## Management Innovation: A Critical Review

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**Abstract**: Management innovation is one of the most important innovations that help organizations to overcome their performance threshold in the last century (Hamel, 2006). However, the failure rate of management innovation is as high as 70%. This study investigates how management innovation is conceptualized in the literature and proposes a more comprehensive framework for analyzing management innovation. Through an integrative literature review and critical analyses of each approach to management innovation, the paper demonstrates three approaches to management innovation and its philosophical assumptions. Drawing from social constructionism and organisational change theory, it proposes a conceptual model for analyzing and leading management innovation via three mechanisms of social constructionism i.e. externalization, objectification, and internationalization. Each mechanism is described and discussed for research and practical implications.

**Keywords:** *Management innovation, social construction, adoptive management innovation, organisational change.*

## Introduction

This study concerns management innovation, which generally refers to adopting new management ideas, practices, tools, or structures to an organization. Management innovation (MI) was found to play a central role in the effectiveness of other types of innovation and in organisational performance (Damanpour, 2014; Heij, Volberda, Van den Bosch, & Hollen, 2020; Khosravi, Newton, & Rezvani, 2019). However, the failure rate of MI implementation can be as high as 70% in some industries (Gómez & Carnero, 2011) and continues to be a concern for organizations  (Kirsner, 2017). The high-rate failure is alarming and needs to be understood and addressed. Meanwhile, most studies on MI focused on understanding why one organization was more likely than others to adopt a new management practice (Anderson, 2016; Volberda, Van Den Bosch, & Heij, 2013). Far less attention has been paid to understand how MI was adopted and implemented. Prior studies also emphasized on the MI's mechanistic processes and less focused on its humanistic processes (Pirson & Von Kimakowitz, 2014; Sullivan & Daniels, 2008). Given the central importance of innovation to economic prosperity and organisational competitiveness (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), the quest to develop an effective approach to understand

innovation including MI, hence, continues to grow in organizations around the world (Bessant & Tidd, 2007).

This study attempts to provide an integrated perspective drawn from both academic and practitioner literatures in MI and theories of organisational change to develop a conceptual model to understand MI's dynamics. It is argued that social constructionism and theories of organisational change provide theoretical foundations to understand MI. The rationale for drawing from theories of organisational change is the similarities between MI and change. MI and other types of innovation alike, bring change to organization and are also considered as a special case of change (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004). Theories of change, as a result, would be applicable to MI, giving us insights on change dynamics in a particular MI. Similar to other social phenomenon, MI happens inseparably with social interactions. It is emerged from and constructed by social interactions. Social constructionism, therefore, would give us insights on mechanisms of MI in its transformation from ideas into organisational practices. The study aims specifically to answer the following research questions: (a) *How is MI conceptualized in the literature?; (b) How is MI similar to or different from other types of innovation?; and (c) How does MI happen in organizations?*

Considering the importance of MI and the need to further explore the dynamics of MI as it is implemented in an organization, this study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the study provides integrative literature on MI to consider different perspectives from research and professional practice on the topic. Second, it examines the similarities and differences of the MI's conceptual foundations and other types of innovation. Third, it presents findings from a literature review and theory of organisational change to propose a conceptual framework of how MI unfolds in an organization.

In the following, I describe the methods of literature review, followed by the findings, the development of the conceptual model, and the discussion for further research and applications in management innovation.

## Method for literature review

This paper is based on a review of the relevant literature in MI, which is conducted using a broad literature search and the four steps of content analysis proposed by Mayring (2015). The four steps include material collection, descriptive analysis, category selection and material evaluation (Mayring, 2015). The approach provided a rigorous process to transform from a literature review to a conceptual framework (Seuring & Müller, 2008). In the first step, material collection, the material to be collected is defined and delimited. Using multiple online databases (EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, and Web of Science) with key words that are most relevant to the study including "management innovation", "non-technical innovation", "administrative innovation", and "organisational innovation". Once the initial set of relevant articles was identified, the initial review was started to identify additional key words, subject terms that were not considered initially. This process is called "pearl growing" (Ramer, 2005). Through this stage, additional key words are identified such as "process innovation", "innovation processes", "managerial innovation", and "business innovation". Many studies seek to understand the implementation of various management tools such as Total quality management, balanced scorecard, lean organizations, etc. However, these studies did not analyze those tools under the perspectives of management innovation. They, hence, were not

included in the study.  Overall, the search yielded 1,106 relevant publications, which consist of 538 articles and other types of publications such as proceeding papers, book chapters, book reviews, editorial materials, abstracts, books, letters, and notes. As this study focuses on the evolution of knowledge on MI, research articles are major sources of data for the study. 538 articles were formed as the initial set of focal articles.

In the second step of descriptive analysis, in which collected materials were assessed, the articles' abstracts were appraised to exclude irrelevant studies. A further search for keywords of "management innovation", "management ideas", and "management tools" in the abstract and keywords provided by authors was conducted. The search yielded 323 articles. Several of them were more related to innovation management and were excluded. The remaining 316 articles were included in the final database.

The third and fourth steps are category selection and material evaluation in which categories are formed and analyzed. These steps are iterative and managed using NVivo version 11. The software helped to store and manage the coding process. The collected studies covered broad topics in management innovation, investigating why one organization was more likely than another to adopt a management innovation, i.e. different determinants for MI (Mihalache, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012; Peeters, Massini, & Lewin, 2014; Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012; Volberda et al., 2013), relationship between MI and different organisational constructs and other types of innovation (Alexy, George, & Salter, 2013; Bezdrob & Sunje, 2014; Büschgens, Bausch, & Balkin, 2013; Damanpour & Aravind, 2012; de Cock & Hipkin, 1997; López-Mielgo, Montes-Peón, & Vázquez-Ordás, 2009; Černe, Jaklič, & Škerlavaj, 2015), and the MI process (Basile & Faraci, 2015; Pfeffer, 2007; Qin, Li, & Yu, 2015). The lines of inquiry reflect how researchers view MI. Based on their similarities in defining MI, three major categories of management innovation conceptualization were formed through the content analysis of the literature review (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Conceptualizations of in Management Innovation*

|  | The outcome approach to management innovation | The process approach to management innovation | The critical approach to management innovation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Definition** | Management innovation is management practice, principle, tool, process, structure or technique that is new to the focal organization (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012a). | Management innovation refers to the adoption and/or implementation of new management practice, tool, process, structure or technique to the organization (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). | Management innovation refers to the socially constructed process of transforming a new management practice, tool, process, structure or technique into organisational practices (Knights & McCabe, 2002). |
| **Foci of** | Determinants of | Understand how | How culture, power |

| inquiry | management innovation, relationship between management innovation and other organisational constructs, performance effects of management innovation. | management innovation unfolds in the organization, different stages and sub-processes of management innovation, the effects of other factors on management innovation processes. | and politics play a role in management innovation. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Major assumptions** | A management innovation is universal and unitary. | Human agents are rational in management innovation. Management innovations are driven by key human agents and with homogenous goal of advancing organisational performance. | There are different social forces in the organization. People behaviors based on their subjective perceptions of reality. |
| **Examples of contributors** | Alexy, George, & Salter (2013); Bezdrob & Sunje (2014); Büschgens, Bausch, & Balkin (2013); Damanpour & Aravind (2012a); Cock & Hipkin (1997); López-Mielgo, Montes-Peón, & Vázquez-Ordás (2009); Mihalache, Jansen, Van den Bosch & Volberda (2012); Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda (2012); Volberda et al. (2013); Heij, Volberda, & Van den Bosch (2019); | Birkinshaw et al. (2008); Davenport et al. (2012), Damanpour & Aravind (2012); Lin, Su & Higgins (2016); Guimaraes et al. (2011); Kumar, Yakhlef, & Nordin (2019); Peeters, Massini, & Lewin (2014). | Knights & McCabe (2002); Salaman and Storey (2002); Scarbrough, Robertson, & Swan (2015). |

## Findings

The literature review yielded three major approaches to MI (Table 1). In the following, I describe these approaches and how MI is defined and distinguished with other types of innovations. Major themes of knowledge are also summarized.

**The outcome approach to management innovation**

The outcome approach to MI is the most popular approach in which MI is considered as a tangible thing, an outcome, or an end result of a process. There were 219 articles following this approach in the final data set. The approach can be traced back to Kimberly's (1981) possible first definition of managerial innovation. Kimberly (1981) defined managerial innovation as "any program, product or technique which represents a significant departure from the state of art of management at the time it first appears and which affects the nature,

location, quality or quantity of information that is available in the decision making process" (p.86). Later, Hamel expanded the definition of the managerial innovation from mainly focus on decision making process to "a marked departure from traditional management principles, processes and practices or a departure from customary organisational forms that significantly alters the way the work of management is performed" (Hamel, 2006, p.9). Similarly, Birkinshaw, Hamel & Mol (2008) defined MI as management practice, process, structure or technique that is new to the state of the art and is intended to further organisational goals. Based on these definitions, a new management idea such as balanced scorecard might not be a management innovation after it was known in business practices. Later, an expansion in conceptualization of management innovation was found with its resurgence after Birkinshaw & Mol (2006). A management practice, process, structure, or technique known in other settings but is new to the adopting organization was also considered management innovation (Mol & Birkinshaw, 2009). To differentiate the two levels of the newness of management innovation, the new-to-the-art MI is often referred to as generative MI (Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2008) and the other – the new-to-the firm MI- is named as adoptive MI (Lin & Su, 2014; Vaccaro et al., 2012). Although the generative MI enables production of more knowledge, the adoptive MI has been prevalent among most firms.

Under this outcome-based conceptualization of MI, scholars and practitioners have drawn MI's boundaries, making it a distinctive type of innovation amid some criticisms that MI is a rebranded concept of administrative innovation. However, administrative innovation often refers to a narrow range of innovation in the exclusion of many management practices such as marketing or operation management (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Compared to other types of innovation, MI, in general, has three key distinctive characteristics (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). First, unlike technical innovations, it is tacit in nature and is difficult and almost impossible to protect by patents (Teece, 1980). Management innovation is also more difficult to measure, and management innovation sources are typically different from technical innovations (Armbruster, Bikfalvi, Kinkel, & Lay, 2008). Second, compared to process innovation, MI has higher adaptability, higher complexity and are more pervasive (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Third, MI also tends to produce radical change (Damanpour, 2014).

The studies housed within the outcome approach to MI focused on exploring and explaining the antecedents and consequences of management innovation. The most recent meta-analysis on management innovation captured our knowledge on various MI's (Khosravi et al., 2019). Many factors are contextual factors such as organisational size, workforce characteristics, market scope, policy, organisational culture, national culture (Büschgens et al., 2013; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Hsieh, 2011); individual factors such as knowledge sources, leadership, innovators' education (Madrid-Guijarro, García-Pérez-de-Lema, & Van Auken, 2013); organisational structure, consultant role, organisational routine and performance management system (Büschgens et al., 2013; Hamel, 2006; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Hsieh, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015; Madrid-Guijarro, García-Pérez-de-Lema, & Van Auken, 2013; Tran, 2008; Walker, Damanpour, & Devece, 2011; Wright, Sturdy, & Wylie, 2012; Černe et al., 2015). Prior studies found that big organizations are more likely to adopt MI than smaller organizations (Černe, Jaklič, & Škerlavaj, 2013b). Organization's size was found to moderate the relationship between leadership and MI. Transformational leadership tends to be more effective than transactional leadership in realizing MI as an organization's size increases

(Vaccaro et al., 2012; Černe, Jaklič, & Škerlavaj, 2013). Managers and the similarity between middle and top managers play an important role in facilitating MI (Heyden, Sidhu, & Volberda, 2018). Institutional factors were found to be significantly important in highly regulated industries such as health care, airlines, and public organizations (Hsieh, 2011; Mamman & Bakuwa, 2012; Roggenkampa, White, & Bazzoli, 2005). Public policy also plays an important role in encouraging firms to adopt MI (Hsieh, 2011). Among barriers to MI, cost was the most significant barrier (Madrid-Guijarro, Garcia, & Van Auken, 2009). An interesting finding related to the role of consultants in MI is that consultant-led MI tends to become more standardized (Wright et al., 2012). The findings of this study point to the need to understand the dynamics of standardization and MI and change and MI.

Studies based on the outcome approach to MI also investigated MI's relationships with other constructs such as organisational performance, organisational dynamic capabilities, technical innovation, and standardization (Damanpour, 2014; Gebauer, 2011; Liang-Yuan & Se-Hwa, 2006; Shun-Wang, Shiou-Yu, Heidi-Yen, & Yun-Lung, 2014; Vaccaro et al., 2012). Most of the studies found a positive association between MI and other types of innovation (Hollen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2013; Nieves, 2016), organisational business performance, employee's job satisfaction, service quality (Bezdrob & Sunje, 2014; Hsu, Chen, Chang, & Chen, 2014; Krasnicka, Glod, & Wronka-Pospiech, 2018; Shun-Wang et al., 2014).

In summary, viewing MI as an outcome has expanded our understanding of its critical role on organisational performance and various factors influencing the introduction of MI into an organization.

**The process approach to management innovation**

Unlike the outcome approach, the process perspective of MI does not define MI as a thing, but instead a process of adopting or implementing a management idea, tool, process, or practice that is new to the adopting organization (Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2009). Scholars in this approach have attempted to understand the process nature of innovation and its complex dynamics. MI as process approach explores how the innovation is originated, developed, diffused, adopted, or implemented (J. Birkinshaw et al., 2008; A. David, 2019; Klein & Sorra, 1996; Robert, Giuliani, Guilloton, & Khallouk, 2019; Rogers Everett, 1995; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999; Yi, Berry, & Chen, 2019). Compared to the outcome approach to MI, the process approach has received less attention. Among articles included in this study, there were 86 studies that viewed MI as a process driven by rational change agents in the organization to invent, adopt and/or implement new management ideas, tools, or practices into the organization. However, there are increasing numbers of studies unpacking MI processes. Nearly half of 86 studies on this approach were published within the past three years.

The studies within this process approach to MI generally grouped similar activities in management innovation into differentiated processes. They proposed various models of MI to capture the progression from a management idea into organisational practices. The literature review suggests two different process models of MI depending on the type of management innovation. The first model concerns with generative MI which consists of different phases and sub-processes such as motivation, dissatisfaction with status quo, inspiration from outside, invention/generation, implementation and theorization and labeling (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Birkinshaw, 2006; Damanpour & Aravind, 2012; Davenport, 2013). The generative

MI studies are conducted most often in the context of developed economies. A rare exception was two studies on indigenous MI in China (Frynas, Mol, & Mellahi, 2018; Qin et al., 2015). Through a case study, Qin et al. (2015) found that most of innovative management practices arose from the company's idiosyncratic collective mindset. In this study, Qin et al. showed how MI in developing countries might be different from those in developed countries. Frynas et al. (2018) expanded the process of MI by adding contextual factors and emphasizing the roles of both external and internal change agents at the beginning of the process.

The second process model corresponding to the adoptive MI received far less attention in the literature yet being implemented in almost organizations. As noted earlier, the term adoptive MI refers to the management ideas, tools, or practices that are new to the adopting organization. Examples of adoptive MI are sustainable supply management, human resources systems, strategic talent management, project portfolio management, management by objectives. The process approach to MI unpacked the adoptive MI and argued that it were often initiated in the administrative core (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012). Berry & Wechsler (1995) supported this claim by finding that an individual leader primarily made the decision to adopt strategic planning practices. Investigating the implementation of total quality management, Ahire & Ravichandran (2001) suggested that the implementation goes through four phases: adoption, adaptation, acceptance, and use with the utmost importance of leaders in the adoption process (Ahire & Ravichandran, 2001). There are few studies of adoptive MI in developing countries such as China and Brazil. Lin & Su (2014) investigated adoptive MI in China and developed a two-interlinked-sub-process framework of adoption decision and implementation. The two processes consist of many different interlinked phases: problem identification, innovation perception, attitude formation, problem diagnoses, innovation revision, proposal evaluation, selection, preparation, overall implementation, and solidification (Lin & Su, 2014). Recently, Lin, Su & Higgins (2016) suggested a four-stage process of MI in other developing countries which includes initiation, outside search, proposal development, and implementation. Most of these studies remain focused on the first phases of MI i.e. the transformation from the new ideas to a tangible practice or tool to be applied into the organization. Douglas, Overstreet, & Hazen (2016) proposed three processes of MI (acceptance, routinization, and assimilation) and found that these three processes are facilitated through many situational conditions and occur at the same time with different levels of intensity (Douglas, Overstreet, & Hazen, 2016). These process models of MI exemplified the interrelatedness between MI and organisational change. They emphasized the top-down process of MI (Damanpour, 2014).

Besides providing a processual picture of MI, several studies in the process approach to MI also provided insights into its underlying mechanisms. Instead of analyzing MI transformation from ideas to organisational practices, these studies usually focused on unpacking a particular phase and unfolding change agents' role and their behaviors in MI. Through an extensive qualitative study, Hellström, Lifvergren, Gustavsson, & Gremyr (2015) found that professional organizations used five critical practices to adopt MI, including focusing on labeling and theorizing to create an organization's own version of MI; focusing on the role of change agents especially internal change agents; allowing for an evolutionary adoption process mostly through continuous dialogues; building new professional competence through the change agents, and adopting a research-driven approach to the

adoption of a MI. Peeters, Massini, & Lewin (2014), through two in-depth case studies, investigated the routinization process of MI and found that the sequence of developing routines, adequacy, and interdependencies fit between routines explain how rapidly and seamlessly a firm is able to implement a MI. Gebauer (2011) explains how MI contributes to dynamic capabilities via a study of capital goods manufacturing companies. The study showed how change agents and their utilization strategies facilitate sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring MI's implementation (Gebauer, 2011).

In short, the process approach to MI has contributed to answering the question of how it occurs in one organization. Different sub-processes and mechanisms have been explored, providing in-depth knowledge on how MI unfolds in an organization.

**The critical approach to management innovation**

The last approach found in the literature review was an emerging conceptualization of MI as socially constructed process, embedded in wider context of organization and depends on different social forces in an organization. These studies focus on MI's micro dynamics at individual level and on its' power dynamics. Among a small number of studies found in this approach, Knights & McCabe (2002) was considered as pioneer studies investigating MI from critical perspectives. Investigating the adoption phase of MI, Daniel, Myers, & Dixon (2012) suggest that earlier adoption of management practices is associated with political and psychodynamic rationales (Daniel, Myers, & Dixon, 2012). In other words, organizations adopt new management ideas and practices because of their politics and the persuasion of the supplier of management ideas and practices (Sturdy, 2004), rather than due to their homogenous goal of advancing organisational performance.

Besides politics and powers, several studies explored the role of discourses in management innovation. Among the few studies, Salaman and Storey (2002) conducted a qualitative study to unpack the managerial discourses on innovation. They found that managers' perceptions of innovation tended to obstruct innovation. Their findings also suggested that managers' resistance to innovation was due to their "bipolar perceptions" of relationships related to innovation (Salaman & Storey, 2002). Managers themselves were aware of the benefits of innovation but also considered innovation as series of dilemmas created by both positive and negative forces. The study noted that the bipolar thinking encouraged managers to view things in terms of negative and positive forces and to choose the safe path (Salaman & Storey, 2002).

Another example is a case study of an insurance company in which McCabe (2002) explored how managers might resist new discourses and argued that innovations reflected and reproduced the past in intended and unintended ways. The author initiated a new perspective on MI as a discursive practice and provided insightful pictures of how fads, fashions and novelty, and the discourse of stability, security, and moderation emerged and reproduced (McCabe, 2002). Basile & Faraci (2015) also used discourse theory to analyze the strategic change in showing how different levels of discourses from the grand to the local were intertwined in an organisational and situated context (Basile & Faraci, 2015).

Overall, the literature review finds three major conceptualizations of MI, addressing its different aspects. The outcome approach of MI unpacks its relationships with other constructs when viewing a MI as a unified and homogenous thing across settings. The process approach

pushes further to build our knowledge on how MI happens in the organization via various phases. Through the lens of various stakeholders in organizations, the critical theory helps us to acknowledge the heterogeneity in organisational phenomena, the role of power, culture, and politics in management innovation.


## Discussion

The three approaches to MI underline several assumptions of MI. These assumptions might not hold as we continue to build our knowledge on MI. In the following, I unpack these assumptions, discuss implications for further studies, and propose a framework for understanding MI.

**Major assumptions of the three approaches to management innovation and gaps**

The literature review suggests developing our thinking on MI progress from dominant modern perspectives to an embrace of post-modern perspectives (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Modern perspectives are the foundations for the outcome and process approaches to management innovation. The central assumption of modern perspectives is the objectivity of truth which manifests the universal assumption of management innovation in both outcome and process approaches to management innovation. In the outcome-based approach, management innovation is homogenous across settings and thus can be compared, which helps us to put management innovation in the massive maps of organisational constructs and to explain the associations between management innovation and other concepts. At the same token, each phase in the process approach of management innovation was also treated as homogenous across settings. The transformation among these phases, in addition, are led by rational agents with a unified goal of advancing organisational performance (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). As a result, the outcome and process-based approaches to MI provide us with a synoptic account of MI, its bird view (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), in which we could picture the general phases of MI and the associations between MI and other constructs. However, these approaches have some reservations. First, studies grounded in the modern-based approaches to MI only suggest that positive or negative association exists among investigated constructs but lack a sufficient explanation of how and why these relationships were formed or operated. In addition, there are mixed results in the relationship between organisational values and MI. Some studies found that organization with culture of valuing creativity tend to implement more MI (Naqshbandi, Kaur, & Ma, 2014; Sitko-Lutek, 2015). Meanwhile, some found that controlling and stability organizational values tend to associate with MI's successful implementations (Buchanan et al., 2005; Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005; Shih & Huang, 2010).

Second, these approaches to MI assumed that a MI was universal. They, therefore, did not account for the multiple meanings and variations of a management innovation due to differences in perceptions, time and contexts. Perceptions of MI, especially adoptive MI can significantly vary among organisational members (Basile & Faraci, 2015; McCabe, 2002; Qin et al., 2015; J. Thomas, George, & Rose, 2016). A specific MI is significantly dependent on its organisational context and considerably different from its original standard definition (J. L. Thomas, Cicmil, & George, 2012). The universal view of MI permits us to explore a

generalized knowledge of MI but limits our capabilities to discern insights of the complex dynamics of the MI process (Garud, Tuertscher, & Van de Ven, 2013).

Third, the underlying assumption of modern perspective is rationality, suggesting that MI is introduced and driven by rational individuals with the homogenous goal of advancing organisational performance (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Hence, such rationalist views of organization neglect many other aspects of organizations such as heterogeneous interests, power, and conflicts that have significant impacts on innovation (Dyer & Page, 1988). The impacts of different employee groups on MI were not explored adequately. These employee groups may not be the initiators of MI but certainly contribute to shaping the process (David & Darren, 2002). Without considering these possible factors leads to an oversimplification of MI process. The process approach to MI depicted a linear MI process, while innovation processes can be cyclic, ongoing, dynamic, fuzzy, and highly complex (Garud et al., 2013). The process approach to MI has been criticized for over-simplified and a synoptic approach to change, which views change from outside and static. Besides, while the top-down goal deployment has been extensively described in MI as an essential attribute of MI, the bottom-up process in the implementation of MI has an important role yet received only limited attention (Gieskes, Boer, Baudet, & Seferis, 1999).

Unlike the outcome and process approaches to MI, the critical approach to MI explores different voices in MI. The aforementioned shortcomings in the modern perspectives to MI were partially resolved when a number of scholars have advocated for a critical perspective on management innovation. In this approach, MI is conceptualized as a socially constructed process, embedded in a wider context of an organization and depends on different social forces' standpoints. Employing critical perspectives, scholars have mainly focused on exploring the role of culture, powers and politics in MI. This approach is broader than the fashion and cultural perspectives noted in Birkinshaw et al. (2008) as it not only focuses on culture and politics but all other social forces. The critical perspective scholars investigate how power and politics affect the innovation process. They helped us understand the dominant discourses, prevailing and self-reinforcing in the organization, and why managers often resist MI. They also provided insightful reasons for resistance to MI in an organization, which have been neglected in the two other scholarships (i.e. outcome and process approaches to MI). The complexities of MI itself are clearer with various underlying mechanisms such as bipolar thinking, sense-making, and power. Furthermore, these studies also shed light on how different voices are being ignored during MI process. Finally, the critical perspective on MI can account for the fluidity of complex processes and their changes over time. Not many studies have done so, however. Nevertheless, the critical approach seems to overly emphasize the voices of less powerful forces in the organization. It provides insights into how MI is implemented mainly from the point of view of those who are being asked to participate in the process rather than those who are driving it (Birkinshaw et al., 2008).

Against the background above, as an effort to bridge the gaps in our understanding of MI, this paper proposes applying social construction theory of change to understand MI. There is also a call for more applications of social construction due to the limits of rationality or modern approach (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). The social construction theory shares the same ontology with critical perspectives but does not overly emphasize the less privileged in an

organization (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Besides, there are similarities between MI and organisational change. Hence the incorporation of change theories into MI may provide further insights.

**Social construction theory of change in management innovation**

Social constructionism is rooted primarily in sociology with the proposition that the social world is negotiated, organized, and constructed by our interpretations of symbols in words, objects, actions, and events (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). According to social constructionism, organization is not a thing but a socially constructed concept developed out of our actions and language (Anderson, 2016). Ontologically, social constructionism rejects the idea of objective reality. It suggests that there is no knowledge beyond individuals' subjective and intersubjective interpretations of reality. Human action depends on their subjective interpretations of contexts in which they are embedded. This idea emphasizes the role of perceptions in organisational change as well as in MI. The social construction approach centers on the concept of intersubjectivity which "refers to the realm of subjective experience occurring between people that produces a sense of shared history and culture" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013, p.34). Therefore, thoughts and actions are the results of ongoing processes of interactions and interpretations between human beings. Individuals enter intersubjectivity via three primary mechanisms externalization, internationalization, and objectification. Externalization refers to a process of giving the meaning of social realities through symbols. Objectification concerns treating a nonobject as object, and internalization occurs when one does not question objectified social realities and accept the shared and objectified social realities (Hatch & Cunlife, 2013). Social constructionist research has become increasingly popular within organization science over the last decades to understand how organizations, identities, cultures, changes, paradoxes, strategies, and knowledge are socially constructed (Anderson, 2016; Cunliffe, 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Luscher, Lewis, & Ingram, 2006; McCabe, 2002). It provides tool for us to understand messy and unpredictable change (Anderson, 2016). In the following, drawing on social constructionism, I will describe how social constructionism can be applied in studying MI and propose that MI is a socially constructed process operated through three major mechanisms: externalization, objectification, and internalization.

**Management innovation as a socially constructed process**

MI, similar to other organisational phenomenon, is subjectively and inter-subjectively understood and created by human beings. In other words, MI is realities or process which emerges dynamically from social interactions among organisational members. Organisational members construct multiple MI(s) because human action and understanding are based on their interpretations of their own experiences (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979). Each organisational member externalizes and internalizes MI in one's own ways and via social interactions with others in the organization. Studies on organisational change and resistance to change have well documented multiple forces happening during the change process (Anderson, 2016). MI as a particular type of change is not an exception. Which construction of MI, in other words, the meaning of management innovation, will be objectified and become an accepted social reality of management innovation, depends significantly on organisational landscapes and the negotiated processes among organisational members. Prior
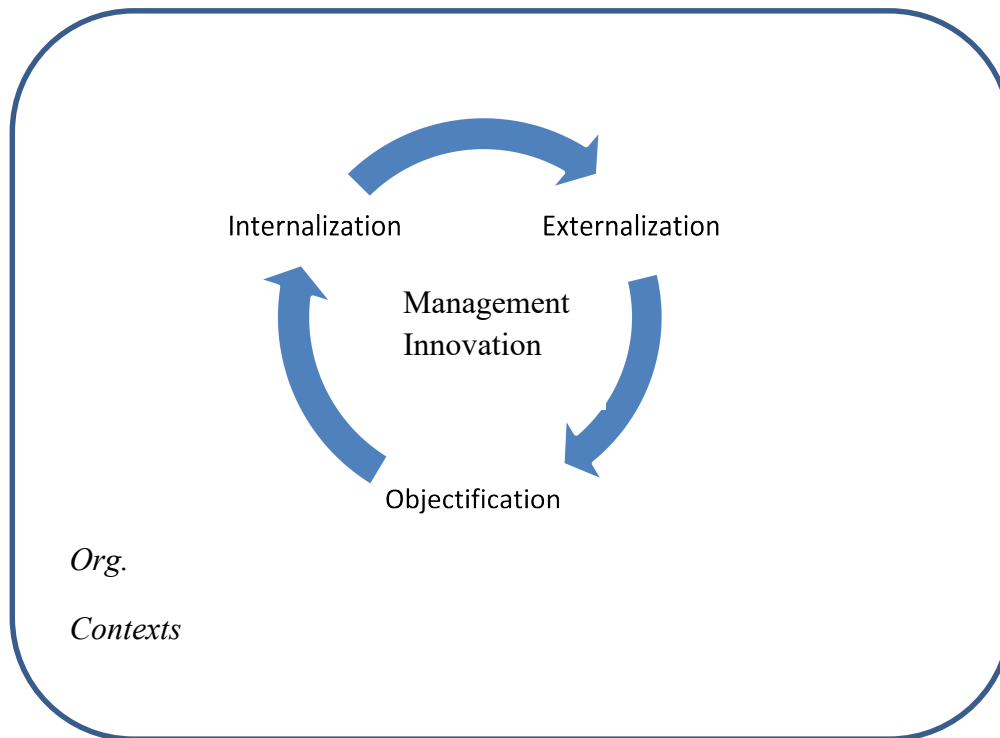
studies have also suggested the influences of organisational contexts and external contexts on MI (Khosravi et al., 2019), yet little is known about how the influence is exerted. Social constructionism may enlighten our knowledge of the mechanisms. In the process of objectification, organisational members make decision to put forward a shared meaning of MI. Their subjective views of MI now become an objectified and hegemonic view of MI. The objectification is negotiation among multiple constructions of MI in organization and is deeply embedded in organisational political landscape. The process is often signified via acknowledgement, organisational symbols, and practices. These symbols or objectified MI are being internalized by organisational members. Recent studies on discourses and institutionalization have shown the central role of discourses in organisational change (Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Maguire & Hardy, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004). Discourse is formed via externalization (Phillips et al., 2004). The internalization is achieved when organisational members accepted the objectified MI and changed their behaviors accordingly.

The processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization help explain the complexity and fluidity of change and innovation in an organization. The hegemony of shared meaning of MI is transient and can be overshadowed by a different hegemonic view of MI as the process of implementation happens. Prior studies have explored the evolution of discourses in organization and suggested that a discourse become a hegemonic one via negotiated process among organization's social forces (Basile & Faraci, 2015; Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2016; Thomas et al., 2016). The landmarks of objectified MI constitute a temporal view of MI from initial ideas to organisational practices.

The social constructionist approach to MI is a clear departure from the rational perspectives of management innovation which rely on the assumptions of homogeneity in organization. It takes into account the differentiated perspectives of organisational stakeholders. The social construction approach to MI is similar to the critical approach to MI in its ontological standpoint of subjectivity and relativism. However, different from the critical approach to MI, the social construction approach does not focus only on the power relations or the advocacy of voiceless voices. It emphasizes understanding how MI is constructed in the organization through all participants' implicit understandings formed subjectively and inter-subjectively.

Through three mechanisms of social construction, i.e. externalization, objectification, and internalization, MI is progressed. The progression of MI in an organization transforms a management idea into organisational practices. The process often starts with the externalization of a management idea by organisational members. Then, through objectification and internationalization, the management idea might be adjusted or symbolized into a tangible form such as decision, sketch, statement, tools, etc. When participants internalize the tangible form of the management idea, the new social reality of the management innovation is accepted (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the model). The acceptance of social reality of MI marked progress in the implementation of a MI.

*Figure 1. Social Construction of Management Innovation*



For instance, the implementation of a balanced scorecard is often initiated by the top of an organization (Nguyen, 2021). The top-down characteristics of MI was shown in prior literature (FabiĆ, ZekiĆ, & SamarIja, 2016; Lin, 2018; Lin, Chen, & Su, 2017; Rasmussen & Hall, 2016). The CEO may first communicate with his management team to decide if they should go forward with the idea. The discussion involves externalization, mainly from the CEO. The internalization involves all management members who internalize the CEO and others' ideas and the new social reality emerged from the discussion. Externalization and internalization in organisational context mainly occur via communication activities (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). Let's assume that all CEO team members agree with the decision to adopt a MI. The outcome of the discussion is a decision communicated with others in the organization. The decision itself is an example of externalization from the management team in its relations with the rest of the organization. By symbolizing or objectifying the management idea with the tangible decision of objectification, the management team has pushed the implementation of MI forward. The process of externalization, objectification, and internalization begins for each organisational participant. Each participant has their own socially constructed reality of the MI, and the more similar these internalized realities are, the smoother the management innovation process might be. This is a simplified example to illustrate the processes. In reality, the dynamics among externalization, internalization, and objectification are complex, depending on the complexities of negotiation among organisational members in their externalization/internalization processes to coming to an objectified MI.

**Three mechanisms of management innovation**

Externalization, objectification, and internalization are mechanisms to transfer a management idea to organisational practices.

*Externalization*

Externalization, as aforementioned, is a process of giving meaning through symbols such as writing, speaking, or any visual forms, etc. The externalization, like other mechanisms in social construction, happens intersubjectively or between social actors, i.e., organisational members. Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) depicted a similar process called sense giving which refers to "of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality" (p.442). Sensegiving may occur when some symbols, such as an abstract vision of the changed organization, evolve and are disseminated to stakeholders. Similarly, externalization occurs when meaning is carried by and communicated through symbols such as communicating about the new management practices, tools, structures, or techniques (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Unlike sense giving which tries to influence others' sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and is sometimes referred to as *active externalization*, externalization might happen without an intention of influencing others, which is referred to as *passive externalization*. In a passive mode, one might externalize to make sense of the social realities, showing their confusion or simply showing their attempt to participate. Active externalization (i.e. sensegiving) has been studied extensively in the last few years. It remains relatively limited to leaders' active externalization. Much less attention has been paid to stakeholders' active externalization while MI, like other organisational change, needs employee participation to be successfully implemented. More studies are needed to understand the implications of active externalization manifested by organisational stakeholders. Little attention has been paid to passive externalization. Yet insights from passive externalization might help organizations to boost their performance in MI. What would the implications when a leader engages in passive externalization? Is it a weak leadership signal or a signal that a leader is actively involved in the negotiated process to build a shared social reality of MI? What are triggers and enablers of externalization from various stakeholders? These questions need further investigation.

*Objectification*

Objectification refers to a process of treating something which is nonobject as object. It is a process through which social phenomena attain the status of things (McKinley, 2011). Objectification is close to 'reification' or 'symbolization' process in which something transcends from meaning into tangible symbols or objects (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). To objectify a social phenomenon, it has to be externalized and viewed as a coherent entity that is detached from human their human origins (McKinley, 2011). Thus, objectification cannot occur without externalization. MI is objectified when they are externalized and becomes entities such as organisational strategy, new job positions, new functions, or new tools.

Objectification is highly dependent on power and politics in organization (Dyer & Page, 1988; McKinley, Latham, & Braun, 2014). Dyer and Page (1988) studied the social and political processes associated with innovation. Through a historical analysis coupled with interviews and observations over one year at a company called MGI, Dyer and Page (1988)

found that an innovation process was complex and involved technical expertise and an understanding of social forces that shaped the development of new technologies. They further suggested that political processes guided and shaped the development of new products. They did not focus on MI, but their findings on product innovation might inform some similar mechanisms. The different meanings of MI externalized in organizations are constituted by different social forces. Understanding how these social forces are formed and interacted to reach a hegemonic meaning of management innovation might give us insights to manage the implementation. Further studies are needed to understand these mechanisms.

*Internalization*

Internalization refers to the process of unquestioning and accepting the externalized and objectified meaning of social reality (Hatch & Cunlife, 2013). As such, in internalization, there is a shared understanding of social reality among a group. For instance, in the discussion of initiating balanced scorecards (BSC) in organization, the management team come to the conclusion of implementing BSC through their externalization and objectification. With the agreement of implementing BSC in the organization, the decision has been objectified and internalized by the management team. Different from externalization and objectification which happens intersubjectively, i.e. via interactions, internalization mostly involves with creating subjectively meaning (i.e. inside the subject). Hence it is often manifested through externalizing the acceptance of objectified social realities. Internalization marked the progress of MI. Detecting and managing the internalization is essential to understanding the construction of MI and managing it.

In summary, the conceptual framework draws on social construction approach to understand MI. Management innovation is viewed as socially constructed process embedded in organisational political, social and cultural landscapes. The three mechanisms of social construction approach, namely externalization, objectification, and internalization are drivers of MI. An externally objectified management initiative is internalized within organisational leaders, externalized in organisational spaces via symbols, and objectified through acknowledgment and other organisational management tools. When the management initiative is internalized among organisational members, it has established a new organisational social reality.

## Conclusion

In this article, I propose a conceptual framework to understand MI through a literature review of MI and an application of social construction approach to change. The prior knowledge of MI is categorized into three major streams outcome-based perspective of MI, process approach to MI, and critical approach to MI. I argue that although these three streams of literature have accumulated our knowledge on management innovation, they do not provide insights on multiple voices in MI and the complex processes in implementing MI(Knights & McCabe, 2002). Both outcome approach and process approach simplified MI into unitary and linear concepts. The critical approach focuses on unprivileged voices in MI, power and politics in the process despite the drivers' voices (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Meanwhile, the social construction approach to change emerges as a different way to view MI. MI is conceptualized as socially constructed reality that is driven through externalization,

objectification and internalization. The framework has several implications to research and practice as followed.

For research implications, the three mechanisms of externalization, objectification and internalization help us to unpack innovation processes, which depart from a process-based study in the dynamics of innovation, treating the innovation process as a linear, stage-based process. Several specific questions were raised to be answered. The approach, which views management innovation as socially constructed reality, essentially tries to consider all voices and stakeholders into the process. As a result, participatory action research tends to be the most effective for studying management innovation in this approach. Although participatory action research is not unfamiliar in organisational science, well-documented examples of this approach are rare in business organizations (Ardichvili, 2013). There are also calls for more studies using participatory action research and the humanistic paradigm (Pirson & Von Kimakowitz, 2014; Sullivan & Daniels, 2008).

For practical implications, viewing MI as a socially constructed reality will help change the top-down perspective of MI to be more inclusive and participative. Considering all voices in the implementation of MI will be likely to make it more effective and more inclusive (Ardichivili, 2013). The framework might also help practitioners, especially Organization Development practitioners, emphasize managing communications related to management innovation and evaluating where and when to intervene. With the evolution of big data analysis and the ability to analyze unstructured data, managing communications might be easier than before. Hence, embracing the social construction view of MI might help practitioners get more buy-in and implement MI more effectively than today.

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