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Language and Hierarchy

Abstract

Despite of the fact that management sciences have experienced significant influences from human sciences along with the so-called "cultural turn", the link between specific disciplines, e.g. between linguistics and organization studies, has still not been specified precisely enough. While, for example, new institutional theory found a concept for informal and mental processes of institutionalization, the corresponding branches in the sociology of knowledge have only occasionally formulated perspectives on management up to now. While economic theory has adopted the concept of performative action (a concept which originally comes from pragma-linguistics), linguistic studies have not been able to develop a common definition of the organization by now. An ongoing discourse about the "gap" between micro and macro is constituting the arena of discussion in social sciences. In face of its methodological issues Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) stated the need of an understanding of the organization as an entity which is "grounded in action".

The present contribution is intending to bridge this gap by having a closer look on the relationship between "language" and "hierarchy". It argues that the hierarchical structuring in an organization is merely the result of communicative action, to a much higher degree than we would normally suppose. Hierarchical structures are grounded in a social communicative action which makes sense in an organization in very specific, e.g. bureaucratic ways. The social conviction or the consensus that these structures rely on are, nevertheless, of a non formal and mental nature. They form part of a metaphorical space where the members of the organization share the social-cognitive elements of their daily lives, the ideological underpinnings of their beliefs, and the frameworks for their social-expressive communicative styles. Yet even if hierarchy is necessary for an organization, it is as well part of the bureaucratic structures that hinder organizations from being innovative (Simon 2007). I want to argue, as a consequence, that management studies should develop

a conceptualization of pre-supposed or pre-cognitive levels of hierarchy in order to discover new innovation potentials.

References

Fairhurst, Gail T./Putnam, Linda (2004): Organizations as Discursive Constructions. In: Communication Theory 14-1, 5-26.

Simon, Fritz B. (2009): Einführung in die systemische Organisationstheorie. Heidelberg.