transcription) with members of the management teams and external stakeholders of the special needs schools. As supporting data serve the available annual reports of the cases from 2003 – 2013 (51 reports) and field memos drafted by the corresponding author of this paper who worked part-time in an administrative role in one of the special needs schools between 2012 and 2014.

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