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Features of Biographical Processes of Professionalization Amongst Managers: Being Aware of The Relevance of Non-economic Conditions and Features of Managerial Work and Laboring With its Paradoxes and Antinomies

1. Management in the view of the interactionist theory of professions

The sociological term of profession as it is used here differs from an everyday understanding of profession, in which the routine of experts is normally interpreted as an expression of professionalism. In the Chicago tradition of interactionist sociology (Everett Hughes, Anselm Strauss, and in Germany Fritz Schütze) professional activity is seen as being oriented towards the protection of valuable societal goods. In direct interaction professional work is – at least in principle – oriented towards the client’s well-being [Schütze 1992, p. 135]. At first glance, it seems that such an altruistic action model stands in diametric contrast to the strategic action model of individual utility maximization which is institutionalized in the world of economy. Analysis of biographies of managers and work processes show, however, that although management is not a “real” profession, such as medicine or practicing law, managers do provide profession-like services oriented to the well-being of entrusted personnel. This is the case, for example, when a personnel manager gets involved to help an employee to find a new job in the company while his superior tries to edge him out of the company. Such kinds of social efforts are often constitutive for work and action processes in economic institutions. It is assumed here that economic action is like any other social action (in institutions) bound to basic principles of interaction [cf. Schröder 2010, p. 110 f.; Beckert 1997; Maurer 2008, p. 78 ff.]. Hence, it is also characterized – again as any other type of social action – by cooperative orientations and it is based on idealization practices [cf. Schütz 2003, p. 152 f.].

The latter means, for example, that interactants assume that perspectives on a specific subject matter of interaction are shared by each other, although this mutual understanding is not yet an empirical fact and needs to be proven in the course of interaction [cf. Schütze 1996, p. 187 f.]. In the light of interactionist theory strategic action which would be oriented to one's own benefit and would not take into account the intention of the interaction partner can be regarded as a very specific type of action. Strategic action bears systematically the risk of generating social escalations due to the violation of cooperation expectations and an endangerment of the base of reciprocity.

Looking at the work of managers from the point of view of professionalization, social foundations and social orientations of managerial action can be focused very well. Talcott Parsons' structural-functionalist view on professions stressed the importance of academic education of professionals who would bear a particular social responsibility [Parsons 1964]. Therefore, classic professions such as doctors and lawyers are usually in the core of theoretical considerations on professional work. They serve as a model to show that professional activity is characterized by an orientation towards common welfare or, more generally speaking, towards collectivity. The development of a *Code of Ethics* as a visible expression of the profession's social responsibility is seen as characteristic, too [Goode 1960]. However, going out this professional-ethical normative view the interactionist-oriented research on professions deals also with professional activities that do not necessarily come out of (full) academic training and cannot draw on a standardized scientific body of knowledge. The interactionist-analytical focus is on specific work processes and interaction situations of professional work. Furthermore, the complex social process of professionalization that unfolds not only on the institutional but also on the biographical level (more on that later) is of core research interest [cf. Schütze 1996].

To this end, life stories told in autobiographical-narrative interviews as well as narrations on work processes between professionals and their clients are analyzed. With such empirical material on work processes it can be scrutinized in what way professional people deal with their clients' problem, and if the professional person would have a case-analytical understanding. Fritz Schütze, a German sociologist who worked on profession theory, explains: "What the case is, lies – in a first approach – in the constitution of a problem context in the everyday living world of the client" [Schütze 1992, p. 137, translation A.S.]. Case problems stem from increasing difficulties that the affected person encounters when pursuing biographically relevant action plans. These difficulties arise from biographical and other social reasons that can exist for a long time (such as a disposition of a client to circumvent all kinds of conflicts) or that take place only temporarily (e.g. the lack of support from a superior for one of his or her employees who encounters work difficulties). In the unpredictable course of the case's unfolding the affected person becomes a help-seeking customer of

professional services. For professional help the professional person is asked to take the client's perspective (in the sense of George Herbert Mead; cf. Mead 1998 [1934], pp. 177–186). Only then he or she will be able to find out constitutive events and conditions that undermine the client's capacity to act (who is then drawn in a mode of suffering which allows only conditioned reaction). The professional who starts to care of a client, needs to respecify existing theoretical categories that explain (specific) problem developments with regard to the conditions of the respective single case. He or she might even have to develop entirely new explanations. Correspondingly, the study of processes of professionalization means – pointedly said – to understand under what social conditions a professional person develops case-analytical skills and an action orientation towards the welfare of others in his or her biography.

Managerial work, too, is in its structural constitution directed towards other people just as it is the case with professional occupations. This is particular true for the fields of personnel and product development management. The initial idea for studying processes of professionalization of managers in these fields was that economic rationality would not stimulate problem-related ideas for creative work on the development of new products (product development management), and that it would neither sensitize for perceiving and working on problems on the level of the dynamics of social relations in employment relationships (this phenomenon is especially related to tasks in personnel management). Interactional and other non-economic foundations and social dimensions of managerial work can be focused in the aforementioned interactionist theoretical perspective. However, research on management needs also to take into account the phenomenon that the orientation principle of economic rationality, i.e. the adherence to the principle of individual utility maximization, is deeply anchored in managerial work culture. A realistic approach towards managerial action and work therefore needs to realize that objectives and action orientations can form strongly conflicting demands; and this must be theoretically considered as a central structural feature of managerial work. Already the early concept of bounded rationality as well as organizational theory focused on empirical contradictions of the goal-instrumental (*zweckrational*) model of economic action [e.g. Simon 1959; Cohen/March/Olsen 1972]. Similarly, in industrial sociological research on management inconsistencies between capital logic and organization of work [e.g. Hyman 1987, Deutschmann et. al. 1995] as well as contradictions on the level of tasks and processes and thus antinomies of managerial work – particularly between the logic of utility maximization logic and tasks of social responsibility – were taken into view [e.g. Freimuth 1995; Neuberger 1990, p. 91 ff.; Kalkowski/Mickler 2009]. In the interactionist theory of professions core problems and paradoxes as well as such kind of antinomies are seen as characteristic for professional work [cf. Schütze 1996, p. 187]. They crystallize on the level of interaction and produce systematic potentials for mistakes at

professional work and work difficulties. In the following their specifics will be presented.

2. Paradoxes and antinomies in professional work

The Chicago sociologist Everett Hughes explains that professions claim a mandate for the administration of specific social values in a national society [cf. Hughes 1965, p. 448 ff.]. Linked to the mandate is a license or permission given to the professions to execute their work for the sake of help-seeking clients. The measures taken by the professionals are developed on the basis of an exclusive knowledge which is foreign to laypersons. A core feature of the professional work situation is therefore that professionals provide services in a very difficult interactional situation [Schütze 1996, p. 184 ff.], an asymmetrical professional-client relationship with striking gaps of skills, power and knowledge. A further characteristic is that the professional work is done between the professional and his or her client who do not know each other. At the same time, however, only mutual input of trust can form a trust base for the joint problem solving work that can be very difficult and even painful. And this work needs to be done on a very vague knowledge base. These asymmetries in the interactional professional work situation continually threaten the base of reciprocity. Therefore – and this is a first constitutional level of paradoxes in professional work – ongoing activities that establish and protect the base of reciprocity become necessary [ibid.]. The professional must, in principle, solicit trust for his actions throughout. This is particularly necessary if it comes to unexpected or painful interventions of the professional; for example, if a lawyer proposes his client an admission of guilt to mitigate the sentence.

In addition, the professional needs to provide further interaction-oriented services with high sensitivity for work paradoxes. Paradoxes also originate from the logical structure of the professional activity itself [cf. Schütze 1996, p. 187]. For example, the professional social worker who wants to help a young man to get in charge of his biographical planning feels he needs to address the client's autonomy in order to strengthen his client's capacity to act. At the same time there is the conflicting requirement that the young man, who is quite disoriented at present, needs pedagogical guidance and practical assistance in order to find the courage and orientation to make first independent steps. Such guidelines bear then again the risk of making the young client again dependent or they could even degrade him. Schütze explains that such conflicting requirements that accompany professional conduct would configure to non-abolishable paradoxes in "that they connect and intensify in certain problem constellations so that it comes to thematically structured aggravations of these core difficulties as well as to irritations associated with these." [Schütze 2000, p. 70; translation A.Sch.-W.] If professionals are not fully aware of these paradoxes, this generates mistake tendencies at work in a systematic way. The fact that the relationship between

the professional and the client and thus the work contract can be destroyed is a fundamental risk. Even more dangerous are case-related mistakes at work which result from a misconception of the case by the professional. For example, the social worker, who wants to help the young man, can be convinced that his client, who should stand on his own feet, should organize his daily life totally on his own. In light of such a position of strict non-interference the young client would probably feel soon overwhelmed and discouraged by everyday tasks and would give up any autonomous activity at all. If, conversely, the social worker would guide his clients in all matters, the young man could neither develop any new capacities to act.

Professional, client-oriented work that is characterized by such kind of paradoxical orientation structures is to find – as already mentioned – also beyond traditional areas of the “proud” or the “modest” professions (such as social work). The focus of interactionist sociology throws light upon the fact that profession-like tasks are also undertaken in other social worlds and in the social world of business respectively. Beyond the idealized, prescriptive (neoclassical) conception of economic activity, managerial action is indeed realized in interactions. In certain management fields interactional situations are of great intensity, and one can find there classic paradoxes of professional action. For example, if a personnel manager deals with a specific work conflict in a decentralized organization. He or she could feel the need, on the one hand, to wait in the face of a conflict and thus supports decentralized problem solving activities; contrary to this, he or she sees the necessity to intervene in order to prevent intensified conflicts which could destroy cooperation for a long time. In addition, the classical paradoxes of professional action in the economic sector are enforced more than in other social worlds by strong antinomies of orientation principles. These orientation principles originate from different institutional provinces of meaning (in the sense of Alfred Schütz): the orientation principle of utility maximization (in the social world of business) and the altruistic orientation principle (which is found, for example, in the world of social work, but also in specific management fields). These antinomies are especially burdensome in the field of personnel management where core tasks such as personnel care and personnel development must be carried out under pressures of rationalization and against the logic of utility maximization. And in the field of product development managers have to promote art-like creativity in a way that is not at all typical for the economy. Managerial action is in both work areas exposed to an extreme antinomian tension. On the one hand, the principle of the economic sphere of meaning demands an orientation towards profit realization as well as towards the corresponding principles of economic rationality, efficiency and predictability. On the other hand, creative ideas cannot be developed step by step in the context of linear-rational action planning. Instead the executive can only try to set up a social milieu framework in which the production of creative ideas

is more likely than in fully rationalized organizational contexts. This means, however, that the product development manager needs to outsource such an art-like social milieu and to demarcate it against the company's rational planning and its culture. – The antinomic tensions which originate from different worlds of meaning are working fundamentally and strengthen the paradoxes in a narrower sense as well as work problems related to them.

A sequential analysis of case presentations, in which personnel and product development managers describe work processes related to interaction histories between them and their quasi-clients (personnel, co-workers, but also customers in the field of product development management), allows determining emerging social requirements in the flow of events. Furthermore, the managers' responses to these reactions as well as related achievements of problem-solving or, in turn, of problematic developments can be analyzed. With such a theoretical focus on work processes prudent interventions as well as sub-optimal strategies in case management in the face of paradoxes and tensions of antinomic requirements become visible. – The research on professional tasks of managers and biographical professionalization processes was done with the theory-based methodological body of biography analysis [cf. Schröder 2010 on Schuetze's methodology, Part B].

In the following I will present a case example of professional managerial work and the emergence of a specific paradox-phenomenon. Based on case comparisons, generalizations with regard to other paradoxes and antinomies will follow. Finally, it will be asked which social conditions in the biographies of managers promote a professional competence that is in its core characterized by an awareness of paradoxes and antinomies in their own actions.

3. A case study from personnel management

Even though managers have significant experiences in their lives that sensitize them for social tasks, social phenomena and foundations in their lives, their awareness for social tasks in their daily work practice can be quite restricted. This is amongst other conditions due to the fact that – as already indicated – the dictate of economic rationality in private corporations is of penetrating power. The rigid enforcement of utility maximization strategies easily superimposes the task of personnel managers to ensure and protect the manifold social conditions of employment relations: e.g. the task of supporting the productive development of employees' vocational biographies, of protecting employees from the danger of stigmatization and arbitrariness in contexts of organizational upheavals, and of creating possibilities for employees to identify with the company. Hence, the employees' perspective in conflicts is often merely visible. In the words of the US-American sociologist Harold Garfinkel these conflicts are "*seen but unnoticed*" which means that the conditions that constitute and dynamize these conflicts are usually not fully understood by managers.

The following case study shows the problem-solving approach of a personnel manager towards a case problem. It shows that professionally acting managers take efforts to carefully consider both, the interests of the corporation and of employees. In the face of redeployment personnel managers are, first of all, confronted with the paradox of the necessity to be geared in their action towards both addressees who demand orientation to conflicting interests at the same time.

Case study

Mrs. Welte is personnel director in the German headquarters of a food company. In the following two text sequences of her narration on a work process with a personnel-client are analyzed with regard to content and the formal narration structure. I intend to show how her attention for the profession-like tasks of her work is clouded at first and then how and why her action orientations alter and become more professional. Structural features of her activities will be spelled out, and it will be shown how they influence the quality and course of interaction. – The personnel manager Mrs. Welte starts her narrative with describing a conflict between an employee of the company and his superior:

And eh anyway in the case of this employee these changes [new business structures – A.Sch.-W.] might came effective at the end of last year. / And the conflict occurred because he [the employee – A.Sch.-W.] was in no way willing to leave any of his former tasks, former strategies and his well-rehearsed routine. / This means / he took the standpoint: I have done this over twenty years. I will continue doing so. / This led to massive conflicts with his superior / of which I've learned only in hindsight. [...] So the whole thing is relatively well ehm escalated emotionally. / And uh the whole thing was then not passed on to the personnel department but to the executive board of the department. / true to the maxim: The employee should be out. / We don't have any use of him. / Then / the former personnel manager became involved in the conflict talks. / But somehow the whole thing came to a point of constant quarreling. / Hence, this man very quickly called in a lawyer because he had the feeling he was being pushed out of his job, and should be forced to take on a new task in X-city. [...] Well so / and the whole thing was at a stage where all ehm were unhappy / the situation was totally hardened. / They would have liked nothing better than to give notice to him. / True to the maxim: He does not do anything at all and / it's all confrontation. / And he himself would have preferred to remain at his old job and nothing else. [...] Yes, then we have begun to look into - which I mean in a sense that we just started talking / and / well, as a matter of fact it is so / that ehm / mhm / despite of all hardening of the situation, thank God, this employee, because his job was really made redundant / which means it no longer existed in the old form / he accepted to work in X-City for a transition period. [...] [Interview Mrs. Welte, p. 42:27-43:47; highlighted by A.Sch.-W.] First, the personnel manager gets right into the conflict line when taking over the case. The case problem consists in that an employee is threatened to lose his job in the context

of a company's restructuring process. This employee defends himself against a compensation offer: a job offer in a plant that is several hundred kilometers away from the corporate headquarters. The superior of the employee wants the personnel manager Mrs. Welte to give notice to his co-worker who in the view of the superior would oppose to these unavoidable adjustment measures.

With regard to content, it is striking in the first narrative segment that the personnel manager Mrs. Welte first sees the main reason for the conflict only in an unwillingness of the employee to adapt to organizational changes. While thus taking on the problem definition of the employee's superior Mrs. Welte also takes on the negative typification of the superior who categorizes his employee as generally reluctant to learn and as being change-resistant. In addition, Mrs. Welte categorizes the case problem as an expression of a recurring problem of her daily work. In her opinion the company's parties would generally not talk openly enough to each other. This would lead to misunderstandings which could easily escalate. This first case definition, however, which seems to be convincing at first glance, becomes somewhat brittle in the course of the narration. So-called constraints of narration (*Zugzwänge des Erzählens*) of the autobiographical impromptu story-telling force Mrs. Welte to describe the events of the escalation more accurately. When the personnel manager is about to explain how it came to an initial compromise with the employee concerned, she is forced to tell in more detail what happened before that (*Detailierungszwang*). To this end, Mrs. Welte explains in a formally striking "background construction" (Schütze 1984, p. 80 f.)¹ that the position of the employee was *fully* eliminated with the enforcement of the restructuring program. One learns now that the affected employee was in a situation in which he was threatened to lose his job, if he would not accept the alternative offer which in his point of view was not acceptable. Therefore it appears in a different light that the employee, who was in a threatening existential situation, began to defend himself. In addition, it might have been the case that the employer's intent to give notice to his co-worker was only veiled by the unattractive job offer which was not acceptable by the employee at all. Against this background, the first categorization of the personnel manager Mrs. Welte with which she labeled the employee as unwilling to learn becomes highly questionable.

In the course of her narration Mrs. Welte then begins to contextualize the case problem with radical changes in the company's work organization. It becomes clearer that there had not been any negotiations between the company's

¹ A background construction is a story told in the background of the main story line (in the interview marked in grey). Often the narrator tries to circumvent difficult events and experiences that are connected to feelings of shame or guilt in his or her story-telling. A background construction becomes necessary at a point in his or her story when the chain of events must be made plausible [cf. Schütze 184, p. 80 ff.].

parties. This condition of escalation was initially not taken into account by Mrs. Welte. For the record, the perspective of the employee does not come up until the self-correction of the personnel manager when she explains that the employee's position was eliminated. A significant criterion for professional action would be, however, an action awareness of the situation and the interests of the personnel-client, and her commitment to de-escalate the situation. If Mrs. Welte had related the perspective of the affected personnel-client to the perspective of his superior already at the beginning of her case management, she would have clearly seen the pressing dilemma of addressees. And this would have enabled her to deal more consciously with these at least two different relevancies in the interactional conflict situation. She does not do so at first and thus circumvents the perspective of the affected employee. This missing awareness of the paradoxical orientation of considering the interests of the personnel-client in the problem solving process on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of being oriented to an implementation of the company's restructuring program, is expressed on a symptomatic level in the (above mentioned) small "disorder" in the narration.

Only in the *concrete interaction situation*, in which Mrs. Welte starts to get personally involved in the conflict and where she begins to communicate with the affected employee, the quality of the social situation alters. The personnel manager Mrs. Welte realizes that if she ignored the employee's perspective an escalation of the conflict would be systematically promoted. The trust basis for a cooperative settlement of the conflict would be destroyed. Mrs. Welte begins to discuss the problem situation with the employee. She realizes that it is unavoidable for her to orient her work to the conflicting interests of the unlike addressees. The fact that Mrs. Welte does not refrain anymore from the dilemma of addresses in the face-to-face situation, shows that she, in principle, feels morally committed to orient to the interests and welfare of the entrusted employee. She feels a kind of inner commitment to learn about the perspective of the employee in the concrete interaction situation and to take it seriously into account for dealing with the case. The following narrative segment shows that her attitude towards the personnel-client then becomes much more professionalized:

Yes / and then we / had in my point of view a very good private conversation. / I've told him what I knew of the case, and also told him that I am now dependent on that he tells me his view of things, so to speak, and that I also want to hear from him what he would see as the core problem and what his topic would be, what his interest is. / He did that. [...] For me, it was very important to find out in our conversation what would be crucial points for him, which we need to take into account in any case, whatever the solution would look like. / And where we might have some space, where he perhaps would be willing to compromise, too, and where he would be willing to move. [...] What / ehm was important for me in our conversation was / to signal to him that I am just not

the servant of anyone or the extended arm of his superiors, but / that I see myself as a neutral person in the whole. / This is an employment / and I am providing services in this company, and my service is to ensure that this employment / is running decently, and to do whatever is necessary to ensure that. / Or that it will end with dignity, if this is the case. / But for my understanding there was no evidence that the [company] would have to do this unidirectional. [Interview Mrs. Welte, p. 44:42–46:48]

When Mrs. Welte takes over responsibility for the case management and takes efforts to understand the perspective of the personnel-client, she realizes that the definition of the problem as it was formulated by the superior provides no basis for negotiations and compromise solutions respectively. Mrs. Welte now finds her professional responsibilities and distances from this first stigmatizing definition of the conflict. Her first step to establish a professional arc of work is exactly this effort to bring about an inter-subjective definition of the situation. To this end, she strives for a systematic triangulation of perspectives and requests the assessment of third parties (e.g. of the work council). This change in the personnel manager's attitude is expressed in her concern to symbolize her independent position. She shows explicitly her neutrality – and this is a confidence-building measure – towards the affected employee (“... *that I am not anyone's servant, [...] but / that I see myself also as a neutral person in the whole affair.*”). In this way the personnel manager can persuade the employee that she is not keeping up a front against him. The employee then, in turn, begins to act in the hope that the behavior of the personnel manager will prove to be authentic. He expects that a solution for the conflict will consider his interests, too. – To conclude here with the analysis of these two sections, it has to be noted that it is not common that a high-ranking personnel manager such as Mrs. Welte becomes personally involved in such a conflict case. However, personnel management is principally in charge when lawyers are getting involved or legal measures have already been taken.

With regard to the content of the case it has to be noted that this single case represents the structural problem how personnel management reacts towards job endangerment and job transfers due to evaluation and restructuring processes in response to economic pressures. Personnel managers can easily fall into the role to be oriented solely towards the action schemata of the business organization. Then, however, the personnel would not experience the management as an authentic reliable or even protecting partner. The fact that Mrs. Welte (and her co-worker in personnel management) does not take legal steps but take efforts to help the employee to find a new job in the corporate headquarters is an expression of her professional value orientation. It is a matter of authentic concern of the personnel manager to support her employee's search for an alternative job in the company and, to this end, be oriented towards his vocational interests as well as to his private situation. She has a keen sense that

his vocational future in the company depends on that the employee will be freed from the stigma of the unwilling, reluctant employee. With her support, he finally gets the chance to work in a new job in the corporate headquarters. In fact, the employee is somewhat overqualified for his new position. However, he is very much interested in this job, and hence Mrs. Welte makes his employment possible (more on that difficult task later).

The case shows that the professional self-image of the personnel manager becomes an effective action orientation. Being aware of the paradox of the dilemma of addressees the personnel manager does an interaction-sensitive conflict management which is able to stop escalation dynamics. – This dilemma of addressees and other paradoxes of professional managerial work are now outlined in their general characteristics.

4. List of paradoxes

1. Paradox: the dilemma of addressees in personnel management with regard to redeployment

The universal content of the paradox of the dilemma of addressees in professional work [cf. Schütze 2000] becomes virulent for personnel management especially in the situation of redeployment and reduction of jobs. Basically, this dilemma means that, on the one hand, the interests of the company, who is one of the addressees of personnel management, need to be considered. This is because personnel management is under considerable pressure to implement restructuring programs and all types of modifications in the work organization by which work processes are supposed to become more efficient. On the other hand – and this demand emerges in an inharmonious-conflicting way to the previous one – the interest of the entrusted personnel-clients are relevant for personnel managers' action orientations. The employee who is threatened by redeployment or even dismissal expects to be protected from hardships in such situations of organizational change. This is particular true for personnel in large German concerns, in which workers' rights are anchored since decades (amongst other institutions by the work council constitution act). The employee hopes that his work situation as well as his private life situation, or – generally said – his personal relevancies will be considered in the management's decision. Even in tense situations professionalized personnel managers are aware that their work has to be developed in this structural in-between situation. They assume that their personnel-clients rightly expect considerations and compromises even though these were not explicitly laid down in employment agreements, but eventually derive from basic principles of interaction, especially from a basic cooperation orientation of action [cf. Schröder 2010, pp. 110–113 with additional references]. Expectations of cooperation and support also originate from previous personal investments of employees [cf. Homans 1972, Chapter 1.]

If it already came to disappointment – as in the described case – because of non-transparent practices or power games in the company's hierarchy, the personnel management needs to do *trust work* in order to maintain or re-establish (individual and collective) working morale. This is at least an important task as long as personnel management (yet) claims a mandate of being “the” reliable partner and socially responsible authority in the company. The latter is of course basically threatened if personnel work under globalization and profit pressures is only interpreted with regard to economic surplus and its strategic function in the company.

Mistake tendencies in personnel management that arise with this paradox originate from defocusing this dilemma of addressees. A harmonistic interpretation – as one can find it in the case of Mrs. Welte when she starts out with the case management – implies, for example, that changes of organizational structures could be successfully implemented already if employees would be willing to adjust and learn. This interpretation fades out all hardships of rationalization measures and endangerment of vocational biographies. The mechanism of fading out leads to a systematic lack of commitment in personnel management: neither support nor protection measures for affected employees will be developed then. To the contrary, a professional attitude is characterized by genuine efforts of personnel managers to consistently keep an eye on the welfare of the personnel-clients at times of organizational change. Professionalized managers are sensitized towards the employees' existential situations and the employees' needs for planning stability. Triangulation of perspectives is a key precondition for a differentiated assessment of such situations of change. A prerequisite for this is that a personnel manager remains susceptible for the (emergency) situation of his personnel-clients. He or she feels committed to do everything in his or her power to remedy such situations. This sense of personal commitment to support personnel-clients corresponds to a moral measure of value of the professional personnel manager. For example, questions of fairness that address the topic of social responsibility of the company express such kind of value orientation. This value-oriented stance contributes to the development of an awareness of paradoxes of managers.

2. Paradox: Orientation towards biographical conditions and biographical development potentials of personnel-clients on the one hand vs. orientation towards actual job offerings and concrete work opportunities on the other hand

This paradox is due to the fact that with tasks of staff development and staffing personnel managers need, on the one hand, to take into account development potentials of personnel-clients. They know that if they want motivated and qualified personnel, they have to find out about biographical preconditions of their personnel-clients, i.e. their potentials for change, what would be sense-making sources of their work and what would be difficulties connected with

their work activities. Professionalized personnel managers understand that if work is experienced as alienating, performance goes down and motivation ebbs away. Nonetheless, biographical development potentials that originate from individual biographical experiences are often unnoticed in personnel work (see below: 3. paradox) and are not seen or accepted as legitimate identification and qualification basis for job search. However, new initiatives in vocational biographies in case of dead-end developments and previously overlooked career lines could be supported by searching for biographical development potentials in the face of redeployments.

If personnel managers and other professionals in the personnel department became biographically sensitized, the constraints to restrict staff development to available job positions only will be easier perceptible. Only this awareness makes it possible to search together with personnel-clients for compromise solutions. In the above case Mrs. Welte, the personnel manager, supports the affected employee to get a job in the corporate headquarters for which he is somewhat overqualified, however, he is very interested in this position. The professional attitude of the personnel manager is reflected in her support of the employee's unusual choice of employment. She abstains from pushing the employee in a position for which he is indeed properly qualified with regard to education, but which is unwanted (with regard to biographical development opportunities). The personnel manager's action is guided by her assessment of the individual (vocational) biographical situation and the personnel-client's job interest. At the same time she reflects the risks associated with staffing overqualified personnel (in this case). However, she follows her intuition based on talks with the employee that the employee has the potential for fulfilling the new job requirements. Insufficient circumspection in the face of this paradox, in turn, would be connected with the idea of personnel managers that offering a job would already be sufficient effort². With it, questions of biographical fit and development would be completely excluded. The economic dimension would then be the only central criterion for staffing.

3. Paradox: focusing documented performances and evaluations of achievements in personnel talks vs. orientation to a fresh approach in the face-to-face encounter with a personnel-client

Another paradox that requires biographical sensitivity becomes virulent with personnel talks for recruitment purposes. A personnel manager may come under pressure from high-ranking managers in the company that demand implementation, adjustment, or even dismissal of certain employees. In talks with the affected personnel-client the personnel manager relies on his or her competence

² This paradox as well as a quantitatively oriented attitude would be most probably found in the work of case managers in public job centers, too.

to come to differentiated assessments in terms of competence, learning potentials as well as of risks and defense potentials of his or her personnel-client. Only then is it possible for him or her to assess qualifications for specific tasks and thus to perform responsible personnel development work. Indeed personnel files and performance documentations (including documentation of failures) basically facilitate a differentiated assessment of skills and competencies. However, personnel managers encounter the problem of not being able to look “behind” documented career developments of the respective personnel-clients. This is because the documentation of performances and achievements is predominantly on success and failure and hence on quantitative and prestige aspects of career advancement. In this way a decontextualized picture of career achievements is created and the quality of vocational biographical experiences is usually covered. Experiences that stimulate learning processes and lead to acquire new stocks of knowledge and also experiences that lead to growing risks in one’s vocational biography are easily overlooked then (e.g. an action scheme of flight in the face of overburdening responsibility which is hidden by career advancements). Skills acquired by intense participation in non-economic social worlds or by living and working in new cultural contexts might be defocused. In addition, quasi-ethnographic competencies of understanding the cultural other as well as competencies of dealing with unexpected problems might be underestimated by the personnel manager or personnel specialist. Furthermore, the capacity to develop contextualized views is often connected with the overcoming of incisive biographical experiences of suffering – and this might not be understood either, if there is a strong focus on success stories in personnel talks.

In the face of this paradox a personnel manager needs to find out about his or her personnel-clients’ experiences. If he or she stays receptive to the experience reconstruction and self-assessment of the personnel-client, he or she can learn something new and unexpected from the (vocational) biographical development of the personnel-client. The personnel manager’s ability to distance from documented assessments is therefore the central aspect of a professional handling of the paradox. Concretely, analytical distance shows in that the professionalized personnel manager is oriented to discover biographic-individual identification grounds with the company or to discuss these anew in the interactive situation, even if these are diverging from previous career lines. This is of particular relevance in the case of young managers who are easily sucked up in a promotion pull (*Aufstiegssog*) and are to lose control of their career development [cf. Schröder 2010, pp. 260–263].

If a personnel manager is not able to find an independent stance towards the documents, the personnel talk is likely to be no more than a tool confirming personnel data. It might be then that especially “critical points” (e.g. times of unemployment, negative statements in the personnel file, etc.) become overly focused. Another reason for a strong document focus and a reproduction of

seemingly objective assessments of an employee, a manager or a new candidate can be that a personnel manager tries to hide her or his uncertainty of judging. Conversely, it is problematic when the personnel manager completely ignores performance and competency assessments and believes that only self-assessment of the respective personnel-client would be decision-relevant. This is particularly true for managers who have a highly critical view of the model of economic rationality and a rationalized working practice in the company and who are likely to take a too naïve-biased outlook. An integrative perspective on the aforementioned spheres of meaning (of economics and of social orientation) is thus of particular importance for circumspect professional managerial action.

Two other paradoxes associated with employment conflicts

To conclude, two other paradoxes of (managerial) personnel work shall be mentioned: With personnel talks the (4.) *paradox* becomes virulent that – similar to the diagnostic situation in social work where the social worker needs to develop a realistic idea of the case problem – personnel specialists *need to put faith* in the personnel-clients. Only then the personnel-client would feel encouraged to talk openly about his or her work and career situation and burdening developments in his or her vocational biography. Professionalized approaches in personnel management are based on case-analytical understanding that can be developed only by taking over the perspective of the involved parties. Personnel-clients must therefore be encouraged to talk about their (work) life history. By means of perspective-taking an empirical understanding of the process and its social conditions that determines the case's *Gestalt* (shape) can be gained. (e.g. the manager can learn how a conflict began; that an intensified situation was ignored; that a conflict situation escalated until the conflicting parties completely lost their willingness to cooperate; that the conflict was dealt with in an inadequate way with regard to the constituting factors of the case; that there was a growing discouragement of the parties, and so on). One problem for personnel specialists and managers is that personnel-clients often veil own conflict shares in their presentation of case problems in which they are enmeshed. For personnel specialists and managers it might therefore become necessary to question certain points in their presentations. Doing so, conflict conditions that were nourished by the personnel-client's behavior could be carefully approached, too. In a stance of solidary critique these shares could be addressed and integrated in a joint definition of the problem.

Finally, client-related personnel work is confronted with the (5.) *paradox of having to wait* in the face of *problem developments in the workforce*. Finding decentralized solutions would be supported by this stance of non-interference. Doing so, also conflict resolution skills in the affected area can be supported and further developed. On the other hand, personnel management is required to *actively intervene* when a conflict in labor relations intensifies. This is because the

involved parties may become emotionally burdened thereof, or demoralization processes could develop in the respective teams. Hence, it would be a mistake when a personnel manager (along with other managers in decision-positions) feels that space for decentralized decision-making needs to be restricted in principle. He or she might think that restrictions could prevent ineffective solutions which deviate from the headquarters' objectives. In turn, an attitude of laissez-faire bears the risk of escalation of problems that at a later date would no longer be controllable. Such problem escalations could deeply affect the experience of collective identity in the company and, in addition, lead to increasing transaction costs, too.

Paradoxes in the field of product development management (R&D management)

In the management of product development departments more paradoxes become virulent. These are partly cognate paradoxes with regard to the task of how vocational biographical learning processes can be supported. However, given the structural difficulties of stimulating creativity in goal-instrumental (*zweckrational*) structured work contexts, of dealing with anomies of time in innovation work, and of dealing with organizational changes and constant expectations of profit and success, other specific paradoxical demands occur [cf. Schröder 2010, pp. 397–423]:

- Product development managers are, on the one hand, geared to market analysis and prospect of success when assessing emerging as well as ongoing projects. On the other hand, they are oriented towards the principle of an unpredictable unfolding of creativity, which means that they have to deal with the emergence of yet unknown (technical) developments and vague future horizons.
- Also, the paradox of focusing specific requirements of time needs and resources in the project on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of adjusting towards the goal-instrumental structures of demands of the line hierarchy is not abolishable.
- A third paradoxical constellation that product development managers face is connected with the process of creativity. On the one hand, managers need to look for ways to increase the employees' potentials of contingency by promoting experiences in new territories (such as in fields of application in other social worlds). The unfolding of new product ideas and new development lines can be systematically supported by such excursions. On the other hand, circumspect managers know that previous successful experiences can function as an important link for the activity of exploring new fields. With it, discouragement and disorientation can be limited if nothing new is found for a long time. This paradox is also relevant for understanding difficulties and professional action requirements in other areas of professional supervision of work processes in which new insights are to be developed.

5. Further general aspects of laboring with paradoxes and antinomies in managerial work

The analyzed cases show that paradoxes of interaction-based managerial work are systematically reinforced by antinomic value orientations. Professional action is by definition geared towards the value of the clients' welfare. However, in the world of business dominates the principle of individual utility maximization as a measure of value for "right" economic action. Creation of awareness of the aforementioned paradoxes is extremely difficult in a sphere where utility maximization is of highest value. Only a reflective distance in management with respect to this (classical) economic value orientation brings out the conflicting altruistic value orientation. Since managerial action in the economic institutional sector is usually appreciated when the principle of individual utility maximization is upheld, managers, who deal in their daily work practice with paradoxes in a circumspect way, might perceive their own action as an expression of violating proper business conduct. This great social problem is of course extremely irritating for managers and undermines their efforts to act professionally.

The question of how social orientation and economic functioning is linked is of central relevance for a professional outlook and capacity to act. Otherwise, economic ratio functions in the field of business enterprises as a super-structuring power. From this it follows that social foundations and social requirements of managerial action as well as paradoxes and antinomies can hardly be recognized, dealt with or even be discussed openly. Hence, another important question is how managers in their vocational biographies can develop a transcending outlook on economic rationality with which an awareness of paradoxes could be promoted.

6. Biographical processes of professionalization in management

At the end of this article, this second area can only be discussed very shortly. To put it in a nutshell: Biographical processes of professionalization of managers are, generally said, connected with the unfolding of creativity of their self-identities [cf. Schröder 2010, Part D]. Pre-vocational or vocational experiences of future managers that make alternative value orientations biographically relevant are a prime condition for mediating and integrating different value spheres. Action Schemata and metamorphosis process structures play a central role in these biographical processes of professionalization.

First to mention is an *action scheme of shaping social relations*. This you find in the above analyzed case example of the personnel manager Mrs. Welte. A core feature of this action scheme that professional managers can follow is a habitus of an active style of communication. In the case of Mrs. Welte it shows in that the personnel manager finds it important to include the work council as a cooperation partner in the conflict. Further structural features of this action scheme are a thematic focus on relationship structures between

employees as well as between employees and management. Knowledge of social conditions of cooperative social relationships, and, in turn, of conditions of escalation of social conflicts in work relations is gained in the course of this action scheme. Other types of process structures which promote biographical processes of professionalization are: an *action scheme of identity work*, in which course managers can become aware of endangerments of the employees' identity developments, both on the individual and collective level. In a *process structure of learning in a biographically sensitized way* managers can learn about the importance and legitimacy of relating to biographical interests in career decisions and other decision-making situations. *Processes of learning in foreign cultural contexts* foster quasi-ethnographic competencies of managers by which they become able to realize universal social principles of action and work processes, for example the importance of cooperation action orientations in situations of change in the company. In learning processes that take place in the *context of processes of suffering* (future) managers can learn that unexpected developments and crisis experiences due to temporary failure are part of complex work processes.

By such learning and metamorphosis processes certain *base positions* crystallize that enable managers to recognize and consider social foundations of work processes. These base positions reflect an *awareness of principles of cooperation, trust, and identity* as preconditions of productive individual-biographical as well as collective development in the workforce. They are relevant to action and allow managers to cultivate self-criticism and self-ascertainment. Authenticity of their own actions as well as circumspection and a will to cooperate can be inspected by them.

Conversely, one also finds detrimental biographical processes in managers' biographies as well as attitudes, social conditions and mentality structures contributing to these. Types of such kind of biographical process structures are *processes of suffering* that are, however, often covered by impressive career developments. (These processes cannot be discussed here any further.) Finally, it should be noted that quite often one finds *schematizing views of managers on economic (work) processes* that hinder a development of transcending views and assessments. An example is a *binary schema* that is based on the idea that economic activity would not belong to the sphere of social action but follows its own, exactly this monologue, goal-rational logic (and that this needs to be this way!). It is obvious that such a view veils any social requirements of economic action as well as paradoxes and antinomies of managerial work.

7. Final remark

Professionalized work of personnel managers in terms of the outlined sociological meaning of profession is paradoxically in great demand in the context of current processes of economic globalization. It seems that professional managerial work that is directed towards the establishment and protection of social foundations

of economic action becomes especially important in the face of irritation and fear caused by continuous restructuring processes and organizational upheavals in business companies. Cases show that managers often misinterpret or even fade out paradoxical requirements of their work in order to avoid conflicts with addressees and also due to very strong antinomic tensions in the economic institutional sector. Hence, problem-solving activities that take into account the perspective of personnel-clients are often subordinated. This means that managers are likely to put up with further escalation of conflicts. Possibilities of joint solutions are then being diminished or even destroyed. – To conclude in terms of Joseph Schumpeter one might even say that the extreme focus on the value of utility maximization and related theories promote a self-destructive process of capitalist enterprises and (parts of) the economic system in the long run. Processes of professionalization in management could retard this powerful overarching process of endangering the social foundations of work and social action in the economy.

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