

Quality Management in Adult Education Organisations

Modes of Integration in Different Organisational Fields

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Abstract

The manifold discourses on the quality of continuing education organisations are closely related to processes of social change. However, it is unclear to what extent the effectiveness or integration of quality management systems in continuing education organisations in Germany is influenced by organisational contexts. This study used the neo-institutional concepts of organisational fields and loose coupling as a theoretical basis to address this research gap. Based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey, this study examined and differentiated effectiveness attributions by their organisational springs with a variance analysis. The results showed tighter couplings for the “organisation” impact factor, medium couplings for the “pedagogy” impact factor and rather weak or loose couplings for the “personnel” and “economy” impact factors. The fields for the “organisation” factor significantly differed from each other. There were no significant differences for the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors.

Keywords: Quality management; new institutionalism; organisational fields; effects of quality management; variance analysis

Abstract

Die vielfältigen Diskurse rund um Qualität in Weiterbildungsorganisationen stehen in engem Zusammenhang mit gesellschaftlichen Wandlungsprozessen. Weitgehend ungeklärt ist bisher jedoch, inwiefern die Wirksamkeit respektive Integration von Qualitätsmanagementsystemen in Weiterbildungsorganisationen in Deutschland durch den organisationalen Kontext beeinflusst ist. Theoretisch wird hierzu an das neo-institutionalistische Konzept des organisationalen Feldes und der losen Kopplung angeschlossen. Auf Basis der wbmonitor Umfrage 2017 werden Wirksamkeitszuschreibungen differenziert nach organisationalen Feldern mithilfe einer Varianzanalyse betrachtet. Im Ergebnis zeigen sich engere Kopplungen bei dem Wirkfaktor „Organisation“, mittlere bei dem Wirkfaktor „Pädagogik“ und eher schwache bzw. lose bei den Wirkfaktoren „Personal“ und „Ökonomie“. Dabei unterscheiden sich die Felder bei dem Faktor „Or-

ganisation“ signifikant voneinander. Bzgl. den Faktoren „Pädagogik“, „Personal“ und „Ökonomie“ zeigen sich keine signifikanten Unterschiede.

Keywords: Qualitätsmanagement; Neo-Institutionalismus; organisationale Felder; Effekte von Qualitätsmanagement; Varianzanalyse

1 Introduction

As in other countries, adult education (AE) in Germany has a rich history with varied discussions of its quality. The topics of these discussions have ranged from the orientation towards relationships in the sense of the “voluntariness of participants” and “institutional freedom” in the 1950s (Tietgens 1999, p.10) to the criterion-oriented, systematic and continuous correlation of various quality factors with the help of quality management systems (QMSs) in the present (Hartz & Meisel 2011). This development is interwoven with processes of social change. Some processes are characterised by the increased importance of general AE, by the increased economisation and by shifted control of the state (Nittel 1996; Schrader 2011).

The literature has already found evidence of the effectiveness of QMSs in AE. For example, recent empirical studies reported descriptive evidence that these systems work at different levels. The strongest effectiveness was observed at the organisational level, especially in improving organisational processes. The cost-benefit ratio was judged to be overall negative from an organisational perspective (cf. Ambos et al. 2018, p. 31). Käpplinger (2017) pointed out that quality management (QM) seems to bolster the control of the management level, whereas its effects on other staff groups are characterised more by additional work. In connection with professionalization, Käpplinger, Kubsch and Reuter (2018) proposed that the relevance of staff professionalization varies depending on the QM model. Namely, the staff training practice seems to shift its emphasis from external to internal training. With reference to the Learner-Oriented Quality Development in Adult Education (LQW; Lernerorientierte Qualitätsentwicklung in der Weiterbildung) QMS, Hartz (2011) highlighted the need to consider factors aside from the QM model that influence the effectiveness of QMSs. Ultimately, she concluded that LQW would barely reach the targeted teaching-learning interaction level (cf. p. 283). However, following her cluster analysis of the effects, her results also showed that one of the four clusters comprising about a quarter of the organisations was explicitly constituted by strong effects in the “teaching-learning interaction” dimension (p. 323).

Within the free text portion of the 2017 wbmonitor survey, continuing education organisations emphasised that QMS effectiveness is influenced by the conditions under which a given system is introduced. Thus, when QMSs are introduced under coercion from the environment, non-intended consequences become apparent. In effect, they are only introduced formally and with the least possible effort, thus limiting their potential impact. The following quote illustrates this dynamic: “As long as QMS[s] are

only introduced, because some client demands it, they are useless. There is a manual that is only opened once a year because another audit is due" (ID 772, own analysis).

Overall, QMSs and their effectiveness seem to be integrated or interwoven in complex arrangements. However, little information on this topic is available. Against the background of the pluralised continuing education sector in Germany (Reuter, Koscheck & Martin 2020; Schrader 2011), the present study assumes that specific institutional expectations are associated with the context of a continuing education organisation. Hence, different effectiveness attributions can also be observed depending on the context. Notably, Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020) showed that QM models can be used with different weights in four identified organisational fields (cf. Table 2).

Against this background, this study examines the extent to which AE organisations integrate QMSs and whether differences can be observed between four organisational fields. In particular, this study applies the theoretical approach of neo-institutionalism (NI) to assess the social interconnectedness of organisations. In this context, the concept of loose coupling is of particular importance. Following Hartz (2015), this study assumes that the strength of the effects attributed to QMSs by AE organisations can be used to infer their integration levels. Consequently, this study addresses its theoretical foundations and central concepts. After specifying the research question, this study then presents the methodological procedure. Subsequently, this study describes the attributions of effectiveness in detail. It concludes with a discussion of the results.

2 Theoretical Foundation

NI in organisational sociology focuses on the interface of organisations with society (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 2009; DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 2009). Thus, organisations and their structures come into focus in a conditional field. Crucially, this field consists of institutions (e.g. norms, expectations and mission statements; cf. Herbrechter & Schemmann 2010, p. 128). In this field, organisations are "influenced by societal expectations in general and by state-political regulations in particular" (Hasse & Krücken 2005, p. 55).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 2009) presented a systematisation of the social environment with the concept of "organizational fields"¹. As such, they referred to "those organizations that, as an aggregate, constitute a recognizable field of institutional life. Central suppliers, consumers of resources and products, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (ibid., p. 59). Notably, NI views the organisational field as its central unit of analysis (cf. Senge 2005), which can only be determined empirically (cf. DiMaggio & Powell 2009, p. 64). Hence, an understanding of the organisational field with a medium complexity offers a certain degree of differentiation without being too complex for empirical operationalization.

1 To ensure empirical connectivity, this study uses the concept of the organisational field by DiMaggio and Powell (2009). For an overview of further developments of the concept, see Becker-Ritterspach and Becker-Ritterspach (2006), pp. 118–136.

Neo-institutional research focuses on the analysis of the diffusion of organisation-external social expectations in organisations. As a precursor to NI, bureaucracy theory assumes that the pursuit of efficiency shapes the structures of an organisation and legitimises them (cf. Weber 1972). However, Meyer and Rowan broke with this assumption and emphasised that maintaining legitimacy is the primary concern. Thus, the aspect of efficiency is of secondary importance. Organisations gain legitimacy by connecting with environmental expectations that are considered to be rational (cf. Meyer & Rowan 1977, 2009). Rationality myths are a central concept of NI: “The rules embedded in society have a rational dimension in that social goals as well as means to pursue such goals are established. The mythical dimension follows from the fact that the effectiveness of such means is not proven, but merely believed in their success” (Schemmann 2018, p. 189).

Following Meyer and Rowan (1977), Merckens (2011) described the relationship between organisations and their environment as an “interdependence relationship” (p. 19). In these relationships, behavioural expectations from the environment itself or from the organisations’ own claims can contradict each other, making the pursuit of legitimacy ambiguous. Weick (1976, German translation 2009) conducted a case study of schools in the USA, and he determined that organisations deal with such contradictory expectations in certain ways.

Namely, if they are only loosely coupled to them, organisations take up these expectations and formally or superficially correspond to them. In doing so, the respective elements are “somehow interconnected” (Weick 2009, p. 88).

Because each element exhibits a certain degree of identity and autonomy, “their connection can be described as irregular, weak in mutual influence, unimportant, and/or slow in response” (ibid.).

The concept of loose coupling must be understood as an “instrument of sensitization” (Weick 2009, p. 88) with the aim of questioning the self-evident facts of the observer. Distinctively, Weick’s coupling concept takes into account the mutual influences in couplings and, in doing so, considers the autonomy and identity of the participants (cf. ibid.). Furthermore, Weick drew attention to the fact that the concept does not necessarily need to be understood normatively. Rather, the function of loose coupling can be both an advantage and a disadvantage (cf. ibid., p. 92).

Importantly, loose coupling can result from poor methodology. Therefore, a methodological approach that strongly emphasises context is fundamental to the analysis of loose couplings. As a context-sensitive method, Weick mentioned comparative studies in which the effects of context variation are examined (cf. ibid., p. 98). Likewise, the conditions of the couplings must be considered: “In response to what kinds of activities or what kinds of contexts does coupling change, and what kinds of environments or situations, when they change, have no effect at all on coupling within an organization?” (ibid., p. 102). To address such issues, the coupling should be treated as a dependent variable (cf. ibid.). The same is true if “the question is pursued under which conditions the emerging coupling[s] will be loose or tight” (ibid.).

The concept of loose coupling has often been used in the pedagogical context because of the apparent fit between the formal structures or bureaucratic organisations and the autonomy of pedagogical professionalism. In this sense, Weick urged that caution should be used when making interpretations, emphasising that “any advantage can also be a burden” (ibid., p. 92). Moreover, the apparent fit also prevents a view of the connections between professionalism and bureaucracy, which is why their dualistic usage should be discouraged.²

This approach makes it possible to analyse couplings between organisations and their environments as well as processes within organisations. Accordingly, this study identified two concrete couplings. Organisations can formally implement a QMS and identify themselves with the outside world according to its expectations, usually through external certification. The consequences of this implementation primarily occur in the formal structures of the organisation. In contrast, the active handling of or firm coupling to these expectations affects the action level of the organisation.

3 Methodology

This study used the data of the 2017 *wbmonitor* survey on “QMS in Adult Education”. This online survey was conducted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE) on providers of general and vocational continuing education in Germany. Following the German Education Council (1970), continuing education is understood as an organised educational offering aimed at trained or experienced adults. Continuing education includes further training, retraining and vocational rehabilitation measures as well as general, political and cultural AE. Continuing education consists of offers made to external persons, companies and organisations, not in-house continuing education for employees (cf. Koscheck & Ohly 2017, p. 7). Likewise, it also excludes training, vocational preparation measures and work placement.

While the *wbmonitor* survey focuses on the entire provider landscape in this area, it excludes companies with continuing education courses that are not open to the public or offered to external customers from the target group. It represents the largest provider survey regularly conducted throughout Germany.³ In 2017, its QMS assessment was developed in cooperation with Justus Liebig University in Giessen. 1,755 facilities participated in the survey (9.0% response rate).

Following Hartz (2015), the effectiveness that an organisation attributes to a system can be used as an indicator of the integration type or coupling form. Since the dimensionality of these effectiveness attributions could not be fully determined in advance, this study incorporated the results of the explorative factor analysis by Reuter,

2 This observation can be compared with recent organisational pedagogical interpretations of professionalism that position themselves against an “antagonistic juxtaposition of pedagogy/interaction and bureaucracy/organisation” (Feld & Seitter 2016, p. 70).

3 For a more in-depth conceptual discussion, see Koscheck and Ohly (2020).

Rüter and Martin (i. P.). This analysis was based on data from the 2017 wbmonitor survey on the question, “What effects does the quality management system have on your institution?” This question contained 27 items.⁴ Each item was surveyed with a 4-point Likert scale (1 “strongly agree” to 4 “strongly disagree”). To begin, all items were factor analysed to systematise the different dimensions of the attributions and extract factors. For this purpose, the complete item battery (27 items) was fed into the factor analysis. To increase data quality, missing values were imputed rather than excluded. The suitability of the variables was tested via anti-image correlations. Finally, 20 variables could be used for further analysis (values > .87).

Reuter, Rüter and Martin (i. P.) conducted a principal axis analysis to determine the factorial structure of the effect dimensions. Both the significant Bartlett test ($\chi^2 = 18607.909$; $df = 190$, $p = .000$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = .937) indicated the very good suitability of the data to explorative factor analysis. Thus, a principal factor analysis with a skewed rotation was performed.⁵ Considering the Kaiser-Guttman criterion ($\lambda > 1$; Backhaus et al. 2018), the result was a four-factor solution with a variance resolution of 63.88%. The extracted factors proved to be reliable (scale reliability, Cronbach’s α : Factor 1: .89; Factor 2: .85; Factor 3: .70; Factor 4: .85) and could be assigned to the “pedagogy”, “organisation”, “personnel” and “economy” categories in terms of their impact dimensions. Table 1 illustrates the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Results of the factor analysis on the impact dimensions of QMSs (Source: Reuter, Rüter and Martin [i.P.], based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

| Pattern Matrix | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Effects of QMSs: | Factor | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | Pedagogy | Organisation | Personnel | Economy |
| Increased learning success of participants | 0.813 | | | |
| Increased satisfaction of participants | 0.805 | | | |
| Professionalised pedagogical work | 0.596 | | | |
| Increased employee satisfaction | 0.502 | | | |
| Improved quality of teaching/learning processes | 0.450 | | | |
| Improved organisational processes | | -0.844 | | |
| Improved transparency of organisational structures | | -0.787 | | |

4 For an overview of all items, consult Ambos et al. (2018, pp. 26–30).

5 In the first step, orthogonal rotation was performed, which yields independent principal axes in the result. However, since several items showed cross-loadings between Factor 1 and Factor 2, it was decided to use oblique rotation, which allows a higher reliability within the axes due to the oblique axis arrangement. This is advantageous for further calculations based on the result.

(Continuing table 1)

| Pattern Matrix | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Effects of QMSs: | Factor | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | Pedagogy | Organisation | Personnel | Economy |
| Improved internal communication | | -0.624 | | |
| Increased control possibilities of the management/executive board | | -0.555 | | |
| Increased expenditure for further training of staff (incl. honorary staff) | | | 0.630 | |
| More consulting tasks or simple pedagogic tasks for administrative staff | | | 0.492 | |
| Better qualified staff (incl. honorary staff) employed | | | 0.464 | |
| More management tasks assigned to teaching staff | | | 0.443 | |
| Improved infrastructure (rooms, technical equipment, etc.) | | | 0.433 | |
| More new markets | | | | 0.778 |
| Increased participants | | | | 0.768 |
| Higher revenues | | | | 0.730 |
| Strengthened market position | | | | 0.701 |
| Bound customers (repeated participations/orders) | | | | 0.676 |
| Improved utilisation of the facility | | | | 0.428 |
| Extraction method: principal axis factor analysis. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalisation. ^a | | | | |
| a. The rotation converged in 13 iterations. | | | | |

Following the theoretical assumption that organisations are related to and influenced by their organisational field, Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020) evaluated the effectiveness attributions according to four AE organisational fields based on wbmonitor data. DiMaggio and Powell (2009) provided the conceptual and theoretical basis for this analysis.⁶ Methodologically, the fields were based on a cluster analysis. Although the four fields cannot be described in detail here, Table 2 illustrates their central features.

6 For a detailed description of the methodological approach, see Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020).

Table 2: Structural characteristics of the 2017 organisational fields (clusters imputed) (Source: Reuter, Koscheck and Martin [2020])

| Feature | Cluster | VHS (n = 305) | Non-profit/public (n = 662) | Communities (n = 337) | Commercial private (n = 451) |
|------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of facility | | 87 % VHS 13 % other | 31 % non-profit private 20 % chamber, guild, etc. 15 % technical school 34 % other | 74 % establishment of a church, party, trade union, foundation, association or club 26 % other | 77 % commercial private 23 % other |
| QMS available | | 81% | 82% | 79% | 75% |
| Common QM models (frequently used) | | 29 % LQW 16 % EFQM 16 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 11 % self-developed QMS | 48 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 19 % self-developed QMS per 6 % LQW, EFQM, ISO 29990, QM model according to quality-seal associations | 29 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 15 % self-developed QMS 13 % quality seal association per 7 % QVB, LQW | 41 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 30 % self-developed QMS 9 % EFQM 6 % DIN EN ISO 29990 |
| Financing (mean values) | | 46 % participants 5 % companies 5 % employment agencies/job centres 39 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 5 % non-public sector/other | 31 % participants 22 % companies 18 % Employment agencies/job centres 25 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 5 % non-public sector/other | 32 % participants 12 % companies 10 % employment agencies/job centres 28 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 17 % non-public institutions/other | 24 % participants 35 % companies 26 % employment agencies/job centres 10 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 4 % Non-public sector/other |
| Orientation of the offer | | 91 % general + vocational training 5 % only general education 4 % only vocational training | 56 % general + vocational training 41 % only vocational training 3 % only general continuing education | 58 % general + vocational training 24 % only general continuing education 17 % only vocational training | 49 % only vocational training 49 % general + vocational training 2 % only general continuing education |

(Continuing table 2)

| Feature | Cluster | VHS (n = 305) | Non-profit/public (n = 662) | Communities (n = 337) | Commercial private (n = 451) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Number of subject areas (mean; max. 15) | | 11.3 | 5.8 | 5.9 | 4.8 |
| Number of lecturer hours (mean) | | 23,109 (19,487)* | 7,389 (6,231)* | 5,085 (3,998)* | 12,819 (4,087)* |
| Number of employees or civil servants (mean/median/SD) | | 16/9/24 | 17/8/27 | 12/5/26 | 16/4/78 |
| Proportion of salaried employees in total staff (mean) | | 11% | 48% | 27% | 44% |
| Proportion of continuing education in total turnover/ budget (mean) | | 87% | 55% | 60% | 77% |

* Values in parentheses exclude central offices responding for the total facility.

Next, an analysis of variance was performed to investigate the extent to which the organisational field is an explanatory factor for specific ways of dealing with QMSs or coupling/integration forms. In contrast to factor analysis, variance analysis is a structure-testing procedure that determines whether groups (e. g. organisational fields) differ significantly from one another. Since variance analysis is not very robust against outliers as a parametric procedure, the outliers were removed. The normality assumption is violated in this analysis, but the analysis of variance proves robust to it (cf. Schmider et al. 2010). Variance homogeneity was tested with Levene's test (Factor 1: $p = .158$; Factor 2: $p = .972$; Factor 3: $p = .104$; Factor 4: $p = .086$). In response, the Tukey test was chosen for the subsequent post-hoc multiple comparison, which centred on a liberal to conservative continuum. Table 3 presents an overview of the sample used for the variance analysis.

Table 3: Description of the sample used in the analysis of variance

| | | Statistics | | | |
|----------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| | | Factor 1: Pedagogy | Factor 2: Organisation | Factor 3: Personnel | Factor 4: Economy |
| N | valid | 1181 | 1188 | 1185 | 1179 |
| | missing | 475 | 468 | 471 | 477 |
| mean value | | 2.4735 | 2.0048 | 2.8230 | 2.8286 |
| median | | 2.4000 | 2.0000 | 2.8000 | 2.8333 |
| Std.-deviation | | 0.61928 | 0.52086 | 0.52610 | 0.57471 |
| range | | 3.00 | 2.67 | 3.00 | 2.80 |
| minimum | | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.20 |
| maximum | | 4.00 | 3.67 | 4.00 | 4.00 |

4 Results

The following section reports the mean values (MVs) of the items underlying the factors, which are differentiated according to the organisational fields, and clarifies the strengths of the effectiveness attributions and QMS integrations. Subsequently, this section presents the results of the analysis of variance based on the factor scores of the differences between the fields.

4.1 Effectiveness Attributions

The MVs were compared to describe the strength of the effectiveness attributions and QMS integrations with regard to the four impact factors: (1) "pedagogy", (2) "organisation", (3) "personnel" and (4) "economy". Since the data were collected using a Likert

scale ranging from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 4 (“strongly disagree”), a mean value below 2.5 was assumed to indicate stronger integration or coupling, whereas a mean value above 2.5 was assumed to indicate weaker integration or coupling.

As shown in Table 4, the results revealed that the strongest effects in all organisational fields were in the organisational processes, with slight differences between the organisational fields. The largest difference was between the “VHS” field (Volkshochschulen; MV=1.93) and the “commercial private” field (MV=2.13). Furthermore, the “pedagogy” factor had rather positive effectiveness attributions (MV=2.41 for “VHS” to MV=2.48 for “communities”), whereas the “personnel” and “economy” factors had rather weak effectiveness attributions across all organisational fields. In addition, the highest standard deviations were always in the “commercial private” field. Accordingly, there was a particularly large heterogeneity in the effectiveness attributions.

Table 4: Effectiveness attributions to QMSs according to the organisational fields of adult education (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

| | Organisational Fields | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------|------|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|------|------|-------------------------------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|
| | VHS (N=218) | | | Especially non-profit public (vocational) (N=465) | | | Communities (N=211) | | | Commercial private (N=287) | | | Total (N=1181) | | |
| | MV | SD | M | MV | SD | M | MV | SD | M | MV | SD | M | MV | SD | M |
| Factor 1: Pedagogy | 2.41 | 0.55 | 2.40 | 2.44 | 0.61 | 2.40 | 2.48 | 0.63 | 2.50 | 2.57 | 0.67 | 2.60 | 2.47 | 0.62 | 2.40 |
| Factor 2: Organisation | 1.93 | 0.50 | 2.00 | 1.98 | 0.51 | 2.00 | 1.97 | 0.50 | 2.00 | 2.13 | 0.55 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 0.52 | 2.00 |
| Factor 3: Personnel | 2.84 | 0.47 | 2.80 | 2.83 | 0.54 | 2.80 | 2.83 | 0.52 | 2.80 | 2.79 | 0.56 | 2.80 | 2.82 | 0.53 | 2.80 |
| Factor 4: Economy | 2.76 | 0.52 | 2.80 | 2.84 | 0.61 | 2.83 | 2.89 | 0.53 | 2.83 | 2.82 | 0.59 | 2.83 | 2.83 | 0.57 | 2.83 |

1 = “strongly agree”; 2 = “somewhat agree”; 3 = “somewhat disagree”; 4 = “strongly disagree”

4.2 Effectiveness Differences between Organisational Fields

Next, this study assessed whether significant differences existed between the organisational fields. As shown in Table 5, there were significant differences between the respective groups and organisational fields with regard to the “organisation” factor. In contrast, the differences for the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors were not significant, which means that the groups did not differ from each other systematically.

As can be seen in Table 6, a post-hoc comparison was used to identify the groups that differed in terms of the “organisation” factor. In particular, the results showed that the “commercial private” field differed from the “VHS”, “non-profit public” and “com-

munities” fields.⁷ The underlying factor scores were based on standardised regression values. Accordingly, the larger negative MV difference in the factor scores represented a stronger increase in efficacy in the comparison group.

Table 5: Results of the analysis of variance on the impact factors and the organisational fields (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

| Robust test procedures to test for equality of means | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | | Statistic ^a | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
| REGR Factor score 1: Pedagogy | Welch | 1,581 | 3 | 782,008 | 0.192 |
| REGR Factor score 2: Organisation | Welch | 6,280 | 3 | 775,307 | 0.000 |
| REGR Factor score 3: Personnel | Welch | 1,184 | 3 | 785,951 | 0.315 |
| REGR Factor score 4: Economy | Welch | 1,836 | 3 | 788,652 | 0.139 |
| a. Asymptotic F-distributed | | | | | |

Table 6: Results of the post-hoc comparison between the “organisation” impact factor and the organisational fields (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

| Multiple Comparisons | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Tukey-HSD | | | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable | | | Mean Value Difference (I-J) | Std.-Error | Sig. | 95 % Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| REGR Factor Score 2: Organisation | Commercial Private | VHS | -.22562395* | 0.06215954 | 0.002 | -0.3854764 | -0.0657715 |
| | | Especially non-profit public (vocational) | -.17286886* | 0.05079055 | 0.004 | -0.3034843 | -0.0422534 |
| | | Communities | -.20991627* | 0.06068213 | 0.003 | -0.3659693 | -0.0538632 |

5 Disussion

This study explored the extent to which AE organisations integrate QMSs and whether differences can be observed between four organisational fields. The descriptive findings are similar to previous findings (cf. Ambos et al. 2018; Hartz 2011, 2015) in the sense that QMSs seem to have either different impact degrees on different factors or different coupling degrees (Weick 2009). This study found stronger couplings for the

7 Further significant differences between additional groups did not exist.

“organisation” factor, medium couplings for the “pedagogy” factor (near the middle of the range) and rather weak couplings for the “personnel” and “economy” factors.

Following neo-institutional assumptions of the importance of organisational fields (DiMaggio & Powell 1983), this study used a variance analysis to investigate whether there were apparent differences between them with regard to the integration or effectiveness of QMSs. Hartz (2011) presented initial results in this area related to LQW. She came to the conclusion “that institutions of different control contexts do not differ significantly in their perceived effects” (p. 300). However, given the constitution of the organisational fields presented here and their differences in model use, this study expected to find differences in their effectiveness attributions. In particular, this study observed differences between the fields related to the “organisation” factor, whereas no significant differences were found between the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors regarding the effectiveness attributions.

Institution size is one explanation for the differences between the “commercial private” field and the “VHS”, “non-profit public” and “communities” fields. If the characteristics of the fields are considered (Table 2), in particular the personnel extent (i. e. the number of employees or officials), then the “commercially private” field clearly differs from the others. Hence, this study included many very small mechanisms (median = 4) and some very large organisations (SD = 78). Due to their size and associated structures, smaller organisations require less organisation and coordination. Therefore, it seems plausible that these organisations may weakly attribute effectiveness to the system.

In addition, the “commercially private” field has the highest share of funding (26 %) from the Federal Employment Agency, which requires certification in accordance with the “Akkreditierungs- und Zulassungsverordnung Arbeitsförderung” (AZAV). This certification also takes into account the use of a QMS, although it can also be self-developed. This makes the high proportion of self-developed QMSs (30 %) plausible.

Following DiMaggio and Powell (1983), another explanation may lie in the operationalisation of the organisational fields. The empirical implementation does not only refer to organisational structures. Rather, it also includes environmental influences by considering supply orientation and funding sources. For example, Hoffmann (2000) emphasised the importance of themes and related social interaction patterns for the constitution of organisational fields:

“Where some may define a field around companies with a common product or market (e. g. SIC classification), I suggest that the field is formed around the issues that become important to the interests and objectives of a specific collective of organisations. Issues define what the field is, drawing linkages that may not have been previously present. Organisations may make claims about being or not being part of the field, but their membership is defined through social interaction patterns.” (p. 6)

Thus, assuming that QMSs are seen as influencing the constitutions of organisational fields, the rather small differences between the fields seem plausible due to the overall

high prevalence of QMSs in all fields (75–82 %). However, Table 2 also shows that the QM models used in the respective fields had different emphases, which indicates that the QMSs must be further differentiated.

This study must draw attention to its limitations and possible biases. Notably, the group of respondents to the 2017 *wbmonitor* survey consisted primarily of management staff (cf. Ambos et al. 2018, p. 9). Hence, it must be critically examined whether this group can comprehensively and reliably describe attributions of effectiveness, especially against the background of the personnel situation in continuing education in Germany. In particular, many personnel are freelancers and not permanently employed. In response, future studies should examine the extent to which the teaching-learning process can be reliably assessed in this context. It can be assumed that managers are interested in the positive portrayal of the QMS since they increase their power by using it (Käpplinger 2017).

Overall, this study found that the complexity related to the quality within the fields seemed to be quite high, which made it difficult to identify specific differences. Thus, as shown in Table 4, the results of the effectiveness attributions also revealed that the standard deviations within the fields hardly improved their overall values. As emphasised by Hoffmann (2000), social interaction patterns seem to be a fruitful way to further explore and specify the quality conditions in AE organisations. Such studies should not focus on QMSs as a general topic. Rather, they should follow the complexity of discourses and debates, both accounting for competing viewpoints and logics and applying the QMS-immanent logic of the continuous improvement of organisational processes. These studies could determine which topics are discussed with competing logics and how they result in institutional changes. In this context, the theoretical model developed by Reay and Hinings (2005) to explain changes in mature organisational fields also seems promising. The authors emphasised the role of competing institutional logics as part of a radical change process. Ultimately, studying fields in these moments of restructuring should increase the present understanding of how collective rationality is developed (cf. Wooten & Hoffmann 2016, p. 15).

Following Weick (2009), further studies could describe the modes of integration of QMSs in organisational fields. Furthermore, other studies should investigate the inherent question of the function of decoupling processes. Here, Boxenbaum and Jonsson's (2010) comment seems insightful: "The unintended effects of decoupling, such as whether it affects morale and fosters cynicism within the organisation, certainly merits attention as well" (p. 91).

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