FEATURE

Promoting workplace innovations: Reconsidering the role of development programmes from a neo-institutional perspective

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About the author

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Abstract

Europe has a long history of programmes to develop the organization of work and promote workplace innovation. Nevertheless, questions concerning the potential of such programmes to act as agents of change and the possibility of change through programmes in general have remained the subject of scant research and discussion. This paper presents a framework for analysing the possibility of working life change supported by work organization development programmes. The paper builds new bridges between research on working life change, workplace innovations, work organization development programmes and neo-institutional theory, and draws implications for how to build better programmes based on such bridging.

Introduction

Many European countries, spearheaded by the Nordic countries and Germany, have conducted programmes to develop the organization of work and promote workplace innovations in recent years. The concept of workplace innovation refers to collaboratively constructed changes in a company's organizational, management or other work-related practices that lead to simultaneous improvements in productivity and quality of working life, which, in turn, also often support other types of innovation (Alasoini, 2011). Our stock of knowledge on such programmes and their outcomes is based primarily on two kinds of studies. The first group comprises a number of comprehensive analyses of development programmes and underlying strategies conducted in individual countries (e.g., Alasoini, 2015; Arnkil, 2004; Brulin & Svensson, 2012; Cole, 1989; Fricke 2003; Gustavsen, Finne & Oscarsson, 2001; Qvale, 2002; Riegler, 2008). The second group of studies includes (mainly) descriptive presentations and comparisons of programmes and strategies implemented in different countries (e.g., Alasoini, 2009; Brödner & Latniak, 2003; Business Decisions

Limited, 2000; Den Hertog & Schröder, 1989; Eeckelaert et al., 2012; Gustavsen, 2007; Naschold, 1994). The latter group of studies has been, for the most part, conducted for the purpose of either highlighting the existing examples as showcases to be emulated by European, national or regional policy-makers, or for criticising the lack of activity by policy-makers in this area.

Nevertheless, at the same time, questions concerning the potential of such programmes to act as agents of change and the possibility of working life change through such programmes in general have remained the subject of scant academic research and policy discussion thus far. To better understand both the factors that are favourable to the occurrence of workplace innovations that enhance organizational performance and quality of working life and the dynamics and structures that can act as obstacles to the creation and dissemination of such innovations, we need a conceptual framework applicable to practice. By making use of a neo-institutional perspective and the idea of development programmes as (potential) institutional entrepreneurs, this paper tries to construct such a framework.

Neo-institutionalism is an approach that focuses on developing a sociological view of institutions. This approach starts with the assumption that institutions operate and interact with each other in an environment in which the main goal of an institution is survival and the establishment of legitimacy. This quest for survival, in turn, often serves as a powerful motive to resort to conformist behaviour, to maintain the status quo and to resist (potentially radical) changes. However, alongside an emphasis on the difficulty of change and obstacles to the diffusion of innovations, neo-institutional theory and research have sought to find explanations for why changes do occur. The neo-institutionalist literature has tried to identify factors that create the conditions that would enable certain organizations to adopt innovative solutions and, thereby, lead to diversity between organizations (e.g., Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009; Beckert, 2010; Dacin, Goodstein & Scott, 2002; Garud, Hardy & Maguire, 2007; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Oliver, 1992; Weik, 2011). Hence, neo-institutionalism could provide an interesting framework for examining the possibility of working life change through work organization programmes.

To date, even the most comprehensive and ambitious analyses of work organization development programmes and strategies (see above) have not made much use of

this branch of research. Building new bridges between two previously distinctive discourses, i.e., research on working life change, workplace innovations and work organization development programmes, on the one hand, and neo-institutional theory, on the other hand, can be considered the main scientific contribution of this paper. Drawing implications for how to build better development programmes based on such bridging can be considered the main practical contribution of this paper.

This paper starts with a description of the concept of work organization development programme. This is followed by a presentation of a framework for analysing the possibility of working life change supported by work organization development programmes. Thereafter, I will make suggestions on how to make use of the framework in the design of programmes.

What are work organization development programmes?

Development programmes have been a widely used "soft" form of regulation to promote working life reform in different countries. A „work organization development programme" is understood here to mean three things: first, development is guided by a shared framework that applies to several work organizations simultaneously; second, the content of the framework has been accepted by management and staff of the work organizations in question and other major stakeholder groups, such as policy-makers, social partners, and researchers, consultants and other experts; and third, the involved work organizations engage in exchange of information, interaction and cooperation (Alasoini, 2008). This definition is quite broad, and programmes may differ significantly from one another with regard to these key features. Programmes may also differ from each other in many other respects (e.g., Gustavsen, 2006).

The purpose of work organization development programmes is to promote desired lines of development in working life, such as improvements in productivity and quality of working life, and to produce innovations that renew working life, in a planned, systematic and organised manner based on broad cooperation between different types of actors. As such, work organization development programmes' main aim is not geared towards micro-level (company- or organization-level) changes. Such micro-level changes can also be achieved through individual development projects.

The minimum targets of any work organizational development programme would be clearly distinguishable positive externalities in the form of new ideas, knowledge and network relations, which can act as sources of insight, inspiration and encouragement among a larger number of work organizations and which can lead to cumulative innovations among them. Cumulative innovations can, at best, lead to broader macro-level changes that manifest themselves as new approaches or practices on the industry, sector, region or even the national level.

Different stakeholders have different roles in work organization development programmes. These roles can be examined using the triple helix concept, which is derived from innovation research (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). This concept refers to the view that the most effective way to generate new innovative solutions is based on learning and the enrichment of knowledge through cooperation between industry, universities and government.

The triple helix concept primarily describes the industrial environment, with a focus on technological innovations. However, in the case of workplace innovations, a broader framework comprising more parties and more interactive relationships is usually needed. The expanded triple helix model that is characteristic of work organization development differs from the traditional, narrower model in at least four ways (Ramstad, 2008).

First, the expanded model includes not only companies but also public-sector workplaces and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Indeed, the public sector may, in some cases, be ahead of the private sector in adopting new organizational and human resource management practices.

Second, in addition to universities and research institutes, the expanded model includes other educational institutions and intermediate organizations, such as consultancies and development agencies. Workplace innovations are context-dependent, and their promotion depends on external experts that can commit to long-term cooperative relations with businesses and can communicate effectively with management and personnel on the basis of shared tacit knowledge.

Third, the expanded triple helix concept includes labour market organizations as well as public authorities. The potential for promoting workplace innovations is crucially

dependent on how institutionalised industrial relations are and how capable labour market organizations are to engage in open dialogue.

Finally, whereas the traditional triple helix model discusses three types of relationships, the expanded model addresses the importance of a more varied range of relationships.

Framework for analysing the possibility of working life change

In this paper, I present a theoretical framework for analysing the possibility of working life change supported by work organization development programmes in three consecutive steps. Each of them draws on different aspects of the neo-institutionalist approach. First, I conceptualise working life as an institutionalised entity. Second, I combine these concepts and insights with studies on institutional entrepreneurship. Third, I apply the multi-level perspective to transitions.

Working life as an institutionalised entity

The American historian Thomas Hughes (1994) has conceptualised technological progress as the development of ”technological systems” instead of that of individual technologies. In his thinking, these systems comprise a number of intertwining and complex cultural, social and technological phenomena whose mutual interaction aims at particular outcomes, such as energy production, road traffic or health care. By utilizing this framework, it is also possible to examine working life (at the national, regional, sectoral or industry level) as an entity that comprises a number of “technological systems”. These systems concern, for example, how work is led, managed and organised; how decisions about the terms and conditions of employment are made; how employees’ skills and competences at work are developed; how employees’ health is protected; and how their well-being at work is promoted.

Different institutions, organizations and professions play an important role in the development of technological systems. Technological systems are relatively open to changes in the early stages of their development but become increasingly institutionalised as they mature (i.e., as they grow and become more complex), making it increasingly difficult to reform them. Hughes (1994) describes “a

technological momentum" phase, after which, the system starts to function like a material determinant of social reality, i.e., the system is going to take on a life of its own. Technological momentum does not mean that any leeway for different solutions, for example, at the individual workstation, workplace, company or company-to-company network level within a system disappears. It simply means that it is easier to experiment with and introduce new practices at the level of individual work organizations than to break institutionalised practices at the level of the whole industry.

It is possible to draw three main conclusions from the above framework regarding the potential to reform working life. First, working life and all technological systems that influence it become increasingly institutionalised as they mature and begin to function like any material phenomenon. For example, in most advanced industrial nations, especially the post-WWII era represented a period of strong institutionalization of working life in the form of stricter labour legislation, expanded regulation through collective bargaining and increasingly bureaucratic management systems and forms of work organization in accordance with the needs and logic of Fordist mass production. Second, a highly institutionalised working life and its technological systems enable very different manifestations. The lower the level of the unit in question, the greater the leeway (see above). The third conclusion concerns the potential to change working life. The more mature the system, the more difficult it is to change the system from the bottom up. It is difficult to change a mature and institutionalised system from the level of an individual work organization or any individual actor/project.

Work organization development programmes as (potential) institutional entrepreneurs

To bring about a change in a highly institutionalised working life and its technological systems, there are two major strategic options available.

The first of these is to build as large a coalition as possible, including key institutions and organizations, in support of change. A large coalition is in many cases necessary but not sufficient for success. As Leonardi and Barley (2010) note, the institutional dynamics of mature systems typically strive to maintain the status quo rather than to change it (or at least avoid radical change). Sociological research has distinguished

different mechanisms of institutional isomorphism based on the collective rationality that encourages institutional actors (e.g., companies, public institutions, labour market organizations, research units, educational units, and professional or other expert networks) to act in a consistent manner and to rule out alternative manners (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The second strategy is to construct a new competing solution to the existing technological system. This requires a paradigmatic rethinking. For example, in the case of working life change, a radical paradigmatic rethinking could entail a whole new conception of a "working life of the future" represented by the emerging "gig/sharing economy" (e.g., Grossman & Woyke, 2015; Sundararajan, 2016) concerning, how work is organised, how the terms and conditions of employment are determined and how individuals' economic livelihood is safeguarded.

Work organization development programmes can be seen as means to reform working life that optimally combine both strategic options, i.e., the building of broad coalitions and the search for new paradigmatic solutions. Coalition building is essentially a political task. The programme owners must have the capacity to attract various stakeholders, for example, by creating new trust and cooperative relations or by developing existing relations. The search for new paradigmatic alternatives is primarily an explorative task. The programme owners must have the capacity to launch processes, in which research can play an important role, for finding new insights and workable solutions to meet future challenges.

Programmes that are able to effectively perform both the political task and the explorative task can be described as "institutional entrepreneurs". The concept of institutional entrepreneur refers to change agents who initiate changes that break with the prevailing institutional logic within a given context by actively participating in the implementation of these changes through the active mobilization of resources (Battilana et al., 2009; Garud et al., 2007; Weik, 2011). In the case of work organization development programmes, this means an ability to attract a large number of various stakeholders to join forces in the search for new paradigmatic alternatives to existing established managerial, organizational or other work-related practices.

Work organization development programmes represent a collective or distributed agency that typically comprises many kinds of actors (the expanded triple helix

model). To succeed in this role, a programme must solve, or at least avoid, what in the social research literature has been called the "paradox of embedded agency" (Battilana et al., 2009; Garud et al., 2007; Weik, 2011). This paradox refers to the tension between institutional determinants and agency. In other words, how can programmes, which typically include the parties that also play a key role in the prevailing technological systems, become change agents who are capable and – more importantly – motivated to initiate changes that break with the institutional logic of these systems and to actively participate in the implementation of these changes?

The next two sub-sections will refine the conceptual field in which working life changes take place as well as position work organization development programmes within this field.

The multi-level perspective on working life change

Working life and its different systems form a complex entity. The multi-level perspective (MLP) on sociotechnical transitions is a middle-range theory (Merton, 1968) that has been developed for analysing the change dynamics of such complex systems. So far, the MLP has been used mostly to analyse changes in infrastructure systems, such as energy, transport or food production, but conceptually, it could be applied to almost any type of complex social system (Weber & Rohracher, 2012). The MLP combines elements of different approaches (Geels, 2010), taking a fresh look at the "paradox of embedded agency".

By applying the MLP to working life change, the different systems that characterize different aspects of working life can be conceptualised as sociotechnical regimes. Under normal conditions, sociotechnical regimes provide strong structuration characterized by stabilized rules and established social networks, which make it difficult to deviate from mainstream practice. Sociotechnical transitions refer to changes from one sociotechnical regime to another. Characteristics of such transitions are a long time-span, non-linearity, an interplay between social and technological phenomena and processes at different levels, and the need for system innovations and broad acceptance among key actors (Geels, 2004; Geels & Schot, 2007; Smith et al., 2005).

According to the MLP, sociotechnical transitions occur through interaction between new niche-innovations, external pressures that landscape changes bring to bear on existing regimes and internal tensions within the regimes. When applied to working life change, niche-innovations refer to workplace innovations that question certain routines adopted by key actors of sociotechnical regimes, concerning, for example, how work is managed and organised. The sociotechnical landscape forms an exogenous environment in which economic, technological, political, social, cultural, demographic, etc. changes beyond the direct influence of regime actors or niche innovation actors take place.

In contrast to sociotechnical regimes, niche-innovations experience weak structuration characterized by poorly articulated structures and small and precarious social networks. Competition between niche-innovations and institutionalised mainstream practices that are supported by the prevailing sociotechnical regimes is based not only on the features of the niche-innovations and mainstream practices but also on the features of the institutional environments in which they operate. For this reason, it is difficult even for the most promising niche-innovations to develop into mainstream practices without simultaneous and favourable landscape changes and/or the simultaneous opening up of the prevailing regimes to change. According to Geels and Schot (2007, p. 406), the regimes are never fully impervious to change but can be described under normal conditions as "dynamically stable".

The MLP has been used in innovation studies both as a tool for understanding the dynamics of sociotechnical transitions and for managing such transitions. The rich literature on the subject developed over the past 20 years provides many detailed conceptualizations and models of the dynamics at and between the three different levels (i.e., niche-innovations, regimes and landscape) as well as tools for managing these dynamics (e.g., Van den Bosch, 2010). Here, I limit my review of how the MLP can help us to better understand the possibility of working life change supported by work organization development programmes.

Geels and Schot distinguish five alternative transition pathways of sociotechnical regimes (Table 1).

Table 1
Typology of Transition Pathways (adapted from Geels & Schot, 2007)

	Reproduction	Reconfiguration	Transformation	Substitution	De-alignment and Re-alignment
External landscape pressure for change	No	Low	Moderate	Much	Much
Availability of radical niche-innovation	Yes or no	Yes	No	Yes	Not in the beginning, but multiple competing innovators emerge
Possibility of break-through for such innovation	Little chance	Existing symbiotic innovations are adpoted by the regime	No	An existing innovation breaks through	One of the emerging innovations breaks through after experi-mentation and compe-tition
Regime transition pathway	Incremental change within existing trajec-tory	Substantial change in architecture	Cumulative adjustments and reorientation towards new trajectory	Replacement of the old regime with the new one	Erosion of the old regime, emerging of a new regime after a period of time
Key actors in tran-sition	Regime actors	Regime actors and suppliers of the component niche- in-novations	Regime actors and outside pressure groups	Suppliers of the niche-innovation	Suppliers of the emerging niche- inno-vations

The first of these is **reproduction**. In the absence of any external landscape pressure to change, the regime reproduces itself only through incremental changes despite the availability of advanced radical niche-innovations.

The second line of development can be described as **reconfiguration**. This pathway differs from the previous pathway in that the available niche-innovations are in a symbiotic relation to the prevailing regime, which facilitates their adoption by the regime. However, the adoption requires changes in the regime architecture.

In **transformation**, a gradual but permanent change in the landscape, in the absence of an available advanced niche-innovation, forces the regime to renew itself. Change happens slowly, but, as it matures, it leads to a distinctly new kind of development path. Although no single promising niche-innovation exists in transformation,

the regime may nonetheless be inspired, albeit in a watered-down form, by niche-innovations that are still in their germ form.

In **substitution**, the regime faces strong external landscape pressure in a situation in which radical niche-regimes are available. Consequently, a new kind of regime replaces the former.

The fifth potential pathway is **de-alignment and re-alignment**. It differs from the previous pathway in that radical niche-regimes do not initially exist, but they develop through experimentation and competition. The former regime gradually collapses, and the new regime is able to emerge only after a period of experimentation and competition.

Positioning work organization development programmes in the framework

The multi-level perspective helps to deepen our understanding of why the modification of practices in working life is so difficult to achieve through the actions of individual work organizations, other individual actors or even networks of these actors alone. According to the framework, even the most promising workplace (niche-) innovations do not easily break through and diffuse among a larger number of work organizations without favourable framework conditions created by tensions within the regimes or supporting changes in the external landscape.

As changes in the external landscape are, by definition, beyond the direct influence of actors, two possible policy approaches remain through which regime-level change can be promoted (Kivimaa & Kern, 2016). The first approach is to destabilize the dominant regime. Regime destabilization can take place, for example, through regulatory changes and control policies, questioning the cognitive and normative basis of its guiding rules, reducing support for dominant regime technologies and practices, or bringing about changes in supportive social networks and replacement of key actors. The second approach is to help niche-innovations to develop into competing regimes. Critical fields of action concerning niche development include developing the contents of the niche-innovations, clarifying the expectations and visions related to them, building social networks and enrolling more actors in support of such innovations, and organizing supportive learning processes.

Work organization development programmes usually resort mainly to "soft" forms of regulation, ranging from indirect means such as providing general frameworks, recommendations and "good practice" guides to more direct means such as project funding. Many of these means are more suitable to niche-innovation support than regime destabilization. However, depending on the type of transition pathway, programmes can play a variety of roles and operate with a variety of policy mixes.

Reproduction and reconfiguration do not necessarily require the support of an in-depth search for new solutions from the programmes, because radical niche-innovations already exist (reconfiguration) or are not needed (reproduction) and the external landscape is fairly stable and thus predictable. This means that programmes can be very development-oriented, focusing on the dissemination of already existing solutions in a larger number of work organizations and helping them to find workable tailored applications of these solutions to their own needs. However, reconfiguration requires more active network building to support successful change compared with reproduction.

In transformation, new development paths that lead towards a totally new trajectory must be actively sought. This emphasizes the role of research and other forms of exploration. Successful transformation also requires a significant investment in the construction of networks and cooperative relations.

In substitution, an existing niche-innovation develops into a competing niche-regime and replaces the old regime. Programmes can accelerate this process both by regime destabilization and through activities that help to disseminate the adoption of new practices.

In de-alignment and re-alignment, in contrast, new niche-innovations compete with each other in the event of the dissolution of the old regime. Here, programmes can play a versatile role by supporting experimentation with potential new solutions through both research and development in cooperation with the underlying networks of these solutions.

Summary of the framework

This section has conceptualised working life as an institutionalised entity and work organization development programmes as potential change agents by framing them as

institutional entrepreneurs. Based on this framework, the potential of a programme to fulfil the role of an institutional entrepreneur is influenced by the combined effect of factors at three levels: the availability of perfectible workplace (niche-) innovations, the degree of structuration of the sociotechnical regime underlying prevailing workplace practices and the state of the external landscape. A typology of five different pathways for working life change was constructed and various potential roles that programmes can take within these pathways were distinguished. Next, this article deepens the discussion on this topic by providing a framework for analysing external programme effects in greater detail.

Programme effects as institutionally framed

According to many evaluation studies that have been conducted in different countries, work organization development programmes have often been successful in producing significant improvements in productivity and quality of working life in individual work organizations that have participated in publicly supported development projects (e.g., Gustavsen, Hofmaier, Ekman Philips & Wikman, 1996; Keuken, 2010; Lee & Lee, 2008; Oeij, De Vroome, Bolland, Gründemann & Van Teeffelen, 2014; Ramstad, 2014). However, although the success rate of demonstration (pilot) projects in such programmes is generally good, the experiences of many programmes indicate that the "good practices" that these projects create spread poorly (e.g., Arnkil, 2004; Brulin & Svensson, 2012; Fricke, 2003; Gustavsen, 2008; Qvale, 2002; Riegler, 2008; Steiber & Alänge, 2013). There are many factors, which may explain this paradoxical situation faced by most work organization programmes. Table 2 summarizes key reasons for this poor dissemination by comparing the divergent conditions for project success between piloting workplaces and "second wave" adopters.

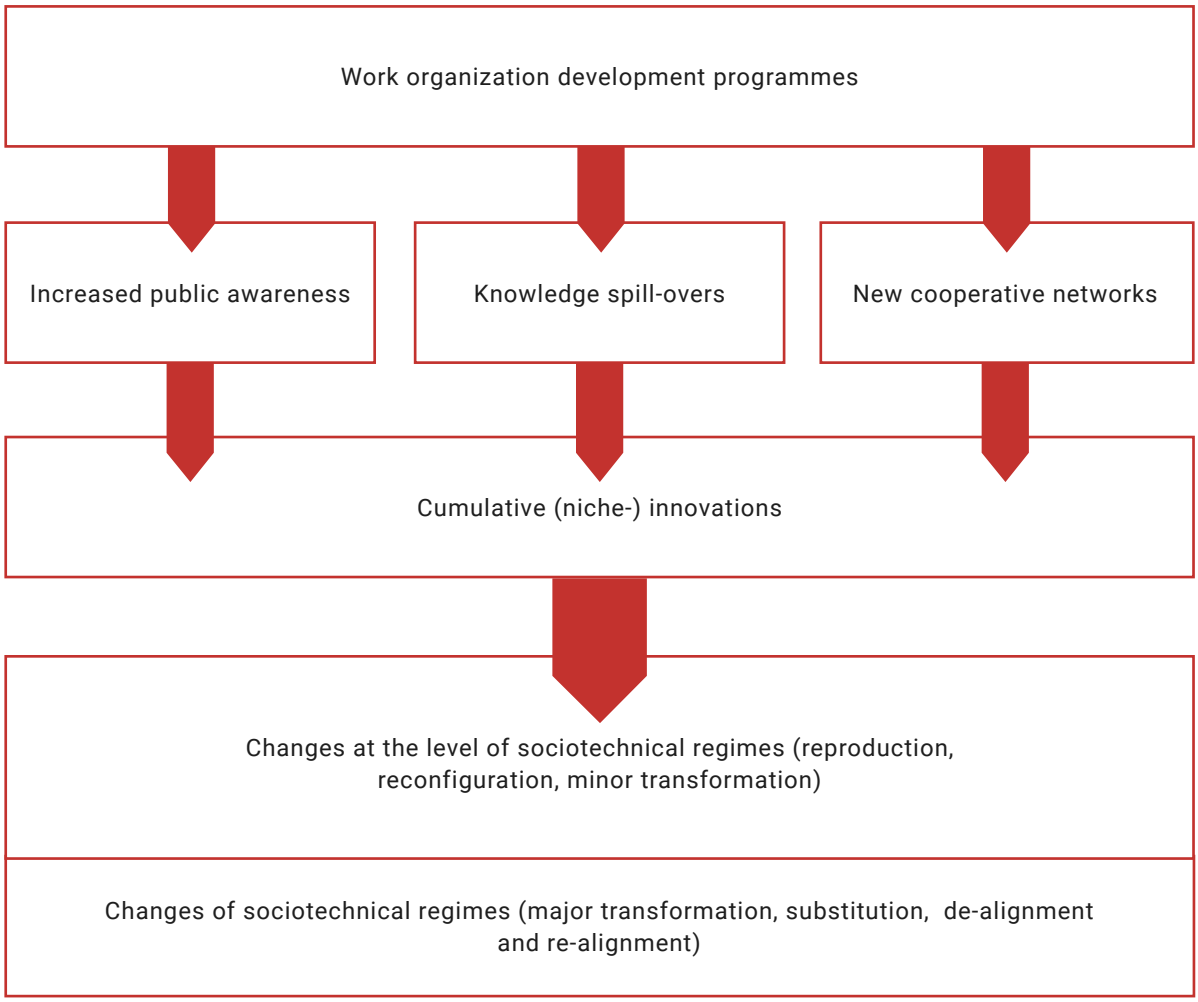
Table 2
Conditions for Project Success: Piloting Workplaces Versus "Second Wave" Adopters (adapted from Alasoini, 2006)

	Piloting workplaces	Second wave adopters
Resources to implement the project	Exceptional resources provided by the programme in terms of funding and expertise	Depends on the financial situation and the extent of management commitment of the adopter
Opportunities for tailor-made solutions within the project	Extensive target-specific tailoring possible	Depends on resources given to the project and the development expertise of internal or external change agents
Development level of the workplace	Progressive workplace that often has experience with both self-motivated development and cooperation with external experts in development	Typically, a follower or a laggard that has less experience with self-motivated development and cooperation with external experts in development
Commitment of participants to implement the project	High legitimacy and transparency of the project and high level of commitment from participants to implement the project as well as possible	"Programme boost", which would enhance legitimacy, transparency and high level of commitment from participants, is lacking
Motivation of the participants to rate the project as successful	Hawthorne effect possible: participants improve their performance and/or give positive evaluations of the project because they have received special attention	Hawthorne effect missing: depends very much on realization of the process (how?) and context (why?) dimensions of innovation

However, the legitimacy of publicly supported development programmes cannot be derived primarily from the success of individual demonstration projects. Rather, it must be justified by a variety of positive externalities produced by the intervention. Work organization development programmes in various countries have generated new and wide-spread knowledge, given rise to new cooperative networks and increased awareness of the possibility of alternative solutions, which, in turn, has contributed to increased public awareness and discourse on working life reform. Gustavsen (2003; 2004) speaks of the need for such programmes to work as mechanisms that can be used to catalyse social movements aimed at making working life more democratic. The challenge is thus to generate parallel and interacting processes of change in a great number of work organizations. In Gustavsen's view, the growth or strengthening of such a movement can, in itself, be considered an indication of a programme's success.

By making use of the MLP, it is possible to build a more structured framework for analysing external effects of work organization development programmes at various levels (Figure 1). Besides changes at the level of individual work organizations, programmes should be able to contribute to increased awareness, knowledge spillovers and the emergence of new cooperative networks around perfectible workplace innovations. This is close to what van den Bosch (2010) calls "broadening of niche-innovation". Gustavsen's characterization of programmes as mechanisms for social movements implies that programmes should be able to produce, in addition to this, mutually supportive cumulative innovations that embody as new practices in a larger number of work organizations than those directly involved in programme-supported activities. Using MLP terminology, this process can be called "scaling-up of niche-innovation" (Van den Bosch, 2010).

Figure 1. External effects of different levels of work organization development programmes



At best, programme impacts occur as changes at the level of regimes or even changes of regimes at the national, regional, sectoral or industry level. Changes at the level of regimes refer to reproduction and reconfiguration pathways, whereas changes of regimes refer to substitution and de-alignment and re-alignment. Transformation represents some kind of middle ground between these two types of change. Changes at the level of regimes refer to change dynamics that largely proceed along predictable trajectories and do not undermine the legitimacy of and power relations between regime actors. Changes of regimes, in contrast, mean more radical changes of trajectories and within the group of key regime actors. "Changes" refer here to processes of adoption or breakthrough of new workplace innovations that can manifest themselves, for example, as new kinds of doctrines in management and work organization, new ways of working, new paradigmatic approaches in workplace health promotion or new kinds of normative expectations concerning employees' opportunities to exert influence at work.

The ability of programmes to produce changes at the level of regimes or changes of the regimes themselves is affected not only by the characteristics of the programmes per se but, according to the MLP, also by external pressure brought to bear on regimes by landscape changes and internal tensions within regimes. The possibility of breakthrough for programme-supported niche-innovations is dependent, among others, on economic, operational, social and other benefits produced by these niche-innovations and the extent to which these niche-innovations support or instead call into question the premises of the prevailing regimes.

Neo-institutional theory and research have developed insights that help us to better understand the change dynamics of regimes. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have identified three mechanisms of institutional isomorphism that can act as significant converging forces for work organizations and thus prevent a wider breakthrough of niche-innovations and the evolution of such innovations into new mainstream practices (Table 3). Underlying this view is a belief that organizational life is driven not only by economic rationality but also by powerful tendencies to strengthen the organization's political and institutional legitimacy and to demonstrate its social fitness.

Table 3
Three Mechanisms of Institutional Isomorphism and Key Actors (adapted from DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 and Paauwe, 2004)

Mechanism	Source	Key Actors
Coercive institutional isomorphism	Results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on work organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations of the society within which work organizations function.	Governments, labour market organizations and work councils
Mimetic institutional isomorphism	Results from a standard response to uncertainty and the following of trends and hypes which, when applied, demonstrate that the work organizations in question are at least trying to improve their operation.	Competitors and other companies and workplaces
Normative institutional isomorphism	Results from the professionalization of occupations as part of their collective struggle to define the conditions and methods of their work and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy.	Educational and training institutes and professional and occupational associations and networks

It is interesting that the same institutions of the expanded triple helix model that are seen as key promoters of workplace innovation may, under certain circumstances, also act as significant impediments to workplace innovation activities. This inherently contradictory relationship of the various actors towards the development of workplace innovations is rarely explicitly recognized in evaluation studies and other analyses of work organization development programmes.

Although governments and labour market organizations may be active funders and promoters of workplace innovations in work organization development programmes, the labour legislation and collective agreements supported by these actors may include stipulations that seriously discourage innovative behaviour in working life (an example of coercive institutional isomorphism). Work organizations within the same industry may be important sources of learning for each other, but in certain cases, rather than promoting the emergence of novel, unique and innovative solutions, this learning may result in the spread of increasingly consolidated industry-wide "best practices" (an example of mimetic institutional isomorphism). Universities and other educational institutes may enhance the skills and competences of company managers

and other key occupational groups in different functional areas, which may ultimately have the effect of increasing the normative pressure among these groups to think alike and decreasing the incidence of deviant behaviour (an example of normative institutional isomorphism).

To conclude, this section has constructed a framework for distinguishing programme effects at different levels. Depending on the ambition level of a programme, the MLP provides various evidence-based principles and techniques, which can be directly applied to work organization development programmes in an effort to overcome the effects of institutional isomorphism.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper had two main objectives. First, the paper sought to build new bridges between research on working life change, workplace innovations and work organization development programmes and neo-institutional theory. A framework for analysing the possibility of working life change supported by work organization development programmes was constructed. Second, the paper sought to draw implications for how to build better programmes based on the framework. In more general terms, the paper can be considered an attempt to demonstrate how sociological theorizing can contribute to practice.

Four major theory-based contributions that have practical relevance for designers and implementers of work organization development programmes can be distinguished.

First, the paper further develops the MLP on transitions and the typology of transition pathways and applies this framework to outline the possibility of working life change supported by work organization programmes. As shown above, the possibility of change should be analysed as a dynamic interplay of niche-innovations, sociotechnical regimes and the sociotechnical landscape. To build development programmes that have the ability to bring about cumulative workplace innovations in a large number of work organizations or changes at the level of regimes or even changes of regimes, a realistic analysis of the existing sociotechnical regime, landscape and the most promising niche-innovations is needed. Programme designers and implementers must also have an understanding of how to make use of this information for niche development and/or regime destabilization. For this purpose, the studies on both the

MLP and institutional entrepreneurship can be of great help. They have produced, for example, conceptualizations of types of landscape change and coordinating components of regimes, tools for strategic niche management, lists of distinctive characteristics of transition experiments and models of the process of institutional entrepreneurship (e.g., Battilana et al., 2009; Geels, 2004; Geels & Schot, 2007; Van den Bosch, 2010).

Second, the paper directs attention to the fact that the positive results of individual pilot or demonstration projects in publicly supported development programmes are often achieved in an environment that is artificial in many respects (Table 2). Unawareness of the artificial nature of demonstration projects can lead to unrealistic expectations and undefined and under-resourced strategies in terms of diffusion of innovations. Programme designers and implementers should take this artificiality as their starting point and work out strategies to narrow the chasm between the conditions faced by piloting workplaces and "second wave" adopters. There are different strategic options available for programme designers and implementers to achieve this. For example, they can produce more convincing evidence-based argumentation through rigorous analyses of demonstration projects in terms of "what works under which conditions and why". Another option is to try to bridge the social and cultural gap between the creation and reception stages of new practices by enriching knowledge from demonstration projects. A third option is to use learning networks in which the generation of new practices results from co-creation by several actors (e.g., Alasoini, 2011; Gustavsen et al., 2001; Steiber & Alänge, 2013).

The third practical contribution concerns the breakdown of external effects of work organization development programmes. Figure 1 makes a distinction between six different effects. The breakdown can be used as a tool for setting programme goals and as a benchmark for monitoring and assessing the overall success and social effectiveness of programmes at different stages of their life cycle. Using this kind of theoretical framing forces programme designers and implementers to take a stand on crucial matters concerning, for example, the target level of the programme and the means and milestones to achieve the objectives.

Finally, by drawing on the idea of institutional isomorphism that stems from neo-institutional theory, the paper highlights the inherently contradictory relationship

of the various actors involved in the expanded triple helix cooperation towards the promotion of workplace innovations and working life reform in general – an issue rarely seriously discussed in the context of work organization development efforts.

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