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**Managing Culture: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Narrative Turn in Business Consulting**

**Abstract**

A so-called 'culture of success' is what most managers today seek to establish. Why? Because corporate culture is an important determinant of success and, in turn, success is reflected in a vivid and innovative corporate culture. How do managers learn about their corporate culture? They listen to the stories of their employees and stakeholders. Do they really listen themselves? Most often not. This is where business consultants come in who increasingly engage in corporate culture consulting. They listen to the narratives the people in organizations tell in order to then tell the management which tools there are to change corporate culture and to not forget about culture in the process of change. Culture thus turns into a business case at the intersection of management studies and the study of culture.

Especially in the past decade, business consulting has moved away from merely quantitative analyses toward integrating qualitative research tools. One of the most prominent methods is storytelling. The practice of listening to and telling stories to assess and develop adequate management measures to support a successful corporate culture indicates the narrative turn in management studies. For scholars working in the field of cultural studies, this move toward narration as the starting point for cultural analysis might sound familiar. Yet, the familiarity also provokes critical reflection. How can culture become a success factor? Is it possible to strategically shape and/or optimize culture in order to ensure economic success? In how far do management approaches to storytelling overlap with narrative theory and key concepts of cultural studies?

The paper provides an interdisciplinary analysis of the so-called narrative turn in management studies. The first section examines the theoretical trajectories of storytelling approaches in the context of corporate culture and strategic

management. The analytical section then reveals the storyline of those who consult managers on matters of culture. Based on a close-reading analysis of the websites of selected business consulting firms, the study explores overlapping and diverging definitions of central concepts such as culture and narration in both management practice and the study of culture in the humanities. The analysis can thus be termed interdisciplinary in a twofold way: 1) the hermeneutic method of close-reading is applied to a business context. 2) the definitions of central concepts revealed in the business context are then transferred back to the theoretical underpinnings of narrative theory in cultural studies. Eventually, the the study thus seeks to indicate the conceptual potential of interdisciplinary engagement between management and culture, between practice and scholarship.