

Exploring the many tales behind success: understanding translations of the “intrapreneurships” management fashion as editing processes

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper explores a management fashion within the Swedish Public Sector called intrapreneurships. Intrapreneurships became popular during a period of public debate on what forms of organizing are most suitable for the production of welfare. However, while the popularity of the model was short-lived, a few municipalities nevertheless constitute examples of where it was supported for a longer period. The aim of this paper is to investigate how the model became continuously legitimate having lost its appeal elsewhere.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper comprises a longitudinal analysis of two municipalities. Field-material was collected through qualitative methods including interviews (35 interviews, 42 interviewees) and document analysis.

Findings – The results draw attention to how management fashions become enduring. The metaphor of translation highlights how different professional actors in a local setting apply editing rules, and how they constitute work acquired for continuous translation of the model in order to make it legitimate, disseminated and supported. The study draws particular attention to the large number of actors involved in the editing process.

Originality/value – Besides an extended understanding of management concepts, to explain the anomaly of a long-standing management fashion, the paper illustrates the importance of acknowledging editing as processes and not process. A key notion in why intrapreneurships became legitimate is that professional actors edited the model differently in order to satisfy their desires and needs. This contradicts the more common case study design in translation studies, which seeks a unitary translation process, in a single local setting.

Keywords Management concepts, Management fashion, Translation, Editing rules, Intrapreneurships

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Against the backdrop of decades of public sector reform in Sweden, an ongoing public debate is taking place regarding what forms of government are most suitable for the production of welfare. The shift toward a public sector characterized by competition and privatization has proven to involve undesirable risks (Hasselbladh *et al.*, 2008; Hartman, 2011; Czarniawska and Solli, 2016). The dominant critique of privatization is that an increased distance between

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politicians and the production of welfare threatens fundamental values such as democracy, equality and equal legal rights for all citizens (Rothstein and Blomqvist, 2008; Pierre, 2009). For example, it is suggested that the increased distance produces variation in the quality of welfare services and further that on many occasions profit is prioritized ahead of continuous investments in quality because of diminished state control (Diefenbach, 2009; Winblad *et al.*, 2015). As a consequence, new ideas in relation to welfare production have come on to the political agenda in Sweden. For example, it is suggested that private organizations should be subject to more auditing and inspection, or that there should be increased rules for who is able to open a private school or a private home for the elderly, financed by taxation. Another topical idea is to find new forms of organizing the public sector, which combine characteristics associated with both private and public organizations.

One form of organizing that is said to combine private and public is “intrapreneurships” (in Swedish “intraprenad”). In practice, organizing in the form of intrapreneurships means that units within a municipality, region or other public authority obtain greater autonomy to run their affairs according to local preferences. The municipality still has overall responsibility and control, but these units are given more freedom in terms of budget, personnel and development. Examples of public units that operate under intrapreneurships are schools, libraries, homes for the elderly and pre-schools. The rhetoric used to describe intrapreneurships highlights advantages associated with public organizations, for example, that there is no risk of tax revenues ending up as profits and that a public owner is less likely to shut down a public service because of too low a level of profit. At the same time, the rhetoric in relation to intrapreneurships also includes advantages of private organizations, such as high efficiency, customer service and capacity to innovate (Westerberg *et al.*, 2011; Carlsson, 2019). One idea behind intrapreneurships is that more autonomy for the employees at these units fosters entrepreneurship (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996), or more direct intrapreneurship (Pinchot, 1985), because the units are still largely connected to the municipality, and thus contribute to innovation within the public sector.

Intrapreneurships attracted attention from many Swedish public authorities in the early 2000s, mainly municipalities. In a period characterized by a debate on the consequences of deregulation and privatization of the public sphere, it is not surprising that intrapreneurships attracted attention from many politicians and public officials in Sweden. Intrapreneurships appeared to be the yellow brick road between the public and private sector, linking the best of both worlds. However, the popularity of intrapreneurships seems to have been short-lived, and just a few years later it appeared to be a management model that was out of fashion within the context of Swedish municipalities. In 2014, the chairman of a national association for municipal intrapreneurships in Sweden, stated her worries for the future of the association due to fact that many municipalities had abandoned the organizational form of intrapreneurships:

[. . .] There is some kind of aversion to it. Luleå, for example, will retain intrapreneurships until 2015, after which they will be closed down. There will then be nothing left. [. . .] Rösjöshool (an intrapreneurship) will become a regular municipal school. So, that's the way it goes, unfortunately. [. . .] Linköping has had intrapreneurships but we have no contact with them anymore and I think they have disappeared. Trollhättan has had intrapreneurships. Same thing there. (Chairman KOMFRI, telephone-interview June 2014)

This shift in popularity is not surprising; collective attention surrounding a management concept, such as organizational or management models, as a powerful means of achieving success within the context of regions and municipalities is recurrently described as transitory (Czarniawska, 1988, 1992; Montin and Granlund, 2013; Madsen *et al.*, 2017). However, there are a few examples of municipalities subscribing to and supporting intrapreneurships for a

longer period. How did this come about? In this article I address the question of how it was possible that the intrapreneurship model could turn into a long-term ambition for change in the municipalities cited, when it was no longer fashionable in others.

A recurrent explanation for fluctuations in the popularity of management concepts is fashion. Swings in fashion, do not only decide the rise, but also the fall, in popularity of management concepts (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Czarniawska, 2005; Madsen *et al.*, 2017). However, recent research has illustrated that variation exist in the lifecycles of management concepts (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012; Madsen and Stenheim, 2013, 2014; Grinsven *et al.*, 2016) and that a management concept can play a more important role in a particular time and space, while not in others. An overall message is that the consumption of fashionable management concepts is what needs further exploration in order to understand their lifecycles and whether or not they become sustainable. In other words, it concerns the long-term use of management concepts in the context in which they are introduced. In this article, I follow proposed inquiries and study the “consumption-side” of management concepts (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012; Heusinkveld *et al.*, 2013), through exploring the case of intrapreneurships in a Swedish municipal context, in order to contribute to literature on management concepts and their lifecycles, or more specifically, what makes them prevail and become sustainable over time in the context in which they are introduced.

In the next section, I present literature pertaining to management fashions as well as introduce the main dimensions of what is often referred to as “translation studies.” Applying translation to understanding organizational change, and specifically the phenomenon of management concepts, has proven to be fruitful in recent years. The analytical framework consists of the concept of “editing rules,” which derives from translation studies and which is used to examine how it was possible that the intrapreneurship model could turn into sustainable ambitions for change. The setting for the case study is then presented, followed by the methodology used to gather and analyze data. In the subsequent section, I present my findings, followed by a discussion and the contributions made by the article.

The circulation of management fashions

Copying management concepts from other sectors and organizations has become a widespread phenomenon (Abrahamson, 1996; David and Strang, 2006; Greenwood *et al.*, 2017). A range of management concepts are circulating in organizational environments, ready to be introduced at any time to meet existing desires and needs (Sahlin and Engwall, 2002; Czarniawska, 2005; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012). Examples of widespread management concepts are Knowledge management, Total Quality Management, Lean Management, Balanced Scorecard and Business Process Engineering (see, e.g., Røvik, 2008; Madsen and Stenheim, 2014; Grinsven *et al.*, 2016). Management concepts, in the form of models, templates or prototypes, for example, are commonly assumed to become popular and spread due to their inherent characteristics and functional effects (Rogers, 1995). This is a rationalist view that stresses the link between concepts, their promises and their realization. However, an alternative supposition is that the use of management concepts has less to do with their function than with their appeal. In the view of early scholars of management fashions, institutional demands were the dominant explanation to questions regarding the spread and use of fashionable management concepts (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamsson and Fairchild, 1999). New institutional theory (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) teaches us that the spread of management concepts is simply the result of demands that have emerged from an institutional environment, and that function as symbols to gain legitimacy, rather than instruments for practical application (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Sahlin and Engwall, 2002; Czarniawska, 2005). Scholars of management fashions have also noted that fashions have their peak and when the glow that comes with being “something new” decreases, so does their spread (Tarde, 1903/1962; Abrahamson, 1996). Collective belief that management fashions are

at the forefront of management progress can be more or less transitory. In many early studies, fashion was coupled with “fads,” where fads were described as a short-lived feature that more seldom gained support from more than a few subgroups, while fashion gained more widespread collective attention and support with an increased chance of a more longstanding support. Albeit, both of them were associated with the idea that certain desires and models come in waves ([Abrahamson, 1991](#)). In the light of these insights, scholars of management fashion coined the hegemonic assumption that management concepts are short-lived phenomena and, more rarely than frequently, result in long-term ambitions for change ([Barley and Kunda, 1992](#); [Rogers, 1995](#); [Abrahamson, 1996](#); [Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999](#)). Accordingly, the prospect of management concepts, such as the intrapreneurships model, having practical impact and, further, becoming sustainable over time, seems low. Nonetheless, Scandinavian scholars with an interest in management fashion have contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of management concepts ([Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996](#); [Sahlin-Andersson, 1996](#)). Drawing on the work of [Callon \(1986\)](#) and [Latour \(1986, 1996\)](#), and “the sociology of translation,” in the mid-1990s, these theorists developed a critique of assumptions that concepts diffuse (spread) in a static form. They shifted the focus from how institutional demands create standardization to how they instead create variation as a result of how individuals in organizations actively respond to and act upon them. One of the central pillars of “Scandinavian Institutionalism” ([Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996](#); [Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005](#)) is the metaphor of “travel of ideas” which illustrates how ideas and practices, here concepts, change as they travel.

While diffusion suggests that inherent qualities make concepts spread, translation implies continuous transformation, highlighting the fact that people translate concepts for their own use and, thus make them “energized” and spread ([Morris and Lancaster, 2006](#); [Kirkpatrick et al., 2013](#); [Waldorff, 2013](#); [Corvellec and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016](#)). When fashionable concepts are introduced in a certain time and space, their form and meaning are changed on a continuous basis, in other words, concepts are translated as they travel. As [Wedlin and Sahlin \(2017, p. 4\)](#) put it: “ideas do not diffuse in a vacuum but are actively transferred and translated in a context of other ideas, actors, traditions and institutions.” Further, translation is used to highlight simultaneous processes of movement and transformation, not only in a linguistic sense. When management concepts circulate, they translate into objects such as books, models and presentations ([Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996](#); [Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005](#)). Accordingly, what is translated from one setting to another is not a concept as such, but rather accounts and/or materializations of a certain concept and these accounts further translates, resulting in different versions of concepts in different time and space ([Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996](#)). As suggested by [Perkmann and Spicer \(2008\)](#), this conceptualization emphasizes the fact that fashions do not simply spread and/or become “new” actions through the degree of uptake by organizations: “Rather, the process is accompanied and reinforced through identifiable expenditures of institutional work” ([Perkmann and Spicer, 2008, p. 838](#)). So, it would appear that the popularity and use of fashion is not only the result of organizations striving for legitimacy within an institutional environment, but also the result of individual and collective actions taking place in the local context in which they are introduced, or in other words, by how they are consumed. A central question for this article is how management concepts are translated in time and space and how this in turn affects people’s actions and responses to them. More directly, the aim of the article is to find patterns of translations that make actors think fashionable concepts are always appealing, which in turn makes them sustainable over time.

The rules of editing

[Sahlin-Andersson \(1996\)](#) has proposed that processes of translation follow rule-like patterns. The claim is based on the results of studies on the circulation of models, prototypes and

templates seen as “successes.” By following the formulation and reformulation of “the customer-concept” in public sector organizations and the idea of building research parks, Sahlin-Andersson found that the processes of translation that took place were not, as expected, creative and open-ended but rather characterized by social control, conformism and traditionalism. As concepts are accounted for and narrated they tend to be framed and presented in familiar and commonly accepted terms so that they will make sense to the reader or listener. They consequently restrict and direct how management ideas are translated in a given context. Different contexts provide different rules with the implication that local history, traditions and institutions affect how people in a given setting engage with new concepts. In this context, [Sahlin and Wedlin \(2008\)](#) talk of different “intrastructures” in different settings, which determine the editing.

However, three kinds of rules seem to work more generally. In the light of the pattern found in these “successful” translations, [Sahlin and Wedlin \(2008\)](#) and [Wedlin and Sahlin \(2017\)](#) suggest that the “travel of ideas” is mainly governed by three different editing rules. A first set of rules concerns context. These rules involve exclusion of time- and space-bound features in order to minimize the perception that a model is different, when, for example, it is applied in a particular setting. It follows that widely circulated concepts tend to be formulated in general and abstract terms ([Gondo and Amis, 2013](#)). Context-bound rules can also be about establishing connections between a model and concepts and/or practices that are already established in an actual setting, and dis-embedding them from concepts and practices considered as foreign and threatening (e.g., [Boxenbaum, 2006](#); [Gond and Boxenbaum, 2013](#); [Hopwood and Jensen, 2019](#)). A second set of rules concerns logic. It entails the re-embedding of a model in a more rationalistic manner, for example, in terms of “cause and effect” in line with a problem-solving logic. Attention may also be paid to certain aspects of developments in regard to others, with the aim of creating an alignment with a law (e.g., [Bergström, 2007](#); [Carlsson, 2019](#)), a topical public debate, or other popular concepts, in a specific time and space (e.g., [Røvik, 2000](#); [Waldorff, 2013](#); [Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2017](#)). A final set of editing rules concerns formulation. As concepts, and their effects, are presented and represented, they acquire appealing labels. They may also be formulated in terms of narratives in certain genres ([Czarniawska, 2009](#)), in the form of for example a drama, comedy or tragedy, consisting of a “plot” ([Czarniawska, 1997](#)), that connects accounts and/or events to one another in an explanatory way, to better attract attention and gain support. Editing in the form of formulation can make certain procedures, techniques or concepts more attractive, and function as a sense-maker for why, for example a concept, is a success.

Research method

A case study was conducted in order to provide information in relation to the question set. The case study consisted of an investigation into the processes of translation, dis-embedding and re-embedding of the model of intrapreneurships in two municipalities in Sweden. The two municipalities were selected on the basis that they represented places where intrapreneurships were still considered attractive after several years in use. This was counterpoised with the fact that most municipalities had abandoned intrapreneurships years ago, suggesting that the model was no longer in fashion. While many other municipalities gave up on the model in the early 2010s, these municipalities continued to utilize it even after its popularity had waned elsewhere. The municipalities chosen for the study were consequently considered to be “critical cases”; in other words, sites where a long-lived management fashion was to be found ([Flyvbjerg, 2006](#)). Municipalities chosen for the study, here with fictitious names [1], were North, which introduced intrapreneurships in 2008 and had over 20 workplaces governed by intrapreneurships in

2016 and West, which introduced intrapreneurships in 2008 and had two compulsory schools governed by intrapreneurships in 2018. In North, as well as in West, I included one compulsory-school in the study.

Field-material consisted of interviews and different forms of documents. Interviews were conducted in the period 2014 to 2017. In total, field material consisted of 35 interviews (42 interviewees) with municipal politicians and officials as well as personnel and managers at two different workplaces governed by intrapreneurships, each situated in one of the two municipalities. All interviews were taped and then transcribed verbatim. Documents consisted of both official documents, such as records and official decisions, and informal documents in the form of memos from meetings and texts from websites and local newspaper articles. In the material, I looked at stories/narratives concerning the intrapreneurship model. Narratives collected determined what was to be included in the stories about intrapreneurships. An underlying premise was that collective stories, or narratives (Czarniawska, 2004), which convey social norms, conventions and traditions, are more than accounts. They are eventful and, in this study, regarded as the basis for individual activities (Gubrium, 2010). In the introductory phase of the analysis, I looked for social patterns and structures in my area of interest, inspired by a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Comparisons between patterns that I found regarding what affected translations of the model ultimately resulted in categories. As these categories fitted well with Sahlin and Wedlin's (2008) and Wedlin and Sahlin's (2017) framework on editing rules, I subsequently used their framework to structure the analysis. In that sense, the research strategy was neither inductive nor deductive, but instead followed patterns of "creative abduction" (Schurz, 2008). Collection, sorting, coding and categorizing data were combined with readings of previous research until I found that the rules of editing constructed by Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) and Wedlin and Sahlin (2017) fitted well with what actors consider the organizational form of intrapreneurships to be appealing.

Accounting for the editing rules of context, logic and formulation

Even though two different municipalities were studied, I found that the translation processes followed a similar route to that predicted by Wedlin and Sahlin (2017). Analyzing translations of the model of intrapreneurships as editing-processes (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008; Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017) highlighted the fact that the model was supported and considered appealing to a greater degree when (1) similarities between contexts and conditions for adoption were emphasized while differences were downplayed (context), (2) new meanings were created, such as problem-solving logics and/or connections to ongoing public debates (logic) and (3) the model was formulated into appealing narratives (formulation). However, instead of one unitary narrative in each municipality, different narratives existed within different professional groups. Politicians, public officials and employees at the schools applied the editing rules differently. Below I describe how the concept changed over time along with the editing rules used in translations of the model in West and North municipalities. For an overview, see Table 1 (West) and Table 2 (North).

West municipality

At the start of the study of West municipality, the model of intrapreneurships was called self-governing schools. The name changed over time, although, I was told that self-governing schools was the same thing as intrapreneurships. I therefore make no other distinction, other than the name, between self-governing schools and intrapreneurships. The model was officially labelled self-governing schools between 2007 and -2015, and officially labelled intrapreneurships between 2015 and -2017.

West	Focus of the self-governing schools model/ intrapreneurships	Editing
2007– 2008	The model, at this point called self-governing schools, is an “alternative form of organizing” and fits well with the municipal tradition of encouraging competition and private ownership. Similar to earlier management concepts used, such as “result-units” back in the 1990s and early 2000s (Politicians and public officials) The model is similar to an earlier project that took place at our school in the mid-1990s with the aim of creating a more self-governing school with the ambition of increased influence for citizens (Employees at the School) The model is in line with the ongoing public debate on entrepreneurship and innovation in the public sector (Politicians, public officials)	The model is edited into something familiar to the local context by making associations with the past (context)
2009– 2010	The self-governing schools model mirrors the national preparatory work for the new education act (enacted in 2011) and it’s proposition on introducing self-governing schools within the public sector (Politicians, public officials)	The model is edited in accordance with a public debate on privatization and entrepreneurship within the public sector (logic) The model is edited according to preparatory work for a new law (logic)
2011– 2014	The model or concept of self-governing schools constitutes a reorganization of how education is administered as a whole, with the aim of creating more autonomy for all principals within the municipality. The absence of the expected paragraph on self-governing units in the new education act made us reconsider (Politicians, public officials) The self-governing schools model no longer exists. The model is an alternative to the bureaucracy and inflexibility that characterizes the municipality and this is not the case when it comes to the reorganization (Employees at the schools)	The model is edited in accordance with a new law (logic)
2015– 2017	The model is now called intrapreneurships (new label). It is the same thing as self-governing schools, but intrapreneurships is a better version. The intrapreneurships model does not include the risks associated with private schools and (as previously used) self-governing schools (Politicians, public officials) The model is edited in accordance with the municipal tradition of encouraging competition and private ownership. Similar to earlier management concepts used, such as “result-units” back in the 1990s and early 2000s (Politicians and public officials) The intrapreneurships model is the same thing as the concept of self-governing schools and represents the same form of organizing that characterized the school back in the 1990s (Employees at the school) The model is not “just” a form of organizing. It is associated with the story of a freedom-fighting principal, a strong leader with big visions, who for decades fought for schools in the municipality to become more autonomous in relation to the local education authority. It is also associated with the reputation of the school in terms of good student results and successful innovation (Employees at the school)	The model is edited in accordance with a public debate on privatization and entrepreneurship within the public sector (logic) The model is edited according to a public debate on entrepreneurship and innovation, but also the debate concerning risks associated with privatization of schools (logic) The model is edited into something familiar to the local context through associations with the past (context) The model is edited into something familiar to the local context (context) The model is edited to represent stories with a “plot” connecting accounts to one another. Stories of a hero and the reputation of the school as a success (formulation)

Table 1.
How the self-governing schools model/
intrapreneurships
changed over time and
the editing rules used
in translations of the
model in West
municipality

Table 2.
How the
intrapreneurships
model changed over
time and the editing
rules used in
translations of the
model in North
municipality

North	Focus of the intrapreneurships model	Editing
2007– 2009	The intrapreneurships model fits well with the municipal tradition of encouraging decentralization. Historically, the municipality has multiple experiences of organizing with the key signature of decentralization, for example in the form of local municipal boards in the 1980 and 1990s (Politicians, public officials) The intrapreneurships model represents the same form of organizing that we had in the mid-1990s when our school was given a more autonomous position in relation to other schools by the local municipal board (Employees at the school) The model is a solution to the problem of increased competition from private schools in the municipality (Politicians, public officials) The model is an alternative to the “classic” public operating mode and also fits well with the ongoing debate on how we can enable entrepreneurship and innovation in the public sector. The model is used by a municipality that recently won an award for its work on quality improvement (Politicians, public officials)	The model is edited into something familiar to the local context by associations with the past (context) The model is edited into a solution to a problem (logic) The model is edited to fit a public debate on entrepreneurship and privatization of the public sector and a “role-model”-municipality (logic)
2010– 2013	The model means that units governed by intrapreneurships should be autonomous, but not so autonomous that we risk equality for the pupils in our schools (Public officials) The model must grant the units governed by intrapreneurships more autonomy to reach advantages associated with self-governing schools and/or private schools (Employees at the school)	The model is edited in accordance with a public debate on risks with privatization of schools (logic) The model is edited in accordance with a public debate on entrepreneurship and privatization of the public (logic)
2014– 2016	The intrapreneurships 2.0 model (new label), grants autonomy to the units based on the results of performance measurements, decided by the municipal education authority. Use of performance measurements is in line with the municipality’s new quality system (Politicians, public officials) The intrapreneurships 2.0 model gives limited and conditional autonomy to schools, which means that they don’t challenge the value of equality for pupils in the municipality (Politicians, public officials) The model no longer exist in the municipality, it is not the same thing as it was before (Employees at the school) The intrapreneurships 2.0 model is part of the municipal history and associated with the story of a freedom-fighting principal, a strong leader with big visions, who fought for decades for the school to become more autonomous in relation to the education authority. It is also associated with a reputation for good student results and innovation (Politicians, public officials, employees at the school)	The model is edited in accordance with a new model of performance measurement introduced in the municipality (logic) The model is edited in accordance with a public debate on privatization of schools as a cause of inequality (logic) The model is edited in accordance with the past (context) The model is edited to represent a story, with a “plot” connecting accounts to one another, consisting of a hero and the schools’ reputation as a success (formulation)

Whether or not the model of self-governing schools was edited into something familiar in accordance with the editing rule context seems to have been important for it to gain support in West municipality. Politicians, public officials and employees at the self-governing school, stated the fact that the model was considered appealing on the basis of its similarity to earlier management concepts used in the municipality. According to politicians and public officials in West, one argument for introducing the model of self-governing schools in 2007 was that it aligned historically with the way the municipality had been organized. It was translated by politicians and public officials into an alternative form of organizing within public sector provision and chimed well with the municipal tradition of encouraging competition and private ownership: “[...] private alternatives and competition have always been words of honor in the municipality” (Politician, West). Employees at the school instead edited it to represent an earlier project from the mid-1990s. The aim of the project was to create a more self-governing, locally embedded school, with the ambition of increased influence for citizens. However, the project came to an end about five years later and led by the principal employees at the school have been fighting to regain their autonomous position ever since. As the principal stated: “When they announced this, we already had an application prepared. For a long time I had been thinking: “something has got to happen, if not, we will try to become a private school” (Principal, West). Although it is a different translation, than the one made by politicians and public officials, it suggests that editing the self-governing schools model, along with context in the form of earlier experiences, made it more attractive for employees at the school. Narratives from West municipality also suggested that edits in accordance with that logic were important for the self-governing schools model to gain support from politicians and public officials. When the self-governing schools model was introduced in West in 2007, it was described as an alternative to public operating, flirting with the ongoing national debate on how privatization enables entrepreneurship and innovation in the public sector. It was described as something similar to a private school: “You could say that it was a private school or comparable to a private school” (public official, West).

Later on, narratives showed that the model of self-governing schools model was edited to fit the national preparations for a new education act, which came into force in 2011. In the preparatory work for the new act, it was proposed that municipalities should have the opportunity to introduce self-governing schools, with public ownership, for increased quality, efficiency and innovation, although, these suggestions were not actually included when the new law came into effect. The absence of an expected paragraph on self-governing schools created uncertainty as to whether or not it was illegal to use the self-governing schools model, with the consequence that, based on recommendations from public officials, politicians decided to turn it into a reorganization of the administration of the education system as a whole. As a public official in West put it: “The Minister of Education said that the new education act would consist of a clear regulatory system for self-governing schools [...] but then they didn’t include anything about this in the education act” (public official, West). This led them to re-think the situation and they started to plan for a reorganization. The reorganization took place in 2014 with the aim of creating greater autonomy for all principals within the municipality, in order to better fit the new education act. However, the reorganization didn’t mean that the model was abandoned. According to public officials, the reorganization derived from the self-governing schools model. Translations that are made can thus be considered to be editing in order to better comply with a new law, in other words according to a logic. It is worth noticing, that the reorganization made employees at the school very disappointed: “Since the education act came into force they (public officials) thought that this would no longer work” (employee at the school, West). Many of the employees at the school stated that the reorganization led to self-governing schools no longer existing in the municipality. They still regarded the model as an opportunity to imitate private sector

management and, to create entrepreneurship within the municipality, which in their view was characterized by bureaucracy and inflexibility.

However, the story of the model doesn't end there. In 2015, employees at the school started to lobby for a "new" model close to the concept of self-governing schools: intrapreneurships. According to them, it was the same thing, but a new label provided the opportunity to convince politicians and public officials that intrapreneurships was a better version of self-governing schools. They eventually succeeded in persuading the municipal council, which decided that two schools in the municipality should be governed as intrapreneurships. The two schools chosen were previously called self-governing schools. Politicians and public officials considered the intrapreneurships model to be similar to management concepts that they had used historically and the model thus once again edited according to context. According to them, the intrapreneurships model was in line with the municipal tradition of using alternative forms of organizing, flirting with concepts such as privatization and competition. Employees at the school also edited according to context in that they considered the intrapreneurships model to be the same as the earlier used concept of self-governing schools that was used previously, as well as the same form of organizing that characterized the school back in the 1990s.

However, and more importantly, according to politicians and public officials, the intrapreneurships model was not exactly the same thing as the concept of self-governing schools used previously. The concept of self-governing schools was strongly associated with private schools, which was not an advantage at that time. Numerous arguments from both national politicians and researchers were put forward in the national debate, on how private schools created inequality for children in Sweden. According to politicians and public officials, many things distinguished intrapreneurships from self-governing schools. For example, schools in the municipality governed by intrapreneurships had their own manager with the task of safeguarding equality for the children. In addition, the autonomy that the schools were granted was more limited than it was when they were called self-governing schools. Further, the schools had to show that the autonomy given, created value through measurable results. So again, narratives show that the editing made the model a logical form of organizing for West municipality. However, employees at the school governed by intrapreneurships were disappointed at the formal conditions associated with intrapreneurships. They felt that the model constituted the same arrangement as self-governing schools: "What was intrapreneurships all about? It was the same thing as self-governing schools" (Janitor, West). According to them, intrapreneurships was also the same form of organizing that characterized the school back in the 1990s. The formal conditions associated with intrapreneurships were therefore counterpoised with their interpretation of the concept.

Finally, narratives from West municipality showed that the intrapreneurships model, as well as the self-governing schools model, was more than an instrument to increase organizational performance. Employees at the school edited in the form of formulation when self-governing schools and intrapreneurships were introduced. Narratives illustrate that according to employees at the school, the model was connected to stories about the history of the school and the municipality. Descriptions of intrapreneurships represented accounts of a freedom-fighting principal, a strong leader with big visions, who for decades had fought for schools in the municipality to become more autonomous in relation to the administration of education: "In her fight to maintain the school's autonomy, the principal discovered the concept of intrapreneurships, which was circulating in the public debate at the time. And this was a way of doing so" (teacher, West). The school's janitor stated: "She wanted to create something unique here, and she did, [. . .] she created a certain spirit among school-employees" (janitor, West) and the school's administrator said: "there has always been pride among the school's employees, and the principal fought hard for the school to

become self-governing. She didn't agree with the way education was administrated with regard to pedagogy, so she chose her own way" (school-administrator, West). It was clear that editing in relation to formulation created attention around the model and led to increased support. The model was not "only" a form of organizing but a model associated with successes in the past. Narratives consisted of many accounts with a principal as a main character, who made the school successful, and even famous, when it came to student results and innovation. The former principal at the school stated: "We have been missionaries all over the country. Even outside Sweden. They even came from Brussels and recorded our work. And we had contact with countries all over Europe" (former principal, West). Employees at the school told the same stories. One teacher said: "Groups visited and studied us all the time [...] we have also been in the newspaper and TV, both local press and national TV" (teacher, West).

North municipality

Edits in relation to context followed a similar pattern in North municipality as they did in West. Much of the focus on the model in the introductory phase in 2007–2008 was its resemblance with the past. In North, politicians and public officials edited the model as something similar to the municipal tradition of encouraging decentralization. Historically, the municipality had a great deal of experiences of organizing with the key signature of decentralization, for example in the form of local municipal boards in the 1980 and 1990s. A public official in the municipality stated that the reason for introducing the model of intrapreneurships was that it was similar to earlier experiences: "I think the reason for introducing the idea is our history, because of the rather autonomous local municipal boards that existed before" (public official, North). Instead, the employees at the school governed as an intrapreneurship in North translated the model to represent earlier experiences of a more self-governing position that characterized the school in the mid-1990s. Back then, the local municipal board gave the school a more autonomous position in relation to other schools, in the form of increased influence over budget, recruitment and property liability. However, the conditions changed when the local municipal boards were replaced by a more centralized organization with fewer centrally placed boards in the early 2000s. As in West, employees at the school as well as the principal, had been fighting to regain their self-governing position ever since. The material suggests that edits of the model according to context, based on experiences from the past, made it appealing because of positive memories. As a teacher at the compulsory school in North expressed it: "But I believe the reason that we wanted to be governed as an intrapreneurship was that we wanted to go back to the self-governing position we had in the 1990s" (teacher, North).

Whether or not the model was edited according to a logic clearly also influenced whether the model was considered appealing and given support in North municipality. Logic as an editing-rule was evident in different forms in different times. Firstly, when the model was introduced it was edited into a solution to a problem. More direct it was edited into a solution to the problem of increased competition from private schools: "And of course, it can't be denied that the increased competition from private schools initiated it. Because in 2006 and 2007 there was a large increase in private schools in the country" (politician, North). In North, the model was also considered attractive because a municipality, which was designated as "quality-municipality of the year" by a national association for municipalities and regions in Sweden, used the intrapreneurships model:

Umeå had become "quality-municipality of the year" so we visited them to learn, and we were up there and listened to them and they had just started this project with intrapreneurships. So that's where the idea came from in the beginning. It got us going, we thought it might be something for us, so we took it with us back North municipality. (public official, North)

However, according to employees at the school, inspiration instead came from a school governed by intrapreneurships in the municipality of Solna: "We visited this school. . . Rösjö-school. . . yes, during this period we had heard that there was something called self-governing schools, and we thought it would fit us perfectly" (employee at the school, North). In terms of the editing rules, this can be considered as expressions of editing according to a logic. The edits reflect the facts that the model was considered an attractive option because it was considered to be a solution to a problem and because others used it. It thereby constituted "a logical choice."

Editing in the form of a logic was also evident in translations that made the model represent current public debates. In 2007, when the model was first introduced, politicians and public officials, as well as employees at the school, described it as an alternative to public operating mode, flirting with the ongoing national debate on how privatization enables entrepreneurship and innovation in the public sector: "It [Intrapreneurships] was introduced in parallel with the establishment of many private schools, so this was seen as an alternative to private schools. [. . .] I think they [politicians] wanted to open up and show that . . . the municipality is not inflexible but offers an alternative similar to private schools" (public official, North). A public debate was also the reason for edits of the model that occurred about three years after it was first introduced. In 2010, and the years that followed, the focus of the model changed in the way that it was now described as a model that only granted schools governed as intrapreneurships limited autonomy. Politicians and public officials said that this was to limit the risks of inequality for children, a risk raised in the public debate over private schools in Sweden. Autonomy entails politicians and public officials having less control and insight, which risks the municipal remit of giving all children an equal education. As a public official put it: "they were becoming uncontrollable but now we have got to grips with them" (public official, North). Politicians, public officials and employees at the school reported that the model's logic was questioned in parallel with the shifting public debate.

The focus of the model changed in 2014. This time it was edited to better fit a new management concept in the form of performance measurements (in Swedish: *Kommunkompassen*) that was introduced in the municipality. To start with, the intrapreneurships model, was considered incompatible with performance measurements, however, over time it was edited to be more compatible with the new concept. Intrapreneurships were no longer a form of organizing that granted units unconditional autonomy, but instead a form of organizing that meant autonomy was granted on the basis of the results of performance measurements, determined by the municipal education authority. If performance, for example of the well-being of employees or pupils' results and attendance, reached expected levels at the end of the year they were able to keep any surplus accrued. The editing of the model to comply with the concept of performance measurements was contradictory in some ways, but for the better, according to politicians and public officials: "we were very successful in introducing performance measurements, but at the expense of the autonomy of the schools governed by intrapreneurships. . . they became a hindrance in reinforcing more centralized governance" (politician, North). In 2016, the intrapreneurships label was changed to "intrapreneurships 2.0." Both politicians and public officials said that it was important to show that the many problems associated with intrapreneurships had been solved. Most importantly, it signaled that the model could no longer be associated with private schools and the risk of causing inequality for pupils in the municipality.

Employees at the school were disappointed at the changes made during the period 2010 to 2016. In their view, intrapreneurships was a logical solution to obstacles created by bureaucracy and inflexibility in the municipality. The model was an opportunity to innovate within the public sector, and thus in line with the public debate on how private sector management could improve public organizations. Moreover, it was an opportunity to return

to the self-governing position the school had enjoyed back in the 1990s: a position that gave employees at the school many advantages. According to them, intrapreneurships no longer existed in North municipality in 2016: "I cannot call this intrapreneurships anymore because this has nothing to do with what it was like before" (teacher, North).

Finally, though importantly, narratives show that translations in terms of formulation had the effect that all professional groups considered the model appealing and that it was given support in North municipality. At times, when the model was being questioned due to the introduction of performance measurements and/or the public debate on the risks of private schools, it was clear that editing in the form of formulation generated support. A decision to stop using intrapreneurships entailed a break with part of the municipal history. Intrapreneurships were associated with the story of a principal, who for decades had fought for "his" school, and other schools in the municipality, to become more self-governing in relation to education authority in the municipality. The principal was described as a strong character endowed with a great deal of energy and who was good at forging alliances as well as lobbying politicians and public officials:

The former principal at the school was a highly controversial person and if it wasn't for him there would be no intrapreneurships in the municipality. So, you could say it is because he has fought for this and dared to make things uncomfortable. . . that we still use the model. . . (politician, North)

A frequently recounted scenario was when the principal barged in to the office of the town council because he was dissatisfied with the new conditions decided for intrapreneurships, claiming the right for more autonomy: "They were so strong and they courted our politicians in the town hall, by passed all public officials and simply entered the chairmans' office" (public official, North). In the narratives collected from North municipality, it is clear that the formulation of the model also included the good reputation of the school governed by intrapreneurships. As a public official put it: "It would be such a shame to end this because they have been so successful" (public official, North). The school was strongly associated with good student results and innovation, especially when it came to school development and pedagogy: "The school is one of the most popular schools in the municipality, not only when it comes to student results but also because of its profile and educational methods" (politician, North). The narrative of school success was even more dominant at the local school and employees bore witness to the attention the school received. As reported by the former principal: "Around the millennium I think we had visits from external study groups every week [. . .] and all teachers at the school visited other schools to talk about our work (former principal, North). Narratives contained associations between the model, stories of the principal and the good reputation of the school, giving the intrapreneurships both attention and support.

Concluding discussion

For decades, the private sector has been considered a role model when it comes to management, with public sector organizations imitating concepts emanating from the private sector more of a norm today than a common feature. However, with private management concepts now being criticized in the aftermath of an intense public debate and critique of deregulation and privatization in Sweden, the concept of intrapreneurships has come onto the political agenda. It seemed to be a management model combining benefits from both public and private organizations. However, the popularity of intrapreneurships was short-lived among Swedish municipalities, and just a few years on it seemed to be a management model that had had its time. However, a few municipalities constituted examples of where intrapreneurships were subscribed to and supported for a longer period. These municipalities showed that theories relating to fashions in ideas, in the form of management models, and what causes fluctuations in fashions, are not sufficient to explain variations in the lifecycles of

management concepts. The question addressed in this article is how the intrapreneurships model could turn into long-term ambitions for change in a small number of municipalities when it was no longer fashionable in other municipalities.

Drawing on translation and editing rules (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008; Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017) this article suggests that editing seems to have played a major role in generating support for the model over a longer period in the municipalities studied. Following the context, logic and formulation of the editing rules, I identify translations that were significant in making the model appealing and supported during the period of study. Narratives from the two municipalities thus indicate that the editing rules, suggested by Wedlin and Sahlin (2017), contribute to an understanding of how a fashionable management concept can translate into long-term ambitions for change. Perceptions of the model as similar to the local context and as a logical solution in the time and space in question were essential for it to receive continued support. Perception that the model was appealing arose as a result of the way it was formulated, in other words, presented in the form of attractive words and a story.

Moreover, by applying the editing rules suggested by Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) and Wedlin and Sahlin (2017), the study provides a more profound understanding of how the editing rules take shape empirically and in what way they constitute the “translation work” (e.g., Perkmann and Spicer, 2008) required for continuous translation. The study shows that editing, according to the rule of context, is stated through translations connecting “new” concepts with concepts used in the past, but also translations connecting “new” concepts with a carrier of the idea similar to the receiving organization. Editing according to a logic is in turn stated through translations making concepts into solutions to current problems in a certain context, but also translations making concepts expressions for ongoing public debates, other management fashions and/or a new law. Finally, and importantly, the study demonstrates how a concept can gain support when being translated from “just” a model for organizational performance to a story of freedom-fighting principals. The results thereby contradict rationalist views that stress the link between concepts, their promises and their realization and assumptions that management concepts become popular and spread due to their inherent characteristics and functional effects (Rogers, 1995). The results also contradict assumptions that the life cycles of management concepts are dependent solely on an institutional environment. Signals from an institutional environment, in the form of fashion (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999), not only affect the lifecycle of management concepts and models, but also the people who receive them.

However, the analysis made in the study also highlights the fact that translations described in the form of editing in the study are, to some extent, different from how translations in the form of editing are described in earlier studies. Insights are gained by comparing the results with studies concerned with what affects how translation of ideas, such as management concepts, unfold. One insight gained from such a comparison concerns the many actors that are involved in the process of translation. Many case studies using translation focus on *one idea* and follow its circulation in the sense of a unitary interpretation (e.g., Lindberg and Erlingsdóttir, 2005; Andersen and Røvik, 2015). Focus is frequently placed on translators who are managers within a given organization seeking to improve performance by institutionalizing a management concept (e.g., Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Waeraas and Sataøen, 2014; Jemine *et al.*, 2019). However, as the analysis shows, different actors were active as translators, or editors, in the municipalities and at times different translations of the concept of intrapreneurships existed in parallel to one another.

Narratives collected from the municipalities showed that support and translations of the intrapreneurships model varied, not just in time, but also between professional groups. As emphasized above, the editing rules were useful in understanding how the model was translated and how translation was conducted. However, this study also draws attention to the

fact that editing takes place within different constellations of actors in a single setting. Editing is not a unitary activity in the form of one process, concerning one single concept or model, in a local context. Several translations in the form of edits, not just one, made the intrapreneurships model evolve and continue to attract attention, resulting in more widespread support. This is contrary to an understanding of translation as a constant compromise between a concept or model and the time and space wherein it travels (e.g., [Boxenbaum and Pedersen, 2009](#); [Kirkpatrick et al., 2013](#)). As put by [Boxenbaum and Pedersen \(2009, p. 191\)](#): “an implicit search for pragmatic solutions”. A possible conclusion is thus that a management concept that accommodates different interpretations is more likely to gain sufficient attention and support to become long-standing and “successful”. Further, this contradicts the more common belief that a shared understanding of a concept for change is crucial for its implementation. [Callon \(1996, p. 223\)](#) suggests that at the end of a translation process, if successful, only voices speaking in unison will be heard. Taking empirical material in this study into account, I would question whether that could ever be the case when it comes to intrapreneurships and the municipalities studied. In this context, it seems that, the popularity of the model was the result of various interests and strategies from different professional groups, existing in parallel to one another. In recent years, several researchers have suggested that variation in translation is the result of different interests, needs and desires, for example emerging out of a professional role (e.g., [Waldorff and Greenwood, 2011](#); [Pallas et al., 2016](#); [Vossen and van Gestel, 2019](#)). Along with this study, these studies not only demonstrate that there are strategies behind translations of a concept, but also that translations of a concept can vary between different actors in the same time and space, for example the local setting of a workplace. However, a question that arises from such a conclusion is whether it is possible for different translations of a management concept to exist in parallel with one another in a single setting? As demonstrated in the study, employees at the schools in both West and North, were disappointed in the study’s final year. According to them, intrapreneurships failed in 2016/2017 and were no longer considered a success. So, when considering intrapreneurships as a success-story, there is reason to ask: success according to whom?

One remaining question is what makes one translation predominate over others? In this study periods can be discerned when it is possible for different interpretations of intrapreneurships to exist in parallel with each other, but also times when they could not. Analysis show that employees at the schools studied were dissatisfied with formal conditions and actions associated with the concept of intrapreneurships during the final years of the study. I was even told, with great disappointment, that the concept no longer existed in the municipality. This insight suggests that a need exists to study further, what affects negotiations in translation and what determines which focus becomes widely disseminated in a certain time and space. More directly, there is a need to investigate further how different power relations and “ownership” ([Cassel and Lee, 2017](#)) influence how concepts are translated. In addition, account must be taken to the fact that power relations are not constant but, continuously negotiated ([Cassel and Lee, 2017](#)). “Ownership” of a concept varies and so does its meaning, content and label.

Note

1. For reasons of confidentiality the material was stripped of information that would reveal the identity of the individuals and the municipalities.

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