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Adoption Rationales of New Management Practices

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Abstract

This study considers that multiple and diverse rationales, including rational, emotional and socially conditioned responses can influence the adoption of management practices. The study includes four case studies in order to subject the adoption rationales that Sturdy (2004) posits to empirical inquiry and to explore the impacts of these differing rationales on characteristics of the subsequent adoption. The findings show that five of the six rationales Sturdy proposes are empirically identifiable. The findings also suggest that, subject to the exploratory nature of the study, earlier adoption of management practices is associated with political and psychodynamic rationales, consistent with notions of being seen to adopt new ways of working. The findings also suggest that the political and dramaturgical rationales are associated with more rapid adoption due to influential individuals or groups acting as champions. Whilst Sturdy proposes his rationales as a simple list, the findings of this study suggest a more complex relationship between the rationales. The study contributes to the growing body of literature that addresses the important topic of management practices, particularly those that provide an expository consideration.

Keywords: management practices; adoption rationales; management fashions; management innovations; management fads

Adoption Rationales of New Management Practices

Introduction

The adoption and use of new management practices by organizations is the subject of much attention by management researchers (Battisti and Iona, 2009; Bloom and Van Reenen, 2007; Chen and Huang, 2009; Constantine, Ruwadi, and Wine, 2009; ESRC/AIM, 2009; Lesure, Bauer, Birdi, Neely, and Denyer, 2004; Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009; Soto Chalhoub, 2009; Wu, 2010; Zajac, Golden, and Shortell, 1991). These studies associate the adoption of such practices to innovativeness, which they view as an imperative for organizational and national economic prosperity and wealth creation. For example, Bloom and Van Reenen (2007) and Mol and Birkinshaw (2009) find that management practice adoption associates with superior firm performance, and the review of UK competitiveness undertaken by Porter and Ketels (2003) suggests that low levels of adoption of what they term best practice is a contributor to the UK productivity gap. However, business commentators including management academics often criticise managers for adopting new practices, pejoratively referring to the new approaches as management fads or fashions (Abrahamson, 1996).

The association between the adoption of new management practices and both firm and national economic performance underlines the importance of this area of study to both practicing managers and academics. However, Mol and Birkinshaw (2009. p.1269) observe that scant research supports this topic, particularly lacking are "studies looking specifically at the firm as the level of analysis, with a view to understanding the causes or consequences of its implementation of new practices". Battisti and Iona (2009) find that traditional economic factors such as firm size, ownership and market competition can only explain a limited proportion of the variability of the adoption of management practices across firms, leading them to suggest it is necessary to consider alternative explanations, including those that

question "the firm's rationality in its adoption choices" (p.1338). This paper begins to address these calls by exploring basic questions in this domain: can different rationales that influence the adoption of new management practices be observed and identified in practice and, assuming that they can be identified, do differing rationales affect subsequent adoption? Damampour and Schneider (2006) report that the context of adoption of management practices influences the phases of adoption. Similarly, the rationale for adoption may influence the characteristics of the subsequent adoption.

Sturdy (2004) proposes six diverse rationales that he posits may, either separately or in combination, influence the adoption of new management ideas or practices. These rationales are diverse and cover rational, emotional and socially conditioned responses. Whilst intuitively appealing, these rationales are not subject to empirical inquiry. This study seeks to empirically identify the rationales that Sturdy proposes. The study then investigates the influence that the different rationales, or combinations of rationales, have on key characteristics of the subsequent adoption.

Identifying the rationales in practice and recognising their influence on adoption is important both for practising managers and those researching the domain of management practices. If managers can recognize the often complex rationales for adoption, and understand how these may affect subsequent adoption, they can plan and manage adoption accordingly. For those researching the domain, this study moves beyond the simple view of the adoption of management practices as a rational and cognitive process that characterizes many of the existing studies in this domain (e.g. Ehigie and McAndrew, 2005) to a truer, more complex view that combines rational, emotional and socially conditioned responses. The link between adoption rationale and adoption characteristics provides a fuller understanding of the "causes and consequences" of management practice adoption that Mol and Birkinshaw (2009, p.1269) exhort researchers to undertake.

The paper commences with a review of current literature relating to the adoption of new management practices. The study adopts a multiple case study approach that includes four case studies. The paper presents a brief summary of the four cases and then presents a discussion of the findings of the study. The paper concludes by proposing a model that derives from the findings of the study.

Management Practices

Research in the domain of management practices explores the adoption, adaptation, use and discontinuance of administrative and management tools and frameworks. Kaluzny (1982. p.254) refers to these as practices that "affect the nature, location, quality and/or quantity of information that is available in the decision-making process". Management practices may be new-to-the-state-of-the art or new to the organization (Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009). This study adopts the latter definition. Whichever definition researchers apply, at the point of first adoption the tools and frameworks are new to the organization. Hence the wider field of innovation studies is highly relevant to the field of management practices. Much literature within the wider field of innovation understandably addresses the important areas of product, service or change innovation, with fewer studies exploring aspects relating to management practices.

Lesure et al (2004, p.169) note that studies use a "remarkably diverse terminology" to refer to the domain of management practices. Many of the earliest studies use the term best practice (Porter and Ketels, 2003) or world class (e.g. Schonberger, 1986). Later authors, shunning the notion of universality implicit in the term best practice and recognising the importance of context in the effective adoption and use of management practices, use terms such as appropriate practice (Bessant, Kaplinsky, and Lamming, 2003) and promising practices (Lesure et al, 2004). Similarly, in order to differentiate their work from that

addressing product innovations, some authors use the terms administrative (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006; Ravichandran, 2000); process (Damanpour, 2009; Davenport, 1993); organizational (Battisti and Stoneman, 2009); management (Birkinshaw, Hamel, and Mol, 2008; Birkinshaw and Mol, 2006) or managerial (Abrahamson, 1991) innovations. This study adopts the contingent view of management practices that is the appropriate practice and how managers adopt that practice will be dependent on contextual factors. This study therefore adopts the more impartial term, management practice that is in current use (ESRC/AIM, 2009; Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009).

The Life cycle of Management Practices

Various studies suggest management practices follow a life cycle model (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006; Ehigie and McAndrew, 2005; Etorre, 1997; Lesure et al, 2004; Swanson, 2001) similar to the diffusion of other types of innovations (Rogers, 1995). Several studies demonstrate this life cycle using citation counts (e.g. Ponzi and Koenig, 2002; Spell, 1999). Carson, Lanier, Carson, and Birkenmeier (1999) suggest the following stages in this life cycle: invention, acceptance, disenchantment and decline. These authors note that organizations are more likely to adopt an innovative practice in the invention stage or acceptance stage and abandon the practice in either of the latter two stages. However, laggard organizations may only begin to adopt a practice when innovator organizations are already abandoning the practice.

In addition to particular practices having an adoption life cycle when considered across all organizations, they also have an adoption life cycle within a single organization. Adoption starts with an initial comprehension stage, when the managers of an organization first learn about the practice and, importantly, how the practice might both address their needs and fit their organization. Next comes the decision to adopt, followed by

implementation which involves bringing the practice into use in the organization, often by making it the practice part of everyday routines. Finally, the organization may choose to abandon or discontinue use of the practice.

Rationales for Adoption

An important consideration in the adoption of innovations is the rationale underlying that adoption. In his conceptual study, Sturdy (2004) posits six rationales for the adoption of management ideas and practices, which he terms: the rational, psychodynamic, dramaturgical, political, cultural and institutional views. The following discussion provides an overview of each of the six rationales and considers how each relates to the adoption of management practices.

The rational view sees management ideas or practices as solutions to problems that employ methodical evaluation and is linked with prescriptive use of approaches such as formal planning, analytical tools and frameworks, metrics and targets (e.g. Daniel and Wilson, 2004). However, studies recognize that rationality is at best bounded (Chiles and McMackin, 1996) and specifying the nature of problems is notoriously difficult, challenging the simple notion of a rational approach producing the right solution. March (2006) observes that managers use a rational approach when dealing with problems that they perceive to be simple, which tends to lead to evolutionary exploitation (Hamel, 1996). In contrast they tend to draw on a wider range of rationales when perceived complexity increases, allowing more radical exploration.

Whilst the rational view sees managers as logical and in control, the psychodynamic view sees them as anxious and wanting to find ideas and practices that offer a sense of security or control (Gill and Whittle, 1992; Jackall, 1988). Sturdy also links this approach to competing psychological and social processes that span both autonomy and the safety of

belonging. Paradoxically this results in managers wanting to be seen to be using a new practice both before and at the same time as others. Psychodynamics accounts for the short life of many practices in that managers adopt them to address an anxiety, rather than to address an organizational need. The anxiety of these managers gives rise to various emotions in the individuals involved. Recent research shows that emotion influences entrepreneurial behaviours that are associated with the adoption of innovations (Foo, 2009; Grichnik, Smeja, and Welpe, 2010), supporting the notion that anxiety causes a departure from the rational model.

The dramaturgical or rhetorical view is concerned with the supply of management practices from suppliers such as consultants and academics and is particularly concerned with the presentation of those ideas including language, charisma and pervasiveness (Symon, 2008). Rhetoric is also applied to the process of adoption, as well as the content of innovations themselves. For example, Berggren (2004) questions the rhetoric surrounding the need for transnational innovation and global project teams in modern innovation management and Benders (1999) highlights the need to differentiate between rhetorical and substantive adoption of what he terms organization concepts. Studies exploring the role of rhetoric on adoption of innovations draw on the theory of impression management (Leiringer and Cardellino, 2008) and consider three core elements: emotional appeal, source credibility and logical proof, the former overlapping with the psychodynamic view and the latter with the rational view (Watson, 1994; Symon, 2008). Whilst the adoption of new ideas from outside the organization may be beneficial, the rhetorical view suggests managers as victims in that they simply adopt ideas without adaptation or translation. However, although observers often use the term rhetoric in a pejorative sense, rhetoric can be beneficial in providing a common language and understanding for communities involved in innovation (Upham, Rosenkopf, and Ungar, 2007).

The political view is broadly concerned with the adoption and use of new management practices to secure or further the power of individuals or groups. In its most extreme form, managers may adopt practices to further their position or career even if the idea is unsuitable or flawed (Watson, 1994). Such power-conscious individuals or groups are also associated with a distancing perspective. That is, they wish to set themselves apart from others and hence will seek to move on when a significant number of other organizations adopt the idea or practice (Grint, 1997). Political influence on innovation may occur at different levels in the organization and Frost and Egri (1991) provide a taxonomy of political strategies, related tactics and their likely location in the organization. Power may also influence elements of the innovation process. For example, Kimble, Grenier, and Goglio-Primard (2010) find that the role of brokers and the choice of boundary objects in innovation diffusion are political in nature. Benders (2002) notes that the call for strong champions to lead the adoption of innovations is a recognition of the political power necessary to address contingencies that arise during adoption and finds that a political dimension can contribute to successful adoption.

The cultural view considers the spread of management ideas across boundaries: geographic, sectoral, organizational or even functional, noting "local culture can act as a bridge or barrier to adoption" (Sturdy, 2004, p.163). Literature suggests that organizational culture has a significant impact on the ability to innovate (e.g. Ahmed, 1998; Frohman, 1998; Jassawalla and Sashittal, 2002; Martins and Terblanche, 2003) and the type of innovation possible (McLaughlin, Bessant, and Smart, 2008). However, Hookana (2008), in her study of the adoption of new public-management practices, finds that there is a two way interaction between organizational culture and innovation. Culture lays the foundation for how employees adopt and use innovations and, in turn, those innovations influence the culture of the organization. She also notes the existence of sub-cultures within organizations, and that

managers may mobilise thee sub-cultures as an aid or a barrier to the adoption of innovations. More than the other rationales, the cultural view influences how organizations adopt and operationalize a practice, rather than which practice they adopt, recognising the opportunity for local adaptation (Cerdin, 2003; Fenton O'Creevy, 2003; Hookana, 2008; Mamman, 2009).

The institutional view draws on ideas from institutional theory (Grewal and Dharwadkar, 2002; Myer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1987; Scott, 2001) to consider the adoption of management practices. Institutional theory suggests that, often to deal with uncertainty, organizations will tend to adopt the same structures and strategies and hence, over time, will tend to become similar or isomorphic (Hoffman, 1997; Zucker, 1987). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three isomorphic processes: coercive, mimetic and normative. However, these authors warn that the adoption of such practices may "make organizations more similar without making them more efficient" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.147). Similarly, Meyer and Rowan (1977) observe that adopters are more likely to adopt the practice because it confers legitimacy than it improves performance. Abrahamson and Rosenkopf (1993) draw on institutional theory to support their use of the term bandwagon pressure, and assert that the sheer number of organizations adopting an innovation can result in a pressure that causes other organizations to adopt, without evaluating the efficiency or return of the innovation.

Table 1 summarizes the six views and the previous studies that consider the role of individual rationales in the adoption of new management practices.

Table 1 here.

Previous studies tend to characterize a dichotomy between rational objectivity and the subjectivity of emotional or socially conditioned responses (e.g. Ansari and Euske, 1987; Boland and Pondy, 1983; Hopper and Powell, 1985; Redondo, Daniel, and Ward, 2009). Sturdy however posits that his diverse rationales are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that the adoption of ideas may be a complex and multi-dimensional, including a mixture of rationales. Extant studies explore relationships between characteristics of the adoption of management practices. For example, Ravichandran (2000) relates the rate of adoption with the intensity of adoption, or between antecedents and characteristics of adoption. Damampour and Schneider (2006) examine the relationships between environmental, organizational and management factors on the phases of adoption of management practices. Whilst previous studies explore individual rationales, this study represents the first to identify empirically the adoption rationales that Sturdy (2004) proposes. Identifying these in a single study allows the exploration of relationships between the rationales.

Research Questions

The research addresses two questions. Firstly, can the adoption rationales that Sturdy proposes be identified empirically in actual adoptions of management practices? Secondly, assuming the rationales can be identified, do differing adoption rationales, or combinations of rationales, influence the subsequent adoption of the management practice? The study explores the latter question using two characteristics: the time of adoption in the life cycle of the innovation and the rate of adoption by the organization.

Method

Individuals involved in the adoption of management practices, or other forms of innovations, may not be explicitly aware of the rationales that contribute to adoption. The

study therefore required a research method that can allow such implicit rationales to be uncovered. Survey based approaches often rely on predetermined items, which may be inconsistent with the terminology or experiences of respondents. Conversely if they employ open items, the reliability of interpretation becomes an issue. In contrast, the qualitative case study method allows those involved to tell their own narratives or "epilogues" (Dibbern, Winkler, and Heinzl, 2008, p.343) and allows the researcher to probe the responses given, ensuring understanding and allowing the opportunity for latent phenomena to be uncovered. It also allows examination of the issue of interest in its unique context, allowing the exploration of interrelationships between factors (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, and Yiu, 1999). Such studies are appropriate for exploratory studies, such as this, that produce propositions or models for further development and testing (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003).

The study adopts a theoretical approach to case selection. Many recent new management practices are organization-wide and managers are finding such practices most difficult to implement (Rigby, 2001). This perceived difficulty is likely to cause them to draw on a wider range of rationales than for simpler or more localised practices (March, 2006). This study therefore focuses on organizations that have recently adopted organization-wide practices. The study draws on four case studies of the adoption of management practices; three of which had adopted balanced scorecards (BSCs) and one that had adopted a program management office (PMO). The term PMO describes the formation of an organizational group, often by co-locating staff, to improve the management and coordination of the portfolio of projects across the organization (Project Management Institute, 2004; Office of Government Commerce, 2006).

Selection of similar practices allows for literal replication within the study, and selection of a different type allows for theoretical replication (Yin, 2003). After using the

innovation for a few years, one organization had discontinued its use of the BSC, thus also allowing the consideration of the discontinuance of a management practice. Consistent with the call of Mol and Birkinshaw (2009) for research at the firm or organizational level, the unit of analysis was adoption of the management practice within the case study organization. The four case study organizations are as follows:

- Retail Bank (RB) adopted a BSC and has since discontinued its use

- County Council (CC) adopted a BSC

- Hospital Trust (HT) adopted a BSC

- Police Force (PF) adopted a PMO.

Within each case study organization, the research team conducted interviews with a range of relevant staff, which included a mix of senior managers responsible for the decision to adopt and managers responsible for leading the implementation of the relevant practice. In total, the research team undertook15 in-depth interviews across the four case studies. Interviews lasted from one to four hours.

Consistent with other case-based research, the researchers used an interview schedule derived from the research questions and prior literature to guide the interview (Yin, 2003). The schedule questions were semi-structured in nature and probed areas such as who was involved in the decision to adopt the management practice in question, how was the decision made, the reasons for adoption and how the adoption proceeded, including when the organization both commenced and completed adoption and, if relevant, when and why the organization stopped using the practice.

The researchers recorded and transcribed the interviews. They coded the data using tabular layouts in a word processing package using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in which they disaggregated the data into categories and sub-categories, such as: role of internal actors (category): role of CEO (sub-category). Use of the word processing

package allowed a piece of coded text to be easily related back to its context in the full interview transcript. The researchers then compared the categories identified with the rationales that Sturdy proposes, which in turn allows for further refinement of the data categories, hence combining inductive and deductive steps in the data analysis process. The researchers also identified the semi-objective data from each case regarding time and rate of adoption.

The adoptions studied span a considerable time period (RB in 1995 to CC in 2008). Whilst this time span allowed the researchers to consider the complete lifecycle of the adoption by RB, the fact that the events in this case occurred some time ago could result in recollection biases by interviewees. The researchers undertook a number of actions in order to address such biases and to improve the internal validity of the study. Firstly they compared interview responses from the multiple respondents within each organization for inter-respondent consistency (Bryman, 2004; Dey, 1993). Where they identified inconsistencies they re-contacted interviewees and asked for clarification. The researchers also drew upon contemporaneous documentary information in order to support the interview data (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). For example, other researchers had written a case study about the adoption of the BSC by RB in 1999. The current study was able to access the original documentation from this early case study. In the case of the County Council (CC), since it is a public body, extensive documentation, such as the minutes of meetings where CC had discussed the adoption of the BSC, is publicly available. The researchers increased the internal validity of the study by initially coding the data independently in the analysis phase and then iteratively comparing and combining emerging findings.

Overview of Case Studies

This section contains a brief overview of the four case studies. The subsequent

sections contain further data and discussion of each of the studies.

Case 1: Retail Bank (RB)

RB is the retail arm of a major high street bank that has branches throughout the UK.

In 1993, the Board of the bank appointed a new chief executive. The new appointee decided

that RB was too focused on short-term financial performance and was excluding other issues,

such as innovation, customer service, and employee development. He was therefore keen to

develop a new performance management system. RB identified a BSC as fitting its needs

and after testing extensively, the BSC went live across the organization on 1 January 1996.

Rather than the more usual strategic BSC (Kaplan and Norton, 1996a, 1996b), the

organization developed an operational scorecard, which they used to collect key performance

measures from the branch network. At the same time, the organization was undertaking a

wider culture change program called the *Customer Focus Program* and the BSC formed an

important part of this program.

RB used its BSC for about three years at which time the Board appointed a new chief

executive who changed the focus of the organization. The incoming chief executive had a

successful background in retailing and decided the crucial factor for the success of RB was

the sale of products. In 1999, RB replaced the BSC with a sales management system.

Case 2: County Council (CC)

CC is the local government responsible for a region (a county) in the South East of

England. Like other organizations in the public sector (including HT and PF), CC is under

constant performance review by central government. The assessors had rated CC as performing consistently well over the years. Despite this, in 2001, senior managers had a strong desire to ensure continuous improvement. They considered total quality management (TQM) as one approach that CC could adopt, but officials of the strategic management board (SMB) identified the BSC as more appropriate and useful.

Adoption commenced in 2002 and the SMB appointed an individual from outside the organization with experience of the BSC elsewhere as head of performance improvement to lead implementation. The SMB also brought in management consultants to assist initially. The process of implementing the BSC organization-wide has been much more protracted than in RB or HT. A phased approach to implementation commenced with use at the top of the organization by the SMB, followed by plans to roll out adoption downwards into each of the several service divisions of CC. CC completed its BSC adoption in 2008.

Case 3: Hospital Trust (HT)

HT is a hospital in the English National Health Service (NHS) also based in the South East of England. Around 2002, HT attracted significant negative publicity relating to poor clinical practice. The Healthcare Commission, the UK's healthcare quality assessors at that time, subsequently identified HT as one of the worst performing trusts in the country. Following from this, an independent assessment identified a number of issues at HT, including poor governance and senior management. Coinciding with this was the arrival of a new chairperson, whose primary objective was that HT would improve its performance rating (from zero), by changing various structures, processes and staff. However, in improving HT's performance, its expenditure increased, triggering a financial crisis.

In 2005, HT brought in external management consultants in an advisory capacity. They recommended that HT should use a BSC in order to improve governance and

performance management. Together with internal staff, these consultants developed and implemented the BSC within six months. HT is now one of the top 40 hospitals in the NHS and is currently seeking foundation status.

Case 4: Police Force (PF)

PF is a police force in the UK Police Service and is based in Scotland, with a geographic area that spans one of the major cities. In 2003, a corporate risk register drawn up by PF identified *"an inability to deliver major projects to time, cost and quality"*. At about the same time, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) also identified a lack of coherent business processes within PF. In 2004, PF established new governance mechanisms to cover all projects in order to address these issues, which included the formation of a PMO. This adoption occurred rapidly, taking just ten months. The role of the PMO was to promote the use of standard project management methods and tools across all projects, monitor the progress of ongoing projects and support the new governance structure. In 2007, the City Council that oversees PF undertook an evaluation of project management within PF as part of an audit. This resulted in a positive audit report. However those interviewed in PF recognize that not all projects use the suggested approaches or use them consistently.

Study Findings

Table 2 summarises the findings of the study.

Adoption Rationale

In all four cases, interviewees attributed an event or problem that triggered the adoption of the management practice as a rational reason for the adoption. That is,

interviewees were keen to justify the adoption by stating problems they were facing at the time, rather than giving reasons for adopting the particular solution or management practice in preference to other courses of action. This observation is consistent with Birkinshaw and Mol (2006) who found that responding to a challenge facing the organization is a particular characteristic of management practice adoption compared to other types of innovation. It is also consistent with the notion of activation triggers in studies of absorptive capacity that are either internal or external stimuli that compel and organization to respond (Zahra and George, 2002). However, in analysing the responses given during this study in more depth, it was possible to identify additional rationales. In each case, one rationale tends to be more significant than others.

At RB, the pivotal role of the new chief executive in the adoption of the BSC suggests a strong political rationale for adoption. Evidence from the case study shows that he wished to be seen to address what he described as the organization being *"too short term focussed"*. Interviewees described how some staff had recently returned to the organization after studying for an MBA at a leading international business school where the BSC was being *"advocated as a new management approach"*. Consistent with the notions of distancing by adopting ways of working that are seen to be leading edge, the chief executive was interested in the BSC being a new approach and was keen to adopt it. He also used the rhetoric of innovation, customer service, and employee development and leadership, consistent with Sturdy's dramaturgical view, to justify the adoption of the BSC.

CC were clear on their wish to pursue continuous improvement, which appears consistent with the rational view. However, the institutional rationale for the adoption of innovations appears predominant. Derived from organizational theory, one premise of the institutional rationale is isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). One interviewee at CC expressed the view that the BSC seemed to be "*in vogue*" amongst other organizations at the

time and this influenced their adoption. The UK government have encouraged public sector organizations like CC (and HT and PF) to pursue performance measurement and performance management rhetorics as part of New Public Management (NPM) (Rommel, Christiaens, and Devos, 2005). They have been under pressure from protagonists of NPM, often within UK central government departments, to manage more like the private sector and so the BSC fitted this need to be seen in a particular way.

Whilst taking steps to address the issues in their corporate risk register and the HMIC report was rational for PF, the psychodynamic rationale appears to most closely describe the choice of a PMO as the means of addressing these issues. Such a rationale seeks to relieve anxiety about an issue or problem in a way that others accept and can understand (Gill and Whittle, 1992; Jackall, 1988). The introduction of formal project management methods was likely to take some time during which their effect would be difficult to demonstrate. In contrast, PF could demonstrate the physical presence of a PMO (i.e. the co-location of a number of dedicated officers and support staff in a single office) relatively swiftly and would allow them to demonstrate to HMIC that they were addressing the issues identified and hence relieve PF's anxiety about the negative report.

After its clinical and financial crises, HT was keen to demonstrate improved governance, which again appears consistent with Sturdy's description of the rational approach that he links to finding the solution to a perceived problem or crisis. The firm of management consultants clearly influenced the adoption of the BSC as a means of addressing the crises. The influence of the consultants confirms Sturdy's dramaturgical rationale in which rhetoric and persuasiveness plays a major part in adoption. The new chairperson was a champion of the BSC, being keen to be associated with the organization doing something new, suggesting that like RB, the adoption by HT also had a political element to it.

The data in Table 2 and the preceding discussion address the first research question. They suggest that the rationales that Sturdy proposes, apart from the cultural rationale, are recognisable across the four cases studied. In particular, each case demonstrates a combination of different adoption rationales, including a mixture of rational and emotional or socially conditioned responses. In order to address the second research question this study considers two key characteristics of the adoption life cycle of the management practice: the time within the life cycle of the innovation when the organization commenced adoption and how long the adoption took to complete, that is, the rate of adoption.

Table 2 here.

Time of Adoption in Life cycle of Management Practice

Researchers studying the adoption of innovations often use counts of citations to approximate the adoption life cycle (Abrahamson, 1996; Ponzi and Koenig, 2002; Spell, 1999). However there are limitations to such approaches, including the lag between first adoption and early publications. Figure 1 shows such a plot for the terms balanced scorecard and program management office. Based on the database used, citations for BSC began in 1992. This is consistent with the first publication by Kaplan and Norton (1992) which many commentators view as playing a key role in increasing the awareness and popularity of the BSC. Maturity, if taken as plateauing in the frequency of citations, occurs around 2005.

Of the three organizations studied that adopted a BSC, RB was the first to do so. RB began developing and testing its scorecard in 1995 and they rolled out the scorecard across the business on 1st January 1996. CC began its development of its scorecard in 2002, with the scorecard going live for the SMB in 2003. Roll out to other parts of the organization

continued to 2008. Although having an earlier traffic light reporting system for key targets, HT did not develop and implement its BSC until 2005.

Figure 1 shows that citations of the term program management office begin around 2000 and reach a plateau around 2006. PF established its PMO in 2004 and therefore was a relatively earlier adopter.

Figure 1 here.

Rate of Adoption

Rate of adoption considers how long it took the organization to achieve its adoption. We recognise that numerous factors, both within and external to the organization, will influence the rate of adoption of a given management practice. For example, consistent with the study by Battisti and Iona (2009, p.1329), this study recognises that "the level [intensity] of adoption is firm specific", that is different organizations may adopt a practice on a different scale or scope. Other factors that influence the rate of adoption may include the use of similar practices within the organization, awareness amongst staff and use of technology (Ahn, 2001; Olve, Petri, Roy and Roy, 2004; Papalexandris, Ioannou, Prastacos, and Soderquist, 2005).

The most rapid implementation amongst the organizations studied is that of HT's adoption of the BSC. HT decided to adopt a BSC following the recommendations of a management-consulting firm in May 2005 and the BSC was available to the governing body of HT approximately six months later. A number of factors contributed to this rapid implementation: HT was already using traffic light reporting of its key targets and the BSC used these key targets. As a relatively late adopter, HT and their advisors were able to learn from similar hospitals that had developed BSCs. HT also adopted a technology-light approach. Rather than rely on a large data warehouse to collect data for or to produce the

BSC, a member of staff pasted data into a tailored spreadsheet. Finally, HT limited the adoption to developing a BSC to report information to their governing body, rather than to develop BSCs for the many departments that constitute the hospital. This limited adoption removed the need to determine measures and goals for each area of the organization and train the many hundreds of staff within HT.

RB was a relatively early adopter of the BSC. RB also carried out implementation relatively rapidly, undertaking all development, testing, communication and roll out in less than one year. Rather than develop the traditional strategic BSC, RB used their BSC to improve operational performance management and therefore developed scorecards for the retail network, which at the time consisted of over a hundred branches and thousands of staff. RB trained all staff in the interpretation of the BSC and had a scorecard relevant to their role available on a PC within their branch or regional office. Interestingly, RB's implementation was not only relatively fast; the lifetime of the BSC in the organization was only three years.

PF was relatively swift in establishing its PMO, launching the PMO just ten months after they identified the idea. However, the diffusion of the project management tools and frameworks promoted by the PMO has proved to be somewhat slower. Staff within PF used some of the tools in the planning the policing of a high-profile conference of world political leaders, which helped spread awareness within PF. However, use of the tools is still heterogeneous across the organization.

Finally, CC represents the slowest rate of implementation of the cases studied. A decision to adopt the BSC was made in 2002. The BSC went live for the Strategic Management Board (SMB) in 2003, after which the organization set about developing BSCs for each of the service divisions, which linked, via "*golden threads*" to the SMB scorecard. CC completed implementation in the service divisions in 2008.

Several factors caused the prolonged adoption in CC. Hookana's (2008) observation of the influence of sub-cultures on the adoption of management practices is particularly relevant. Each of the service division undertakes very different activities and has different professional norms and performance measures. The service divisions had to relate these existing measures to the measures in the summary BSC used by the SMB. The existing levels of performance management varied significantly across divisions. In some divisions CC had to educate staff about performance management *ab initio*, whilst in others CC had to encourage staff to change from their existing approaches to the BSC. A significant issue is that external reporting and monitoring requirements determine many of the existing performance measures, and CC must therefore continue their use. Finally, CC was keen to use technology to support its BSC and has used its SAP Enterprise Resource Planning system as a platform. This use of technology had caused some delays, as CC first needed to ensure its SAP system was robust and used appropriately.

Influence of Adoption Rationale on the Time and Rate of Adoption

Table 2 and the preceding discussion show a variation in adoption rationales across the four cases and also a variation in the time and rate of adoption. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, researchers can draw on possible underlying mechanisms to explain empirical observations (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin. 1990). Sturdy associates both the dramaturgical and institutional rationales (observed in HT and CC respectively) with the supply of management practices and the rhetoric associated with them. Common acceptance of such rhetoric frequently relies on other organizations adopting and using such practices (Symon, 2008). Such rationales are therefore likely to occur relatively later in the life cycle of the practice. In contrast, the political and psychodynamic rationales

(witnessed in RB and PF respectively) are consistent with earlier adoption, since they relate to outsiders seeing the organization as adopting new ways of working.

Similarly, the political and dramaturgical rationales are both associated with influential individuals or groups who drive or champion the adoption of the innovation and ensure timely progress in adoption. This is consistent with the change management literature that stresses the importance of a champion, or champions, and how these are critical to maintaining adoption timescales (see for example Hughes, 2007; Todnem, 2005) and Benders' (2002) observation that strong champions are needed to address the many contingencies that arise during adoption of innovations. The new chief executive at RB, who was determined to improve performance management in the organization, clearly influenced the adoption of the BSC. Similarly the external management consultants at HT directly influenced their adoption of the BSC. In contrast, the adoption at both PF and CC appeared to arise from group decision-making and both appointed someone to lead the implementation that had not championed or contributed to the adoption decision. PF appointed a senior police office to head the PMO, whilst CC recruited a new head of performance improvement from outside the organization.

These explanations taken together with the empirical findings lead us to propose, within the limitations of the exploratory research methodology, a relationship between the rationale for adoption of a new management practice and when and how rapidly adoption subsequently occurs.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study empirically identifies the rationales that Sturdy suggests can influence the adoption of management practices. The study also explores how these adoption rationales relate to key characteristics of the subsequent adoption. The limited number of case studies,

in particular, makes the study highly exploratory. However, within these limitations, the four cases studied appear to show adoption rationales consistent with those that Sturdy proposes.

The case studies suggest a possible relationship or pattern between the rationales. In all four cases, interviewees identify a rational justification for adoption of the management practice in question. In addition to the rational approach, one or more additional rationales that Sturdy proposes also appear to be present. This study does not explicitly identify the cultural rationale. Whilst this may be a result of the number and particular case studies undertaken, the cultural rationale, rather than provide a distinct reason driving adoption, may explain differences in how adoption occurs. As we discuss earlier, previous studies link organizational culture to how organizations translate management innovations during adoption (Ahmed, 1998; Frohman, 1998; Hookana, 2008; McLaughlin et al, 2008). For example, studies of the international diffusion of management practices (Cerdin, 2003; Fenton O'Creevy, 2003; Gomez and Ranft, 2003) suggest that culture does not necessarily drive or prevent adoption, but results in translation of the innovation to fit with local cultural values and practice. The case studies provide examples of translation in the case of the balanced scorecard. Firstly, in all three scorecard cases, a translation from the US to provincial England and, in the case of CC and HT, a translation from the private sector to the use by the public sector. In the case of CC in particular, this translation appears to contribute to the drawn out nature of adoption. For example the need as a public sector organization to continue with existing measures for external reporting and monitoring requirements, slowed down the impetus in some divisions to develop measures for the scorecard.

Figure 2 presents a proposed relationship between the rationales. A rational driver for adoption will contribute to the majority of adoptions. The majority of interviewees first mentioned the problem triggering the adoption of a new management practice, suggesting that it plays an important part in allowing colleagues to explain, justify and share why the

organization has adopted the management practice. Those adopting the practice may identify

this rational driver before the adoption commences, or they may post-rationalize it. Hence

Figure 2 shows this as a double headed arrow. One or more of the following rationales

complements this rational explanation: political, dramaturgical, psychodynamic or

institutional. Cultural considerations will be present for all adoptions. However, rather than

determine if adoption happens, cultural factors are more likely to shape the way that

organizations implement practices. Hence rather than the simple dichotomy of rational and

non-rational approaches that Sturdy himself speaks of, the findings of this exploratory study

suggest that the adoption of management practices is likely to include an interplay of a

number of different rationales, which include both rational, emotional and socially

conditioned rationales.

Figure 2 here.

Figure 2 also depicts the exploratory finding that the adoption rationale appears to be

related to the time of adoption in the innovation life cycle and the rate of adoption. We stress

that earlier or more rapid adoption is not necessary preferable than later or slower adoption.

As with most areas of management, the adoption characteristics that are appropriate will be

contingent on various factors including: resources available to the organization, other

ongoing activities and experiences with previous management practices (Fiedler, 1964; Kast

and Rosenzweig, 1973).

Consideration should also be given to how the characteristics of particular

management practices may influence the findings of this study. As we discuss in the method

section, managers find organization-wide practices as more difficult to implement than more

localized practices (Rigby, 2001). This increased difficulty causes managers to move beyond

a purely rational approach and to draw on a wider range of rationales (March, 2006). These wider rationales may serve a dual purpose, firstly to help assure the managers that they have selected the most appropriate approach, and secondly, in order to influence the many staff that will need to be involved in the adoption of organization-wide practices. For example, in the case of CC, the comfort of other organizations adopting the BSC helped both the managers in their adoption decision and was also utilised to influence the many staff involved in the adoption. The two practices involved in this study were both developed by independent sources outside the organizations studied. Managers adopting such practices can more easily draw on the psychodynamic, dramaturgical, cultural and institutional rationales, than those managers adopting internally developed practices, since externally developed practices will be open to the scrutiny and support of external experts and advocates. Finally, both the practices included in this study address the issue of organizational performance management. Practices related to performance management are often critical for the future of the organization and are often sensitive for the individuals or groups involved as they may highlight disparate performance (Armstrong and Baron, 2004; Papalexandris et al, 2005). Such perceptions of criticality and sensitivity may increase the occurrence of emotional or socially conditioned rationales being employed.

An interesting, and perhaps counter-intuitive, consequence of the findings is when considering the accusation that organizations are faddish in their adoption of management practices. Those organizations that implement practices earlier and more rapidly are most likely to move onto the next practice quickly and are then most likely to appear faddish. In organizations where implementation is drawn out, the practice will appear more enduring. Hence the organization will appear less faddish but this may simply be, as in the case of CC, that they have taken a considerable time to implement the management practice in question.

Limitations of Current Study and Opportunities for Future Research

Whilst we position this study as exploratory and a basis for further research, the limitations of the study should be recognised. The case study method allows those interviewed to describe the adoptions studied in their own words. This method also allows the researchers to probe those responses and combine them with those of the other interviewees in the same case and with the contemporaneous documentary data. However, we recognise that methods such as ethnography or participant observation (Bryman, 2004) provide a richer data set that may have provided more nuanced findings or greater internal validity. The small number of case studies that this study includes is also a limitation, since this limits both the number of management practices studied and the number of instances of adoption of each practice. Future studies should consider different and a wider range of management practices, such as practices developed within the organization or practices in areas other than performance management. These studies could explore how characteristics of the practice relate to adoption rationales or characteristics of the subsequent adoption.

The sample contains three public sector organizations and one for-profit private sector organization. This is insufficient to identify differences between the influences on adoption that may exist between these two groups. For example, public and third sector organizations may find the influence of a significant individual or group on the adoption undesirable, resulting in no obvious champion and hence less opportunity for a predominately politically driven adoption.

Owing to the selection of particular interviewees, the study reflects the views and experiences of senior managers. Further studies of the adoption of management practices could include the view of a wider range of staff and other stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers and external regulatory agencies. The inclusion of such perspectives may help to confirm the presence of certain rationales such as the political and cultural rationales.

Finally, a larger-scale quantitative study could be undertaken in order to attempt to generalize the findings of this study. In particular, a study identifying differing adoption rationales and confirming the link between those rationales and the time and rate of implementation as Figure 2 proposes should be undertaken.

Attempts to validate the findings of this study could also establish linkages with the research framework that Wu (2010) proposes which links the adoption of management innovations both with the underlying organizational context and the dependent or outcome variable of organizational performance.

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Table 1: Sturdy's (2004) Rationales for the Adoption of Management Ideas and

Practices

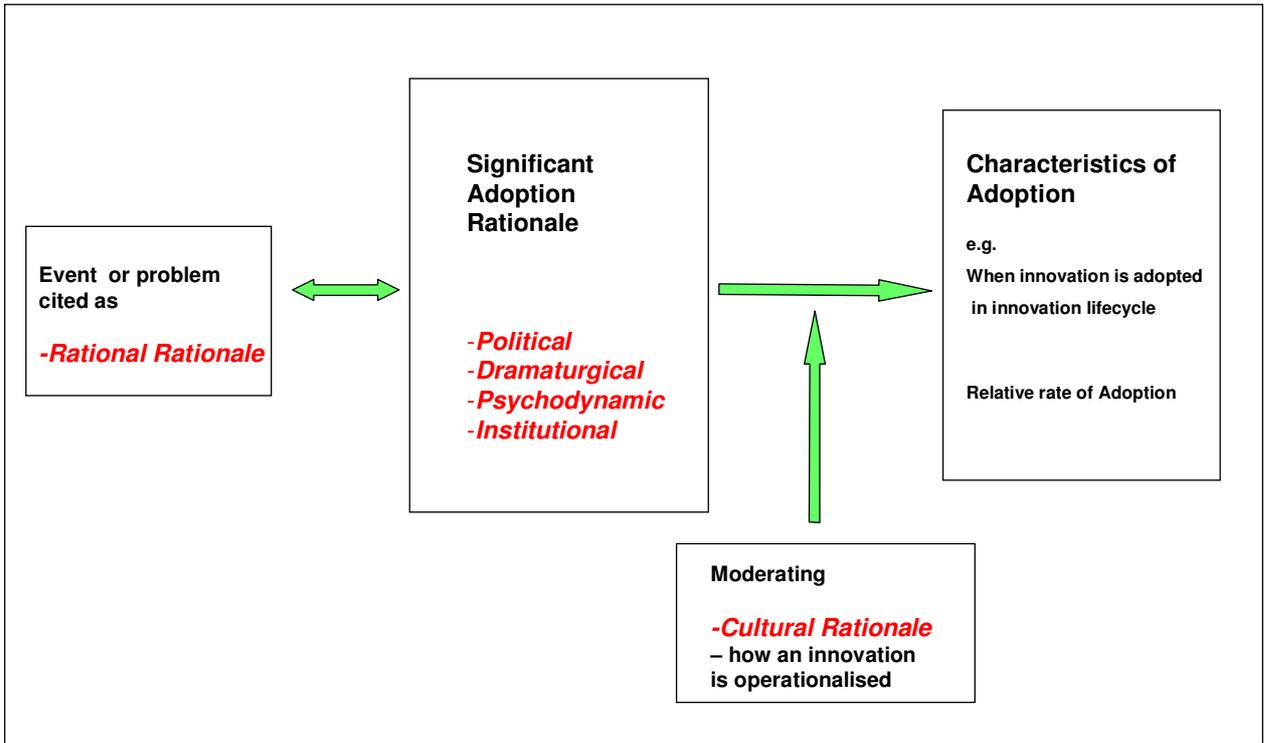| Rationale	Description	Previous studies relating to management practice adoption
Rational View *- organizational effectiveness*	Associated with finding a solution to match a perceived problem or crisis, the search for proven techniques and causal links between practice and performance.	Battisti and Iona (2009); Daniel and Wilson (2004); Mamman (2009); March (2006)
Psychodynamic View *- relieving anxiety and securing identity*	Associated with emotionally informed views and can be based on an impulsive decision to adopt ideas, which vary in how they benefit the organization.	Foo, 2009; Gill and Whittle (1992); Grichnik, Smeja, and Welpe (2010); Jackall (1988)
Dramaturgical View (Rhetoric) *- successful rhetoric*	Focuses on the supply side of the relationship, the persuasive influence of management gurus, management consultants, academics, etc. and their presentation techniques.	Benders (1999); Berggren (2004); Leiringer and Cardellino (2008); Symon (2008); Upham, Rosenkopf, and Ungar (2007); Watson (1994)
Political View *- furthering career, function, status or control*	Broadly concerned with the instrumental use of ideas to secure power and/or with their content in terms of their material and/or discursive power effects.	Benders (2002); Frost and Egri (1991); Grint (1997); Kimble, Grenier and Goglio-Primard (2010); Watson (1994)
Cultural View *- cultural resonance or meaning*	Highlights that the diffusion of ideas can be spread across cultures, for example, through globalization, mergers/joint ventures. Local knowledge can act as a bridge or barrier to transfer.	Ahmed (1998); Cerdin (2003); Fenton O'Creevy (2003; Frohman (1998); Hookana (2008); Jassawalla and Sashittal (2002); Mamman (2009); Martins and Terblanche (2003); McLaughlin, Bessant, and Smart (2008)
Institutional View *- securing organizational legitimacy*	This view accounts for social or societal influences on organizational practices and that peer and shareholder legitimacy is sought more so than efficiency and shareholder wealth.	Abrahamson and Rosenkopf (1993); DiMaggio and Powell (1983)

Table 2: Summary of Case Study Findings

	Retail Bank **RB**	County Council **CC**	Hospital Trust **HT**	Police Force **PF**
Predominant adoption rationales	**Rational** – "*too focussed on short term*" **Political** (ideas flow from the powerful) – adoption driven by CEO and replaced when new CEO appointed	**Rational** – wanted to ensure continuous improvement **Institutional** (isomporphism) – "*in vogue with other organizations at the time*"	**Rational** – need to demonstrate improved governance **Dramaturgical** (successful rhetoric) – consultants advocated choice of BSC	**Rational** – issues on big projects identified in corporate risk register **Psychodynamic** (relieving anxiety) – need to address comments of HMIC
Time of adoption in life cycle of management practice	**Earlier adoption** Tested BSC in 1995 – went live in 1996.	**Later adoption** Commenced implementation of BSC in 2002. Roll out ongoing to 2008.	**Later adoption** Development and implementation of BSC in 2005.	**Earlier adoption** Established PMO in 2004.
Relative rate of adoption of practice	**More rapid adoption** Adoption took 9 months.	**Slower adoption** Drawn out adoption – still ongoing after 5 years.	**More rapid adoption** Adoption took 6 months.	**Slower adoption** Rapid adoption of PMO (10 months) – but much slower adoption of project management tools (approx 4 years)
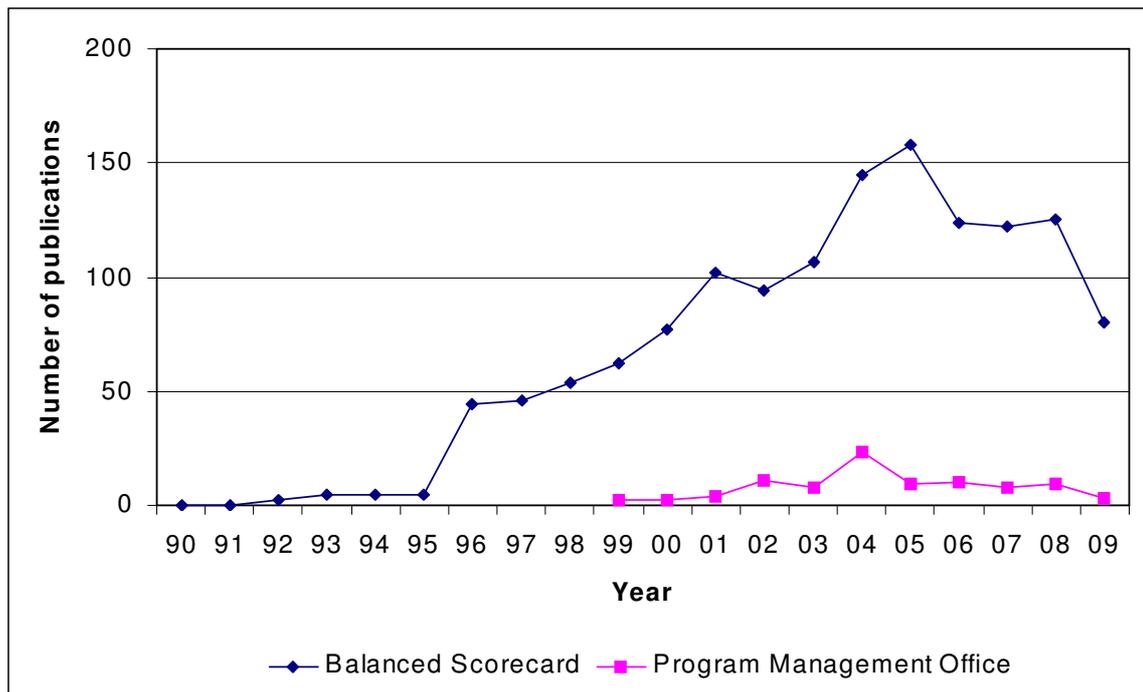
Source: Business Source Complete, Datamonitor. Search includes similar terms such as project management office and abbreviations, BSC and PMO.
Publications in database include academic journals, practitioner journals, books, investment research reports, industry reports and market research reports.

Figure 1: Longitudinal Citation Counts

Figure 2: Study Findings