

Why Human Resource Management Innovations have many Versions not in Theory but in Practice

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Abstract

In the last few decades, most organizations have embraced the notion of *Change or Perish*. As a result, Management Innovations (MI) are adopted the moment they are produced by *fashion setters* among others. However, these innovations are not usually adopted and implemented in full. The innovations are usually modified consciously and unconsciously. This has attracted a lot of criticism from researchers and experts. Although this phenomenon has been widely acknowledged by researchers and practitioners, surprisingly very little research has addressed the issue of why and how MI are modified. Given the importance of modification of MI to organizations who undertake it and to those organizations that wish to emulate them, understanding of why and how MI are modified is very important to the understanding of why MI work or do not work. Therefore, the central objective of this paper is to explain why and how MI are modified. Using a theoretical framework, the paper argues that why and how MI are modified are largely influenced by the reason for the adoption of the innovation in the first place. The practical and research implications are discussed.

Keywords: Human Resource Management Innovations, Management Innovations.

Of late, few issues have unified management theorists and researchers than the idea of achieving survival and prosperity through the adoption of novel ideas. Organizations are told to *change or perish*. As to be expected the market for Management Innovations (MI) has blossom as a result. Most of the MI have direct or indirect implications for the management of people in organizations. Therefore, in this paper MI is used to refer to novel ideas which may relate directly or indirectly to Human Resource Management. Many organizations have responded to the notion of *change or perish* by adopting MI such as Total Quality Management (TQM),

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), Self-Managing Work Teams (SMWT), Self-Leading Team (SLT), High Performance Work System (HPWS) etc. (see Abowd, 1990; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994;1998; Terpstra and Rozell, 1993). While the adoption of these MI have received extensive attention from theorists and researchers (see Abrahamson, 1991; 1996; Alvarez, 1997; Gill and Whittle, 1992; Huczynski, 1993a; 1993b; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996; Noria and Berkely, 1994; Rogers, 1983), modification of the ideas has attracted little attention from researchers and commentators. In fact, while there are theories on the adoption and diffusion of MI and administrative technologies (see Abrahamson, 1991; Arias & Guillen, 1997; Bolton, 1993; Colin, 2000; Donaldson & Hilmer, 1998; Gibson & Tesone, 2001; Lozeau; Langley; & Denis, 2002; McCabe, 2002; Mazza, 1997; Newell, Robertson and Swan, 1997), the same cannot be said, with confidence, about their modification.

Despite what appears to be generalization of prescription of specific MI and practices, many organizations either by design or default tend to modify MI to suit their objectives and circumstances. Sometimes MI are modified beyond recognition. And this has generated criticisms from many experts. For example, commenting on the 75% failure rate of TQM (see Choi and Behling, 1997; Eskildson, 1994; Mathews and Katel, 1992), proponents of TQM blame some organizations for radically altering the idea to the point that they can no longer claim to be operating within TQM paradigm. Hill and Wilkinson (1995: 10) argued that

"Companies seem to pick up pits and pieces of TQM and then report that they are operating TQM when in reality most schemes appear an ill-matched mixture of quality circles, employee involvement, quality tools and long established quality assurance systems"

It can be argued that critiques of management innovation are guilty of ignoring the fact that ideas come in versions. In addition, each version is further modified to suit organizational and individual objectives. Another issue that is not adequately addressed in the literature is that when ideas are adopted, they are rarely implemented in totality. This creates different versions of the idea. Similarly, when they are abandoned or rejected, they are rarely rooted out completely from the organization. Again this may form a catalyst to the adoption of new idea and merge with the remnant of previous idea to form a new version. This process can be conscious or unconscious. However, the organization may continue to refer to the hybridized idea in its original name. This paper argues that MI are not monolith and there is no reason why they should be. This is because many (if not most) of the ideas are imprecise, intangible and at times abstract administrative technologies that lend themselves to different interpretation, understanding and subsequent modification. Most importantly, such ideas are not derived from natural law or science. Indeed, it can be argued that, given that organizations differ significantly, ideas should be developed in many versions to accommodate the diversity. Otherwise organizations would consciously or unconsciously modify the ideas to fit their circumstances.

The paper argues that modification of MI is inevitable and necessary. Failure to modify or adapt MI to suit organizational context is partly responsible for why many MI do not live up to

expectation. Indeed Wood and Caldas (2002:20) pointed out that firms imposing MI without adaptation are taking a huge risk. Other writers who advocate modification of MI include Klein (1989), Young (1992) and Zipkin (1991).

The central objective of this paper is to provide a framework that helps to explain why and how organizations modify MI. This paper argues that modification of MI have not received theoretical attention they deserve. Although some prescriptions and suggestions have been widely made on why and how organizations should modify MI, such prescriptions and suggestions are devoid of sound theoretical foundation. This paper addresses this limitation in the literature. The framework advanced in this paper will hopefully further our understanding of the adoption and modification of MI in organizations. The paper is divided into three parts. Part one provides a brief review of theories that explains the adoption of MI in organizations. Part two presents an analytical framework to illustrate how MI are adopted and modified. The paper concludes by drawing implications for theory and research.

Brief Literature Review

This section summarizes the literature on the reasons for adoption of MI. For the purpose of this paper, literature is divided into organizational and individual dimension.

Organizational Dimension

Several writers such as Abrahamson (1991, 1996) Huczynski (1993b), Gibson & Tesone (2001) and Wood and Caldas (2002) have provided overwhelming evidence and instances to demonstrate that the consumption of MI is influenced by the desire to achieve "organizational" objectives. In other words, the adoption of MI is perceived as a rational exercise. Abrahamson (1991) identified four broad theoretical perspectives on why organizations adopt new ideas. They are (a) Efficiency-choice perspectives, (b) Forced-selection perspective (c) Fashion perspective and, (d) Fad perspective. The authors drew from institutional theories to explain the adoption process. Table 1 provides a summary of the theories and further elaborated in the following sections.

Table 1 Brief Summary of theories Adoption of Management Innovation

Theoretical Perspectives on the Adoption of Management Innovation	Key features of each Perspective
Efficiency Perspectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Adoption is guided by rational and objective criterion (Performance Gap) 2- Innovation adopted are beneficial 3- Only efficient innovations are adopted 4- Organizations are free and independent to adopt what they wish
Forced selection Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powerful organizations dictate the adoption of Ideas • Innovation adopted may not be beneficial • Efficient and inefficient innovation can be adopted or rejected • Coercion is involved in the process of adoption
Fashion Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations imitate others outside the industry • Imitation is caused by uncertainty and ambiguity • Imitation sometimes results in the rejection of efficient ideas • Ideas do not become fashionable by popular demand • Business schools and consultancy firms are the <i>fashion setters</i> who create and disseminate ideas • <i>Fashion setters</i> do not have coercive power but persuasive power

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashionable ideas have emotional and symbolic dimension
Fad Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations imitate others within the industry • Imitation is caused by uncertainty and ambiguity • Imitation enables acquisition of knowledge that can reduce ambiguity • Imitation helps in the acquisition of legitimacy • Imitation helps to reduce risk of being left behind by competitors
Life-Cycle Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MI have life cycle ▪ MI have shelf-life; however some ideas resist extinction ▪ The shelf-life of some ideas are longer than others ▪ MI are transitory collective beliefs ▪ The decline of MI are usually interdependent on the emergence of others
Pendulum Theory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i.</i> Production and adoption of MI are influenced by widening and narrowing of economic performance gaps <i>ii.</i> MI are categorized into <i>rational rhetoric</i> and <i>normative rhetoric</i> <i>iii.</i> <i>Rational</i> and <i>normative rhetoric</i> cannot exist simultaneously <i>iv.</i> Swing from one rhetoric to the other is triggered by macroeconomic expansion and contraction <i>v.</i> <i>Rational rhetoric</i> emerge around the onset of long term expansionary up swing, while <i>normative rhetoric</i> emerge around the onset of long term contractionary down swing

(a) Efficiency reason: This perspective is based on the assumption that new ideas will benefit organizations. And the reason why organizations adopt new ideas is to fill performance gap. This perspective also assumes that organizations are free and independent to adopt ideas without "peer pressure." And organizations are certain of their goals and how to achieve them through adoption of new ideas.

(b) Forced-selection reason: This school of thought identified by Abrahamson placed high premium on the organization's political environment in influencing the adoption of new ideas. Abrahamson argues that organizations will be forced into adopting technically inefficient idea or rejecting efficient idea by powerful organizations outside the group in which the organization belongs. For example, Wood and Caldas (2002: 23) reported that "several administrations in Brazil, coming from diverse political and ideological backgrounds, have supported, with laws, policies and fiscal incentives, the tendency to adopt foreign management models and practices". This view is also shared by Arias and Guillen (1998). The authors argued that in the pursuit of development and national interest, nation states encourages and sometimes coerce manages into adoption of foreign managerial practices.

(c) Fashion reason: The thrust of this argument is that, because of high uncertainty in the environment and the ambiguity of organizational goals, organizations tend to imitate others. The organizations that are imitated are those outside the group that the organization belongs. They are what Abrahamson refers to as fashion-setters (Consulting firms, Business schools). This perspective argues that efficient ideas will be rejected by organizations in order to adopt mutually exclusive idea introduced by fashion-setters. It also implies that efficient ideas will be adopted if introduced by fashion-setting networks. Fashion setters may market only efficient innovations or market only profitable ideas. This implies that modification of ideas is inevitable especially if the inefficient ones are adopted. Also, it implies that ideas generated by fashion setters are more likely to have limited shelve-life because they are more likely to be inefficient and to have a new version.

(d) Fad reason: Unlike the fashion perspective, this school of thought assumes that organizations imitate other organizations within the group only, not outside it. But like fashion school, the organizations imitate others because of uncertainty and ambiguity. The imitation takes place when the organization obtains information from the early adopters that reduce ambiguity about the innovation (Rogers, 1983). Abrahamson (1991) argues "the propensity of organizations in a group to imitate each other's decisions to adopt a technically inefficient innovation will vary with the nature of pressure impelling imitation." (pp. 599). Huczynski (1993b) provided similar categorization of motives/reasons for adopting new ideas. However, his categorization is not based on theory but on ideas and empirical evidences.

(e) Another perspective that tries to explain the adoption of MI is the life-cycle theory. Some writers such as Gill & Whittle (1992) argue that most ideas are consultant driven-packages that have life cycle. They used MBO, OD and TQM to illustrate their point. They argue that each of the ideas have a life cycle characterized by, enthusiasm, disillusionment, decline, followed by another panacea. Similarly, Gibson and Tesone (2001) argued that each management idea has a life cycle characterized by discovery, wild acceptance, digestion, disillusionment, and hardcore. The authors used MBO, sensitivity training, QC, TQM and self-managed teams to illustrate their

version of life-cycle theory. Gibson & Tesone (2001) are among the very few writers to offer a suggestion on "how to" adopt management fads. They provided a checklist of eleven questions that organizations should answer in order to guide them towards successful adoption and implementation of MI. Other writers who subscribe to the life cycle of MI include Colins (2000), Donaldson & Hilmer (1998) and Stern (1994).

(f) In his recent publications on the subjects, Abrahamson (1996) empirically tested the effect of economic cycle on the adoption of employee MI. The analysis of his data supports the pendulum theory that rational and normative ideas tend to emerge consecutively during upswing and downswing of macroeconomic activity (Barley & Kunda, 1992). The author found that there is prevalence of rational employee management rhetoric during upswing of macroeconomic activity. Conversely, there is prevalence of normative, employee MI during downswing of macroeconomic activity.

In summary, the above review indicates that adoptions of MI are largely for organizational objectives. The influence of individuals in the process and objective of adoption of MI is not adequately addressed by the literature reviewed so far. We believe, understanding the role of individuals in the motive and process of the adoption is critical to the understanding of the issue. In particular, we can improve our understanding of the process of modification of ideas if we appreciate the role of individuals in the adoption process. In the following section, the individual dimension of adoption of new ideas will be briefly discussed.

Individual Dimension

One of the theories that adequately explain the role of the individual in the adoption of MI is the sociopsychological perspective advanced by Abrahamson (1996). He used the theory to explain the demand for Management fashion. This school of thought basically argues that individuals (managers) might adopt new ideas in order to satisfy psychological needs. Utilising Sapir's (1937) argument, Abrahamson (1996) argues that "managers demand management fashions to appear individualistic and novel, relative to the mass of managers who are out of fashion." (p. 271). Also, the adoption of the idea is fuelled by individual desire to demonstrate their level of progress. Abrahamson (1996) suggests a second category of psychological factor that influence adoption of new ideas. According to the author, frustration and desire loosens normal institutional control over individuals. This naturally enables managers to go against the norm and adopt new ideas. The third and final category identified by Abrahamson (1996) is a sociological one. Using Simel's (1957) idea, Abrahamson argued that managers adopt MI to distinguish their organization from low status organizations. However, this can hardly be described as a rational and objective exercise. In an article explaining the succession of management fads, Huczynski (1993b) identified specific reasons why managers adopt new ideas. They are, career-enhancing reasons, defense against accusation, and desire to reduce boredom. The need to achieve quick results and status was cited by the author as well. On the whole both organizational and individual factors play a significant role in the process of adoption. In the following section the paper presents analytical framework that explains the adoption and modification processes.

Towards an Analytical Framework

Reasons for Adoption

The paper puts forward a simple framework that can help in the understanding of the process of modification of MI in organization. However, appreciation of the reasons for the adoption is central to the understanding of why and how MI are modified. This paper argues that the reasons for the adoption can be categorized simply into two: *objective* and *subjective* reasons. The reasons are distinguished by the extent to which they are exclusively organizational goal or personal goal. For example, *Objective* reasons may or may not relate to the achievement of organizational goals. Also, *subjective* reasons may or may not relate to the achievement of goals other than organizational. **Diagram 1** below, provides a matrix for the categorization of reasons for adoption of MI. As can be seen, both individual and organizational dimension of adopting MI can be either *objective* or *subjective*. However, this categorization is not water tight. Organizational and individual reasons can overlap. Similarly, the distinction between *objective* and *subjective* reasons can be fuzzy. Nevertheless we believe this categorization provides a framework for understanding the complexity of the adoption of MI in organizations.

Diagram 1.

		Reasons	
		<i>Subjective</i>	<i>Objective</i>
Dimensions	<i>Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological need for novelty and individuality • Desire to address personal needs 	<i>Need for personal Development</i> <i>Solve long standing managerial problem</i>
	<i>Organizational</i>	<i>Imitation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion 	Filling Performance Gap

Typology and Process of Modification of Management Innovation

Adoption of MI can be categorized into two dimensions: Type of adoption and the Process of adoption. Depending on the reasons, the type of adoption of MI can take many forms (Wood & Caldas, 2002). *Type A*: this type of adoption involves high critical reasoning backed up by careful and meticulous assessment of the fit between the MI and organizational context. This leads to the modification of the idea whenever necessary. In fact Woods and Caldas (2002: 26) argued that “Adopting imported models this way allows organizations to extract the best out of them,

performing an appropriation of their core values and translating the technology to their social and cultural universe”.

Type B: This is largely symbolic and ceremonial exercise usually prompted by institutional pressure. This type of adoption illustrates a clear link between the reason for the adoption and the process and type of adoption. It also illustrates how organizations adopt new ideas in order to maintain the status quo by showing some semblance of changing. For example, Woods and Caldas (2002) pointed out that organizations that use a high level of critical reasoning, may adopt legitimized fads merely in a ceremonial manner. Also, the authors argue that organizations resist change by appearing to conform. The authors point to the adoption of TQM and BPR to illustrate this point. *Type C:* This type of adoption is characterized by lack of critical reasoning coupled with pressure to adopt new ideas irrespective of organizational need. The outcome of this type of adoption is usually a negative one.

Many writers take the rational and logical view of the adoption process. For example, Rogers (1971; 1983) suggests five stages for the adoption process. The stages are: Awareness stage, interest stage, evaluation stage, trial stage, and adoption stage. Woods and Caldas (2002) also identified five steps in the adoption process which are: identifying core assumptions; testing and filtering each assumption; blending in local singularities; reconstruction of model; testing and implementing. Although Woods and Caldas (2002) and Rogers (1971; 1983) have provided anecdotal evidence on these stages of adoption, the reality is that many organizations do not follow these stages in the adoption of MI. Nevertheless, the suggestion provides a framework on which to build theories and models of the adoption process. Diagram 2 is a matrix that tries to simplify the types of adoption process across individual and organizational dimensions.

Diagram 2

		Process	
		<i>Reactive</i>	<i>Proactive</i>
Dimensions	<i>Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imitating other managers 	<i>Rational and independent search for solution to managerial problem</i>
	<i>Organizational</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succumbing to institutional and/or industry pressure to imitate 	Rational and independent search for solution to solve organizational problem

Proactive process refers to the extent to which the organization or the individual is acting rationally and independently in search for MI to solve organizational problems. For example, Abrahamson and Rosenkopt (1990) pointed out that in an ambiguous and uncertain situations,

organizations will assess the cost and benefit of adopting innovations. That organizations may be immune to imitating others if the expected return is undesirable. In a nutshell, *proactive process* will be backed up by critical reasoning and analysis.

Reactive process refers to the extent to which the organization or the individual is responding to pressure to adopt MI. For example, forced selection perspective reviewed earlier is a case in point. As Abrahamson (1991: 594) pointed out “powerful organizations may have an interest in forcing a technically inefficient administrative technology to diffuse or an efficient administrative technology to be rejected despite organizations’ resistance”. From the individual dimension, the adoption will have nothing to do with solving organizational problem. Instead, satisfying psychological need will be the main goal. Similarly, from organizational dimension, the adoption will have nothing to do with solving organization problem. Instead, desire *to be in with the crowd* or distinguish the organization from the *crowd* will be the main goal. In a nutshell, *reactive process* will be backed up by critical reasoning and analysis.

Modification Process

When MI are implemented or even before they are implemented they might undergo modification in order to achieve the goals for which they are adopted. Whether and how MI are modified will depend on the degree of critical reasoning of the adopters. Wood and Caldas (2002) define critical reasoning as “the skill to carry out an objective and broad analysis that is at once connected to the context and dispassionate as regards the adoption of managerial expertise” (p. 24). The authors argue that “both unchecked admiration of imported models and complete denial thereof are examples of low critical reasoning. Managers with keen critical reasoning will neither accept nor reject a concept or model *a priori*; rather, they will analyze its entirety and its parts, its appropriateness, and its applicability”. In a review of literature on the adoption of Japanese management practices by American manufacturing firms, Young (1992) found that the firms undertake three types of modification when adopting the Japanese management practices. The first type of modification is retaining all the characteristics of the imported practices while modifying the organizational and working environment (e.g. Reward System employee attitudes and behaviour). The second type of modification is modifying some or all of the imported practices while maintaining the organizational and work environment. The third and final type involves modifying some or all of the imported practices while at the same time modifying the organizational and work environment. Young (1992) argues that the third type is more likely to produce positive outcome than the first two.

The literature reviewed so far, have made significant contribution to the understanding of the topic but it does not identify and elaborate on the key dimensions of modification. This paper argues that the modification of MI can take any of the following forms:

Addition: This is where more components (sub-ideas) are added to the original idea to make it workable (i.e. To meet the organizational or individual reasons for adopting the idea in the first place).

Omission: This is where some components (sub-ideas) of the original ideas are omitted in order to make the original idea workable (i.e. To meet the organizational or individual reasons for adopting the idea in the first place).

Hybridization: This is where two distinct ideas are merged to form a new idea in order to achieve a particular goal. One of the ideas is normally an existing idea that the organization or the individual is already familiar with. The notion of hybridization has been widely advocated when adopting MI across cultures or sectors of the economy (Botti, 1998; Ouchi, 1981). It should be pointed out that the modification can both be conscious or unconscious.

Mediating Factors

Although modification of MI is normal and frequent whenever they are adopted, the process is mediated by many factors. The factors are discussed briefly in this section. There are nine mediating factors identified in this section. The first five factors are based on Roger's (1971; 1983) model of diffusion of innovation. The last four are based on the author's observation, experience and review of literature on the adoption of MI and working practices.

Relative Advantage: According to Rogers (1971, 1983), relative advantage refers to the extent to which innovation are considered better than the one currently used. Thus it refers to the degree to which MI is perceived as better than the *status quo*. Relative advantage of MI would be determined on the basis of its ability to meet the goal it was adopted for. Type and degree of modification would be influenced by the relative advantage. Other things being equal, the more *advantageous* the idea, the less likely it will be modified and vice versa.

Compatibility: Rogers (1971, 1983) regard this concept as the degree of fit between an innovation and organization's values and systems. Therefore, compatibility can be regarded as the degree to which MI is perceived to be consistent with existing culture, experience, strategy, resources and needs of the adopters. Compatibility can also refer to the degree of fit between the MI and the goal to be achieved. Thus the more *compatible* the idea, the less likely it will be modified and vice versa.

Complexity: According to Rogers (1971, 1983), complex ideas are ideas that are difficult to understand. Therefore we regard complexity as the degree to which MI is perceived as difficult to understand and use. The more *complex* the idea, the more likely it will be modified by the adopters and vice versa. However, complex ideas might be left unmodified because of personal or political reasons. In this case, complexity will serve its purpose. This is why it is argued in this paper that when MI is adopted as a result of *subjective reasons*, the idea is less likely to undergo major modification if at all. This is because individuals would seek out and adopt complex ideas they believe others will not understand, by so doing achieve power over others. For example, experts who like to dominate others through their expertise will make sure that ideas adopted will enhance their status as experts on the system or idea adopted.

Triability: this refers to the degree to which an innovation can be experimented with on piece meal basis (Rogers, 1971; 1983). Therefore, triability of MI can be considered as the degree to which the idea may be experimented with on a limited scale. This will determine the degree of uncertainty inherent in the idea. The more *triable* the idea, the more the opportunity for modification. However, this may well depend on whether the adoption process is an *proactive*

one or a *reactive* one. In a *reactive* process, the adopters are less likely to consider *triability* as an essential criterion.

Observability: This refers to the degree to which the result of the innovation are observable (Rogers, 1971, 1983). Thus, observability of MI is the degree to which the results of MI are visible to others. The rate of imitation and mimicry within an industry will depend on *observability*. Similarly, *observability* will influence the type and degree of modification of MI. When poor result is *observed*, MI is more likely to be modified. Also, the less observable the idea the more likely it is to have many versions of the idea in operation because organizations would not have the opportunity to accurately benchmark.

Tangibility: This characteristic of MI refers to the degree of certainty and clarity associated with how the idea is suppose operate as well as its outcome. In others words. *Tangibility* can be synonymous to *quantifiability* or *explicitly*. Other things being equal, the more *tangible* the idea, the less likely it is that it can be manipulated (i.e. modified) for subjective reasons. This is because, other members of the organization would know what the idea is and how it is supposed to operate.

Radicality: This refers to the degree of newness of the ideas to the members of the organization. *Radical* ideas are more likely to contain high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity pertaining to how it is suppose to operate as well as the outcome expected. This is largely because members of the organization have no prior knowledge of something similar to the *radical* idea. Other things being equal, the more radical the idea, the easier it is that it can amenable to manipulation for *subjective* reasons.

Modifiability: This refers to the *malleability* and *ductility* of MI. If an idea is *ductile*, it means it can be extended vertically across organizational hierarchy. For example, MBO can be applied across organizational hierarchy. However, this extension could cause the idea to loose its core structure and identity. As a result it could render the idea unrecognizable. This is because when ideas are applied across organizational hierarchy, they are more likely to be subject of radical interpretation and misinterpretation which will lead to radical modification to suit the level in the hierarchy. For example, when quality assurance scheme was introduce across a particular hospital, doctors, nurses, and paramedics had different interpretation and application of the concept. As a result, quality assurance at one level of the hospital does not resemble another at different level. *Malleable* ideas can be extended horizontally to cover other areas of the organization. If an idea is *Malleable*, it can maintain its core structure and identity despite *addition* or *omission* of components (sub-ideas) of the idea. This is because if an idea is applied at the same level it is unlikely to be subject of radical modification.

Groups: An important mediating factor in the modification of MI is the influence of groups within organizations. In particular, trade unions and professions/occupational groups within the organizations can act as filters in the implementation process. This action can result in modification of the idea to satisfy sectional interests. Both addition and omission of sub-ideas can take place on demand of trade unions or occupational groups.

Interpretation of the Framework

Diagram 3 presents the inter-relationship between the concepts discussed above. It illustrates how modification of MI takes place. Our review of literature indicates that the triggering factors that influence the adoption of MI can be divided into two categories: *organizational* and *individual*. They can be subdivided further into *objective* and *subjective* reasons. And the process of adoption can be categorized into proactive and reactive process. We argue that the adoption process is largely influenced by the triggering factors reasons. The extent to which a particular adoption process is used will depend on whether the trigger is objective or subjective. As can be seen from the previous diagram, objective triggers are more likely to lead to *proactive* adoption process, while subjective triggers are more likely lead to reactive adoption. This paper argues that the process of adoption will primarily influence the type and degree of modification. *Proactive* process is likely to lead to major modification if the idea fails to achieve its goals. This is because the level of investment of time and resources in *proactive* adoption process is normally very high. Hence the individual or the organization tries to modify the idea to ensure achievement of the goal it was adopted for. *Reactive* process is likely to lead to minor modification of ideas. This is because the need for extensive modification will be low given the limited time and resources normally invested in *reactive* adoption process. Besides, the main goal of the adoption could be symbolic anyway. Modification process is mediated by the nature of the idea itself. For example, irrespective of the desire to modify an idea, the achievement of the objective will depend on whether the idea is modifiable (i.e. *Malleability* and *Ductility*).

Conclusion

Central to this paper is the idea that MI are widely adopted by organizations but later modified consciously or unconsciously. The paper argues that sometime organizations/managers seek out MI with sole intention of achieving specific objectives. If the objectives are not met, the MI will be modified until it achieves the objectives it was adopted for. Therefore the paper developed a theoretical framework that tries to explain why and how MI are modified. The framework suggests that MI are adopted for organizational as well as for personal reasons. Both reasons can be *objective* as well as *subjective*. The paper argues that the reasons for the adoption of MI largely determine the adoption process this in turn determines the degree and type of modification.

In spite of the utility of the framework and the propositions advanced in this paper further theory development and testing should proceed on a number of fronts. First, the validity of the propositions advanced in this paper needs to be tested. In particular, empirical evidence is needed to confirm or otherwise the relationship between variables in the theoretical framework. Some questions that need answers include: What is the relative significance of each factor vis-à-vis adoption and modification of MI?. Do the factors interact with each other? If so, how?.

Arguably, only if the validity of framework is confirmed empirically that the practical implications would emerge. Nevertheless, to the extent that what is proposed in this paper is valid, there are some tentative practical implications. For example, given that some organizations are influenced by *irrational* reasons to adopt MI, it would be disastrous if such organizations were chosen for the

purpose of benchmarking. Given that organizational contingencies can influence the adoption of MI, such contingencies could also influence its success. Therefore, despite the argument put forward by proponents of best-*practice* approach to Strategic Human Resource Management, it seems reasonable to argue that organizations should take its internal and external contingencies into account before adopting specific MI. Similarly, the paper argues, whenever appropriate, organizations should always consider the possibility of modifying some aspects of MI they have adopted. However, such modification should take into account of the characteristics (e.g. uniqueness) of the idea as well as the organization's internal and external contingencies. Failure to do so might result in failure of the idea.

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