

Are Management Fashions Dangerous for Organizations?

Gerald Lang¹ & Marc Ohana²

¹ BEM Bordeaux Management School, Talence, Aquitaine, France & Ecole Polytechnique (PREG-CRG), Palaiseau, France

² BEM Bordeaux Management School, CREG, UPPA, Talence, Aquitaine, France

Correspondence: Gerald Lang, BEM Bordeaux Management School, Talence, Aquitaine, France. Tel: 33-1-4603-1662. E-mail: gerald.lang@bem.edu

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Abstract

Management fashions have a strong effect on both managers and their decision-making. The phenomenon has been observed since the late 1980s, with managers ostensibly continuing to be attracted by “fashionable” models and concepts. The present article has a twofold objective. On one hand, it analyses academic efforts in this field by undertaking a state of the art; on the other, it explores management fashions’ potential danger for organizations by reviewing their characteristics, life cycles and processes of creation and dissemination. The analysis also reveals that management fashions constitute in and of themselves a minor risk and can even help to drive a company forward through incremental as opposed to major changes.

Keywords: management fashions, organizational fashions, organizational change, management concepts

1. Introduction

Management models and concepts, encompassing all different kinds of management and organizational practices, processes and techniques (Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2008), usually make their entrance into the corporate sphere as management fashions that a large number of companies adopt at a given moment in time. The fact that management practices tend to follow fashion has been observed in numerous academic analyses since the 1980s (Røvik, 2011). It would appear that managers and companies remain highly attracted to and influenced by “fashionable” ideas, rendering the study thereof as topical as ever (Abrahamson, 2011).

“Fashionable” management concepts, dominated by strategic, organizational or financial thinking such as ‘Total Quality Management’, ‘Reengineering’ or ‘Six Sigma’, can be highly influential. One example from 2006 was when two students from France’s *Corps des Mines* elite engineering school wrote to around 100 corporate executives, operatives, consultants or scientists in France to get their advice on a new management fashion that eminent professors from Harvard Business School had developed, called ‘Strategic Alignment’. The reaction was very diverse, with some interviewees expressing doubt and others praising the concept’s contributions, sometimes enthusiastically. A number of consultants even began applying it immediately as part of their consultancy missions. In reality, the concept had been totally fabricated by the students, whose real goal was to explore the process leading to the birth of a strategy fashion (Frémaux & Marcovici, 2007).

At first glance, the reactions from this Strategic Alignment experiment might discredit everyone in the business world, asking whether actors are little more than “marionettes” (Kieser, 2002). At the same time, following a fashion might also be interpreted as something positive insofar as this signifies modernity, topicality and an advanced level of knowledge. Conversely, it can also be perceived negatively, given that all fashions are ephemeral, somewhat misleading, unserious and ultimately futile (P. Carson, Lanier, K. Carson, & Guidry, 2000). Critical thought and common sense can be suppressed and even choked by management fashions, in which case they might be considered dangerous for the companies practicing them and subsequently for the rest of the economy. Unlike cultural and aesthetic fashions that seem innocuous for their followers, management fashions could be dangerous if they encourage organizations to make bad decisions (Ketchen & Short, 2011).

The present article specifically seeks to determine whether management fashions present a real danger for organizations. This is a particularly crucial issue because of the way in which fashions shape corporate processes and structures and affect the working environment for millions of persons, hence their well-being (Benders, Nijholt, & Heusinkveld, 2007). The focus here will be on the phenomenon of management fashions *per se*

without concentrating on the specific contents of the actual fashions themselves.

Our approach is based on a literature review on management fashions. Academic literature uses different methodologies when analyzing the phenomenon of management fashions. Approximately half of the literature analyzed are conceptual papers, whereas quantitative and case study approaches are used by approximately one forth each. Literature on management fashions makes broad use of bibliometric measures in order to analyze the number and content of publications on specific fashions over time.

The article is useful on two levels. On one hand, it analyses academic approaches to this “intriguing” phenomenon (Van Rossem & Van Veen, 2011), enabling a state of the art on management fashions. On the other, it asks whether such fashions might be considered dangerous for companies. Four kinds of danger are discussed, based on academic literature in this area. The first is the very short life cycle characterizing such management fashions, something that often translates into the implementation of small measures linking to a whole range of fashions but lacking any coherence among them, meaning that they are more of a disturbance than the source of truly positive effects. Secondly, the creation and dissemination of fashions work depending on market mechanisms. At this level, there is the risk that instead of being an effective concept for the companies using it, fashion merely responds to the logic underlying its market. Similarly, the rhetoric used to promulgate a management fashion can be full of false promises or promote recipes that are counterproductive for companies. Lastly, the actors creating and implementing a fashion might - if they are mainly pursuing their own interests - endanger a company by implementing a fashion that does not suit its needs. This article is organized in the following way: We first will present the characteristics of management fashions. We then will introduce the four potential dangers of management fashions for organizations and then discuss the results of our analysis, its limits, research avenues and implications for management practitioners.

2. The Characteristics of a Management Fashion

For more than 40 years, management technique debates have profiled a host of concepts and tools deemed to be suitable ways of resolving the problems that companies face. Yet at any given moment in time, the change programs, management tools and strategic analysis concepts that companies apply tend to revolve around the same approaches and ideas. Similarly, such programs, ideas and concepts will have revolved around other approaches and tools during previous periods. In other words, managerial thinking come in waves, much in the same way as aesthetic fashions do.

The characteristics of management and aesthetic fashions (i.e. prêt-à-porter) can be differentiated at the level of appearances and in terms of the factors shaping the fashion (Abrahamson, 1996). Management fashions must appear rational and progressive and not only beautiful and modern, as is the case for aesthetic fashions. The factors shaping management fashions are therefore not only socio-psychological in nature but also technological and economic. Hence the definition of this construct is a relatively transitory collective belief that a management technique leads rational management progress (Abrahamson, 1996).

Analysis of publications databases on different currents of management thinking reveals that these tend to come in cycles characterized by growth and decline phases of varying length (Carson et al., 2000; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Kieser, 1997; Abrahamson, 1996). Although the number of publications covering a particular management concept is only an imperfect approximation of its true implementation and tends to only reflect the “noise” made by this concept (Giroux, 2006; Clark, 2004), this remains a relatively good indication of how much interest there is in a given method (Benders et al., 2007; Carson et al., 2000).

Managers’ receptiveness to management fashions can be explained by the way management improvements standards affect their behavior. This is because society expects managers to use the techniques that are most effective for achieving performance goals (Abrahamson, 1996). It also expects these techniques to be continually new and improved (March, 1981). Standards of this nature, reflecting the expectations of society and different corporate stakeholders, also describe an ideal framework of a manager, one whose image must be dynamic, mobile and conducive to change (Midler, 1986). A current example of this kind of management improvement standard is contemporary enthusiasm for sustainability.

It is notably during situations of strategic or organizational change that management fashions have the greatest impact on corporate operations (Kieser, 1997). Fashions provide arguments facilitating the introduction of organizational change in a company. They can even serve as an alibi for executives trying to change behavior without criticizing previous attitudes. In addition, it is easier to coordinate the range of activities relating to strategic or organizational change if fashion has provided a common model. Shared convictions can serve as an integration mechanism ensuring that all actors within a company are held to the discipline of the discourse associated with the fashion (De Cock, 1998). By so doing, a fashion can imbue complex projects with shared

meaning (Nicolai & Røbken, 2005). More modestly, alongside this argumentation function management fashions are also useful for the way they shake up a company, upsetting things to ensure that it moves ahead by introducing necessary change. It remains that to be associated with management improvements, fashionable shared convictions must evolve regularly. Otherwise (and paradoxically), they would impede change and progress. Hence, fashions' tend to succeed one another in waves (Kieser, 1997).

Regarding the decision whether or not to adopt management fashions by organizations, the costs associated with the implementation seem to play a minor role. This can be explained by the nature of management fashions, which are "adopted because actors orient their choices to cognitive structures that are shared across societies, rather than to rational cost-benefit calculations" (Nicolai, Schulz, & Thomas, 2010: 165). Although the adoption of fashions may result in costly and time-consuming restructuring processes (Kieser, 1997; Kutschker, 1995), the costs associated with the adoption and rejection of multiple fashions in order to find an efficient concept may be largely overcompensated by the returns from using the efficient concept (Abrahamson, 1991).

After having presented the characteristics of management fashions, we will now present the four possible dangers of management fashions for organizations.

3. Management Fashion Lifecycles: A Succession of Contradictory Ideas?

Management fashions have a lifecycle. The beginning sees a handful of actors trying to promote a new management technique, followed by a second phase when an increasing number imitate them until the fashion is no longer fashionable and a new one's lifecycle is triggered. The succession of management ideas and concepts can lead to the implementation of successive actions that may not only lack coherency but can also contradict one another. In turn, this can disturb a company's operations and seriously undermine its efficiency to the point of becoming a real danger. To ascertain the scope of this peril and measure to what extent the succession of fashions causes real changes from (and contradictions with) preceding fashions, we will now analyze the different phases comprising the lifecycle of a management fashion.

As an analogy with industrial product lifecycle theories – rife in fields like marketing or strategy – the dissemination of the management fashions can be described as a four-step process: invention; discovery; explosion; and decline or normalization (Midler, 1986). The invention stage isolates a number of parameters within a complex reality, while monitoring the relationships between them. In turn, this spawns a management expert discourse. The discovery phase consists of adopting and applying the recipes associated with the method in question. By and large, this is a phase where the fashion is being recognized, first by experts and then by the general public. The explosion phase is marked by widespread discussion about the topic, notably involving consultants, with companies using the new technique to drive many actions. In the decline or normalization phase, the general discourse becomes less omnipresent and more nuanced, with people becoming aware of the new method's limitations and the bad experiences that some people have had implementing it. This leads to some disillusionment with its effects compared to expectations. Ultimately, the method ends up being replaced by another (Brunsson, 2006).

As such, fashions often end up "assassinated", with new actors propagating new fashions and denouncing existing ones (Kieser, 1997). The new fashion will incorporate ideas from its predecessors, causing a sedimentation phenomenon where each management method leaves certain traces without totally overhauling what came earlier (Midler, 1986). As an example, Reengineering can be understood as a global concept, but one that is notably based on ideas taken from Total Quality Management, Lean Management, Organizational Learning, etc. (Kieser 1997; Kutschker, 1995). In addition, each fashion tends to cause technical problems or contradictions that the new fashion uses as its starting point, i.e. today's fashions are launch pads for their successors.

Past fashions can also return once people have forgotten them (Esposito, 2011). This is because fashions are, apparently, never systematically eradicated but can experience a decline (measured by fewer publications) before starting a "second career" (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). For instance, Total Quality Management projects are still being implemented today despite the decline of this fashion (David & Strang, 2006). The same applies to Reengineering or Lean Production concepts (Bort & Kieser, 2011). In performance terms, there is always a chance that a concept will become more efficient after time has elapsed, once the company's context has changed. In this way, management fashions may serve as well to reject a new concept deemed overly similar to other fashions associated with bad experiences (Røvik, 2011).

In short, fashions have lifecycles much in the same way that products do. This is a sign of their evolution and even of progress. The fact that contradictory measures are sometimes implemented due to the succession of fashions appears as a danger in this context, but it is a minor one given that each new fashion incorporates some

of its predecessors' elements.

4. Do the Best Concepts Dominate the Market for Management Fashions?

Management fashions' creation and dissemination processes are crucial to studies in this field. Management theorists tend to analyze both the way that these processes function and how fashions are disseminated in the economy.

The creation and dissemination of management fashions can be analyzed according to the model of a market (Abrahamson 1996; 1991) inhabited by a range of different counterparts. The demand side features managers and consultants. On the supply side, there are suppliers and "management fashion setters" such as gurus, media pundits (notably editors), business schools and consultants. This market model is useful for illustrating the complexity of the process by means of which fashions are created and disseminated - the internal functioning of this market- but also the external factors that influence them. A market logic, which reconciles supply and demand, can lead to the market opting for the fashion that is not the most adapted to a company's needs. This is because companies *per se* are not actors in such markets. The problem is that a poorly adapted fashion can cause damage. The level of danger associated with this kind of market can be assessed by analyzing how it functions, the factors influencing it and the management fashions themselves.

With respect to the internal functioning of such markets, supply is driven by "management fashion setters" who generate, select, develop and disseminate fashions. New techniques that arise and can become real inventions also include reinventions of previous fashions or (as aforementioned) fashions that have already been propagated (Esposito, 2011). Otherwise, the markets also profile which management fashions are deemed to respond to the needs of the demanding parties. Fashion setters perceive demand for a new technique while influencing this demand with their suggestions. In short, fashion develops through an iterative interaction between the demand and supply sides.

Amongst the external factors that influence the management fashion market, demand can be affected by socio-psychological forces relating to managers' personal needs. In an attempt to stand out, for instance, senior managers may wish to "distinguish" their organization from others with a lesser reputation. Here fashion translates the contradictory forces that can exist within a social context built around management practices: between reliability and creativity, rules and innovation (Esposito, 2011) or compliance - where the same methods are being applied as elsewhere - and differentiation - where the prime catalyst is the desire to be different (Nicolai & Röbbken, 2005).

Other external factors are techno-economic in nature and can be rooted in macroeconomics or politics. It is not clear how they affect the emergence and dissemination of fashions, with several authors expressing the idea that this influence is relatively minor (Carson et al., 2000) and others expressing the opposite opinion (Nicolai et al., 2010). Such techno-economic factors can also interact with the tensions and contradictions found within an organization. For instance, if an organization is centralized, the shortcomings of this type of structure mean that it will be receptive to decentralization, or vice versa. The succession of fashions within a company corresponds to oscillations between different tensions structuring its organization. These are pendulum swings (Nicolai et al., 2010; Abrahamson, 1996) driven by technical contradictions in the methods that the company is using.

The different forces affecting and structuring the market for fashions cannot guarantee that one fashion may be the most efficient for a company at a particular moment in time. The relevant socio-economic factors might be disconnected from companies' needs, as can the techno-economic factors. In theory, the market for fashions can create a situation where the dominant fashion is not the most effective one. This can be dangerous for the company.

5. The Rhetoric Associated with Management Fashions: Hot Air?

Rhetoric is a key element (and even a constituent) of management fashions. Most academic analyses covering this phenomenon focus specifically on this aspect.

Regarding the market model, a technique chosen and developed by "management fashion setters" must be promulgated and disseminated on a large scale. The main condition here is the development of the kind of rhetoric that is likely to convince the parties asking for the fashion that it is rational and reflects up-to-date management improvements. Hence the risk that the rhetoric does not reflect the reality of what the fashion actually offers a company, nor the consequences thereof. Rhetoric might also mask some of the effects and risks associated with a fashion or exaggerate its benefits. The danger is therefore that a company implements actions and measures that a fashion suggests based on false promises. Hence our analysis of the different aspects of management fashion rhetoric to evaluate potential risks for companies.

A management bestseller can be the catalyst for a particular management fashion when it contains certain rhetorical elements (Kieser, 1997). The more a book focusing on a new concept incorporates such elements, the greater its chance of becoming a bestseller and contributing in this way to the creation of a management fashion. For instance, new principles propagated by a fashion must accord with some of the readers' central values, such as the need for employees to be responsible, flexible, competitive, etc. In addition, best-sellers describing fashions are characterized by a refined mixture of simplicity and ambiguity. They will present a number of indisputable principles (i.e., a decentralized organization is more flexible than a centralized one) to bring managers on board.

Solutions, on the other hand, often only represent metaphors with a double meaning. This ambiguity is reinforced with the absence of a precise description of the new principles' application. The ambiguity also broadens the scope of interpretation. We feel that the concept of rhetorical ambiguity is key at this level. The ambiguity found in the discourses associated with a fashion ensures its compatibility with a range of organizations and corporate issues. It also harmonizes discourse and action, thereby serving as "social lubricant" (Giroux, 2006). Over-precision, on the other hand, highlights differences and contradictions.

It is also possible that an organization only adopts the rhetoric associated with a fashion, without undertaking any concrete actions based on the fashion's actual contents (Brunsson, 2006). Thus, fashions can be adopted rhetorically and/or substantively (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). For example, a recent study of a company referring to the fashion of "key competencies" in its decision-making and internal and external communications highlighted employees' vague interpretation of this concept (112 different key competencies were identified!) and the general pragmatism with which the terminology was used internally (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010).

In short, actions undertaken in the name of a fashion can be disconnected from its original context (Nicolai & R bken, 2005) causing initial aspirations to be reviewed downwards (Brunsson, 2006). Analysis of the rhetorical factor within management fashions indicates that this generally remains vague and ambiguous. Ordinarily, it helps to ensure that a fashion might be applied in a maximum number of companies of different sizes from different sectors. Although they are potentially dangerous because of their rhetorical nature, fashions generally do not suggest concrete applications or tools that might be implemented within a company. Thus, it is not a fashion *per se* that causes damage but actors' interpretation thereof, and/or the modalities of its implementation.

6. Are Management Fashions in Interest of Individual Actors or of the Company?

All in all, there is a close interrelationship between a management fashion's creation and dissemination. Both involve a diverse group of people from different organizations: managers, consultants, business school teachers, editors, academic gurus, etc. Each is trying to achieve their own individual aims, such as profit, recognition, power, influence, etc. (Kieser, 1997). The fashion's application can therefore benefit the parties driving its creation and dissemination but not necessarily the company. Management fashion can even be disadvantageous to the company and represent a danger for it. We examine different actors' roles and motives to determine whether the pursuit of individual objectives represents real danger for companies.

Most management fashions are created by managers or consultants, i.e. by corporate practitioners rather than organizational theorists (Abrahamson, 1996). As aforementioned, all managers must "distinguish" themselves from others. The rapid adoption of a fashion enables this kind of dissociation (Kieser, 1997) without forcing the manager to assume the full responsibility for the attempt to deviate from the mainstream. It can also be tempting to follow the general trend of adopting a current fashion. As fashion "consumers" (Huczynski, 1996), managers play a key dissemination role through their implementation efforts. They are practitioners serving both as the main drivers pushing the new management fashion and as its main audience.

Consultants' role is also very important albeit ambiguous. They participate in the creation of a new fashion, play a crucial role in the dissemination of management models throughout the corporate sector and are paid for these services. They need new ideas to legitimize their activity and growth, meaning that they must follow trends even as they try to differentiate themselves by means of some specific product (Midler, 1986). This attitude increases the ambiguity and contradiction of the new approach. Hence consultants' dual interest in the propagation of new management techniques and concepts. As the fashion's prescribers and beneficiaries, they sometimes also have reason to try and persuade a company to apply certain concepts, even ones that are not clearly relevant to its needs.

Consultants and managers often work together, with the emergence and production of management ideas being done on a collective basis (Giroux, 2006). This is because it is very important for consultants to demonstrate that they have "real" managers working with them on the new method's launch (Midler, 1986).

Book editors are also very important protagonists since they are the ones who choose management books and edit them to increase their sales potential (Clark, 2004). The thinking here is to transform the management idea into a sellable good by applying marketing and promotional methods and means (Huczynski, 1996), or by the rhetoric that the text uses. With their commercial focus, editors help to accelerate the fashion lifecycle.

Financial analysts also play a very important role in the dissemination of management fashions (Nicolai et al., 2010). The question of whether a company applies a particular fashion has a strong effect on its evaluation since analysts tend to smile on firms applying currently popular fashions. Through their evaluations, financial analysts also influence managers' choices, persuading them to apply methods deemed beneficial for their customers. By so doing, they also serve as fashion "facilitators".

Academics (professors and researchers) create and contribute to the creation of fashions (Bort & Kieser, 2011). They help to amplify a fashion by imbuing it with legitimacy. An academic seeking to analyze a phenomenon objectively becomes a substantial actor in the field in question and thereby gains notoriety and recognition. Simply by taking an interest in the management concept, the researcher amplifies it as a phenomenon.

Different actors can have divergent objectives as regards management fashions, with the pursuit of individual objectives potentially impeding the dissemination of techniques that are actually more efficient than existing ones. Actors might be tempted to opt solely for methods that they think they can use or sell advantageously, irrespective of whether this is very efficient for the company (Abrahamson, 1991). Hence the theoretical risk that actors' needs are not in accordance (and can even be in contradiction) with the company's needs.

7. Discussion: Responsible but Not Culpable

As aforementioned, management fashions interest many different economic actors and constitute a phenomenon that is highly present in many companies' lives. This clear-cut influence raises the question of how dangerous fashions can be for companies. By examining their characteristics, lifecycles, and creation and dissemination processes, we have been able to apprehend management fashions and identify their potential dangers. What remains is to ascertain the reality of such dangers for the companies affected.

Firstly, fashions go through lifecycles and succeed one another over time. It is possible that this succession of fashions can lead to a company taking contradictory measures from different fashions, something that would create inefficiencies and dysfunctions. The risk appears relatively minor, however. Fashions succeed one another rapidly but this might be better analyzed as a sign of progress and renewal that the company should welcome. In addition and more concretely, once an organization has adhered to a fashion, this leaves traces in its organization in the form of ideas and techniques that can be very useful and therefore impede the subsequent implementation of contradictory measures taken from the next fashion.

Another potential danger with management fashions stems from the creation and dissemination process. The functioning of the market for management fashions cannot guarantee that the one that would be most efficient for a company is bound to dominate at a particular moment in time. The different forces influencing this market, notably socioeconomic and techno-economic factors, can be disconnected from companies' needs. Having said that, it is not all obvious that a dangerous fashion will dominate either. It may be just as reasonable to assert that even if the market for fashions does not function perfectly, any unsuitable fashion would be rapidly identified and sanctioned on the market.

Above and beyond this creation and dissemination process, the rhetoric that characterizes fashion and helps to sell it, notably via best-sellers, generally remains vague and ambiguous so that the fashion can fit as many companies and sectors as possible. The rhetoric seeks to ensure the fashion's success, which involves reaching a large audience and an extended scope of applications. Fashions therefore avoid suggesting operationally concrete recipes or tools. This limits the danger stemming from the application of measures that are unsuitable for the company. It is not the fashion per se that can be dangerous but its implementation.

The parties driving the creation and dissemination of management fashions can be tempted to pursue individual objectives, which sometimes contradict the company's needs. Yet the fashion's success is also in their interest, since there are negative repercussions for their personal aims if it has a bad image, reflecting people's bad experiences with it in a corporate environment. In turn, this limits the danger resulting from people's pursuit of their individual objectives. Ultimately, it means that actors' interests - or the way that these are translated into the creation and use of a fashion - must not contradict corporate interests.

Hence the possibility that a management fashion should never be considered dangerous in and of itself. "Fashionable" concepts can be "made innocent" in terms of the potential danger they represent for companies. Moreover, it is even possible to identify fashions' contributions for companies. It is, for instance, possible to

choose the best elements of each fashion - or those that are most adapted to a company - without being dogmatic about a specific concept. The aforementioned incorporations of previous fashion elements and the pragmatic use of fashion concepts support this possibility. Far from making spectacular promises as fashion gurus do, we might simply observe the smaller improvements being made to justify the assertion that a fashion can drive small changes (Kieser, 1997). Each fashion also leaves traces in an organization in the shape of ideas and techniques that can ultimately be useful. In short, it is possible to suggest that fashions are likely to help change organizations, not through revolution but by an accumulation of small stages that continue to evolve even as the fashion falls out of date, as they all do (Kieser, 1997). This has been observed with the "sedimentation" of ideas of previous fashions into actual ones (Midler, 1986). Clearly, management fashions' strong rhetoric is a precondition for such improvements, as the rhetoric serves to provide arguments for the evolutions to undergo.

8. Research Avenues: Understanding Management Fashion's Impact on Organizational Life

In addition to responding to the issue of the dangers associated with management fashion, the present analysis has revealed some limitations of and the need for additional research in this area. Researchers and other academics generally find it difficult to treat management fashions as a phenomenon because they generally view it as unimportant and trivial (Abrahamson, 1996), largely because their vantage point is aesthetic fashion. In addition, academics tend to arrive on the scene once a fashion is in its decline phase (Nicolai & R bken, 2005; Kieser, 1997; Corrigan, 1997). This explains the real need to further study management fashions. We have identified several aspects that merit further scrutiny.

Firstly, at a methodological level, some recent studies on management fashion have examined very specific questions about its rhetorical or linguistic aspects, mainly using quantitative and bibliometric methodologies. These methods require a great deal of preparation and the encoding of fashions' textual elements, so as to be able, for instance, to measure the magnitude of ambiguity in quantitative terms (Giroux, 2006); the normative or rational scope of a fashion (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008); or the characteristics of consultancies' service offer (David & Strang, 2006). It is worth questioning the relevance of the findings obtained in this manner, since quantitative analysis can only offer "theoretical" results that analyze exclusively what has been "declared" about the fashions.

Otherwise, at a theoretical level, the "management fashion market" approach (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Abrahamson, 1996) is still considered the most influential model for the analysis of management fashions (Clark, 2004), with most studies referring to it quasi-systematically. However, this emphasis on how the market for fashions operates does not speak to its intra-organizational dimension, i.e. the way in which fashion affects companies' internal operations and their impact on work and organization behavior. Some generic indications about the actors are provided in existing literature, such as the fact that management population is very heterogeneous regarding management fashions (Van Rossem & Van Veen, 2011) and that managers are rather actors in the adoption of a fashion than passive victims (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). To fully understand the implications of management fashions on behavior in the workplace, further research is necessary.

Regarding the costs associated with the implementation of management fashions, the actual literature pays little attention to the question of potential return on investment and cost-benefit analysis. The suggestion that the costs of "testing" several concepts in order to find an efficient one are worth it (Abrahamson, 1991) was made more than twenty years ago. Further study should enable to explore empirically the benefits of fashion adoption.

Lastly, on an empirical level, the reality of fashion in companies – along with its nature and the process by means of which it is translated and adopted - remains relatively (and regrettably) unexplored in the theorization of management fashions (R vik, 2011; Clark, 2004). Now, the reality of a fashion in a company lies in its utilization, which can indicate its degree of relevance. Management fashions "live" in a company and can only be judged based on this experience, for it is only in this way that a fashion helps to drive the company forward. This seems plausible but requires in-depth exploration, notably the impact on employees' perception and behavior in the workplace. A particularly innovative approach to understand how fashions live within companies might be derived from an alternative theory based on a virus metaphor (R vik, 2011). It is a theoretical concept that provides an analytical framework for the main processes at work in companies' treatment and application of management ideas. The approach bodes well for future research into management fashions.

Explicit implications on practice and practitioners are only indicated very scarcely by the literature on management fashions. The aforementioned implicit managerial implications are mainly linked to the fact that fashion serves management to promote and drive change in the organization by coordinating and providing a common goal to change projects. The use of fashions in a pragmatic way and adapted to the context of the company and the sector seem to be beneficial for organizations and their managers.

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