



**BRITISH ACADEMY
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BAM
CONFERENCE

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER

ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

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Towards a model of ambidexterity change: A multi-level case study in a German multi-campus university

Elena Krause^{1,2}, Angela Roth¹, Christian Schaller²

¹Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU), Nuremberg, Germany. elena.krause@fau.de; angela.roth@fau.de. ²Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany. christian.schaller@dhbw-stuttgart.de

¹Chair of Information Systems
Innovation & Value Creation
Prof. Dr. Kathrin M. Möslein
Lange Gasse 20, 90403 Nuremberg
Phone: +49 (0) 911 5302-0

²Business Administration
International Business
Economic Sciences Department
Rotebühlstraße 131, 70197 Stuttgart
Phone: +49 (0) 711 1849-519

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Abstract

Organizations and thus the individuals within them continuously change their exploration-exploitation configurations to find ideal combinations in constantly changing contexts. However, how these (re-)configuration dynamics occur on multiple levels and sites and how they can be influenced is unclear. This study adopts a dynamic and multi-level view on ambidexterity (i.e. the capacity to explore and exploit at the same time) and examines the processes by which an organization made changes to its exploration-exploitation configuration and how individuals within it responded on multiple levels. Based on an interpretative case study, organizational enacting and constructing change activities are investigated at multiple levels and sites in a distributed organization in the German tertiary higher education sector undergoing strategic development. The findings suggest a model of ambidexterity change dynamics in distributed contexts and draw attention to the organizational change dynamics of ambiguity, power and identity in the interplay between levels and sites.

Keywords: exploitation; exploration; dynamic; multi-level; longitudinal case study

Word count (excluding tables and references): 6.950

1. Introduction

The capacity to explore and exploit at the same time (i.e. ambidexterity) has long been recognized as crucial to the long-term sustainable success of organizations. Thus, the ambidexterity literature is rich in studies that link ambidexterity and success, from the seminal work of Duncan (1976) to the more recent work conducted by Kostopoulos, Bozionelos, and Syrigos (2015). However, the field has failed to show the ‘whole story’ that happens in organizations (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013, p. 294). This ‘whole story’ is that today’s organizations operate in light of constantly changing contexts and thus have to constantly change and develop their exploration-exploitation combinations (Gulati & Puranam, 2009; Luger, Raisch, & Schimmer, 2018). More specifically, organizations and their members are forced “to continuously reconfigure their activities to meet changing demands in their internal and external environments (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008, p. 401). How this change of ambidexterity occurs and how it can be strategically developed is unclear. Previous investigations have tended to ignore the necessity of changing and developing organizations’ exploration-exploitation configurations over time. As a result, today’s field of knowledge lacks a rich understanding of the dynamic aspects of ambidexterity (Luger et al., 2018).

Previous research has also tended to ignore the fact that ambidexterity is a multi-level construct that occurs through an ‘individual’s capacity to be equally skillful with both hands’ (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013, p. 287). In this way, ambidexterity is rooted in social theories on behaviour and learning (Wilden, Hohberger, Devinney, & Lavie, 2018). However, studies have most often evolved around the organizational and firm levels of analysis (Wilden et al., 2018). Certainly, there are studies that have focused on the individual and team levels of analysis (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013); however, rarely have studies been dedicated to connecting connect the multiple levels of analysis (organizational, business unit, individual and team). However, if ambidexterity is a multi-level construct, it is necessary to cross different levels of analysis to determine how lower-level processes are linked to meso- and macro-level aspects of exploration and exploitation and vice versa (Wilden et al., 2018). Knowledge in this area is lacking. This is surprising, given that we already know that ‘choices about how to resolve the tension at one level of analysis are often resolved at the next level down’ (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008, p. 396). This is inconsistent with the basic assumptions of March (1991), who calls for general research that bridges levels (Wilden et al., 2018). Overall, little discussion on ambidexterity as a dynamic and multi-level construct has occurred. Thus, our current understanding is lacking in these two critical areas.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to address these important topics. Our research asks: How does a distributed organization (such as a multi-campus university) change its ambidexterity at multiple levels over time? Our special focus is based on three basic assumptions of ambidexterity (see also Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013). First, ambidexterity must be seen from a processual point of view (1), as exploration-exploitation configurations change over time. In order to explore more fully the nature and dynamics of organizational ambidexterity (OA), a greater understanding of its processual aspects is required. Second, ambidexterity is a multi-level construct (2) that must be observed with a focus on individuals at multiple levels. Third, ambidexterity is achieved through managerial capabilities (3). This is why we are interested in deriving managerial recommendations on the strategic development of ambidexterity.

We address our research question in the empirical context of a German multi-campus university undergoing a large-scale organizational development initiative. The organization, is at the time of analysis, facing the challenge of improving their current investments in short-term improvements (exploitation) and long-term innovation (exploration) inside their multiple sites.

Our interpretative study is intended to shed light on ambidexterity change and development through an investigation of the reconstructing change activities at multiple levels. From this perspective, ambidexterity is not something that is directed from the top, as a plan. It is something that happens internally, something that is done by the people in an organization through their learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997). This is in line with our understanding of organizations as self-designing and continuously changing systems (Weick, 1977; Weick & Quinn, 1999). In this sense, organizational phenomena ‘are not treated as entities, as accomplished events, but as enactments—unfolding processes involving actors making choices interactively, in inescapably local conditions, by drawing on broader rules and resources’ (Tsoukas, 2005, p. 198).

Our study makes three distinctive contributions to the ambidexterity literature. First, through an investigation of how organizations and their actors change their investments in exploration-exploitation, we offer a more nuanced view on ambidexterity and shed light on the processual aspects of ambidexterity. We thereby contribute to the emerging dynamic ambidexterity debate (Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, & Raisch, 2016; Luger et al., 2018). Second, by studying multiple levels and multiple sites through a combination of real-time and historical data, this study provides in-depth insights into the dynamics and interrelations that occur across multiple levels and sites. The study thereby responds to calls for research crossing multiple levels and longitudinal research (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Third, we seek to understand how these dynamics can be influenced and thus managed. In the face of constantly changing boundary conditions, it is vital to understand how the dynamics of ambidexterity can be influenced to derive how ambidexterity can be strategically developed. Through our empirical context of an organization that is undergoing a real-time strategic development initiative, this study allows us to derive recommendations for action on how ambidexterity dynamics can be influenced inside a distributed organization.

2. Conceptual Framework

Our research on ambidexterity as a dynamic, multi-level construct is framed by three conceptual sources: the theory of organizing (Weick, 1977), the theory of learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997), and the theory of emergent change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual sources and framing of ambidexterity in this study.

The first theories that will be discussed are the *theories of organizing and learning*. Based on the theory of organizing, organizations are understood as self-designing systems (Weick, 1977). ‘A crucial characteristic of the organizing model is that the environment is viewed as an output rather than an input’ (p. 228). The model of organizing is described by the main processes of enactment, selection and retention as comprising organizing activities (Weick, 1979, pp. 132-133). From Weick’s (1979) perspective, at ‘any given time more than one piece of information is being processed, the various pieces are at various stages in the organizing processes, the various inputs affect one another in the sense that the interpretation made of one can affect the sense made of another’ (pp. 143-144). Regarding how actors in organizations change and develop their respective organizations’ ambidexterity, an important conceptual source is the double-loop learning model of Argyris and Schön (1997), which encourages people to correct mismatches (single-loop) and to reflect on their own actions, questioning and changing personal norms, values, tactics and goals (double-loop).

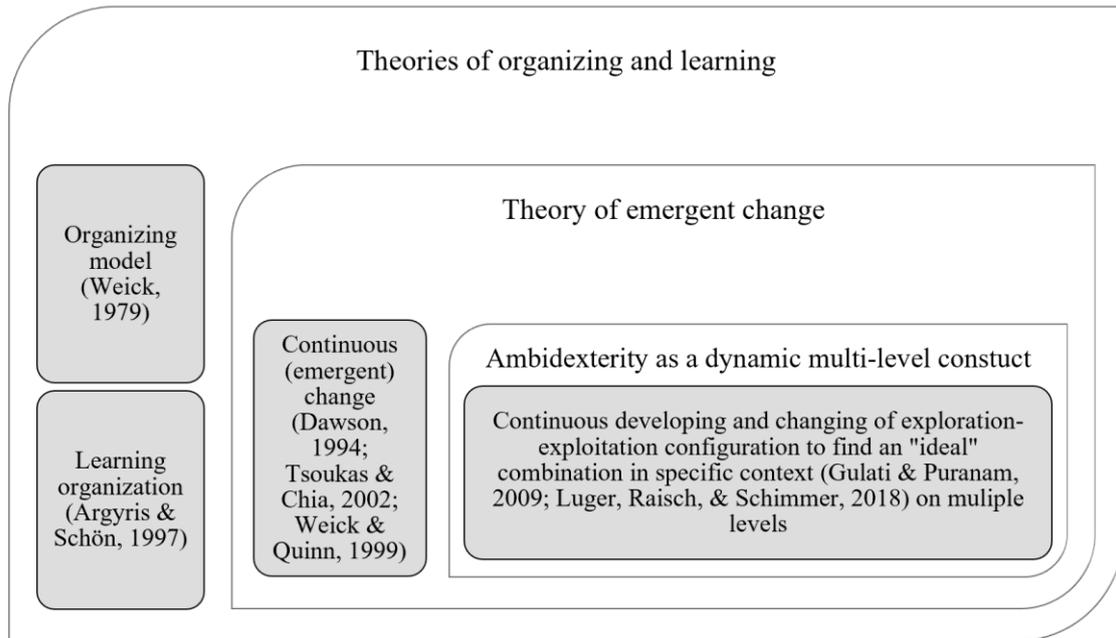


Figure 1: Conceptual sources and framing of ambidexterity (own illustration)

The second perspective is that regarding *the theory of emergent change*. According to Weick and Quinn (1999), the view on change is either from a distance, described as the macro level of analysis, or from closer in, described as the micro level of analysis. At the macro level of analysis, researchers are focused on ‘the flow of events that constitute organizing’ and ‘see what looks like repetitive action, routine, and inertia dotted with occasional episodes of revolutionary change’ and from the micro level of analysis, they see ‘ongoing adaptation and adjustment’ (p. 362). In line with researchers such as Dawson (1994); Tsoukas and Chia (2002); Weick and Quinn (1999), we adopt the perspective of change as a continuous, ongoing process in organizations. This is often described as emergent change (Cummings & Worley, 2014). Dawson (1994) defines change as ‘a complex and dynamic process which should not be solidified or treated as a series of linear events’ (Dawson, 1994, pp. 3-4). According to Tsoukas and Chia (2002), change is treated ‘as the normal condition of organizational life’ (p. 567).

Third, *ambidexterity is a dynamic multi-level construct*. From this perspective, it is unlikely that ambidexterity, and thus exploration-exploitation configuration, is a static construct in organizations. It is more likely a dynamic construct that changes over time in the face of constantly changing conditions. Framed by the previously mentioned conceptions, we define ambidexterity as the continuous developing and changing of an exploration-exploitation configuration to find an ‘ideal’ combination in specific contexts a firm is facing (Weick & Quinn, 1999). While our perspective of ambidexterity is framed in the social theories of organizing, learning and emergent change, it is in line with the wider ambidexterity discourse (e.g. Gulati & Puranam, 2009) and connects with more recently published work in the field of ambidexterity (e.g. Luger et al., 2018; Zimmermann, Raisch, & Cardinal, 2017a). For instance, Zimmermann et al. (2017a) recently pointed out that ‘ambidexterity may rely less on the design of stable solutions than on the dynamic shaping and reshaping of organizational contexts to deal with persistent exploration-exploitation tension’ (p. 3). Their novel perspective draws on paradox theory and describes the nature of the exploration-exploitation balance as a ‘dynamic, constantly evolving challenge’ instead of the static design perspective as a ‘stable and uniform challenge’ (p. 24). In addition to our perspective’s dynamic view of ambidexterity, ambidexterity is something that

happens within organizations as part of the enacting and changing processes of those organizations' actors. To understand the dynamics involved, ambidexterity has to be analysed as a multi-level phenomenon. Based on the assumption that organizations are constantly trying to find the 'ideal' exploration-exploitation combination in the context of changing circumstances (Weick & Quinn, 1999), it is important to determine how the dynamics of ambidexterity can be influenced (for instance, as part of a strategic development initiative to drive group-wide innovation and effectiveness, as is the case in the context of our research object).

3. Methods

We adopted a processual approach and chose a longitudinal, in-depth case study design for this research (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Pettigrew, 1990). This interpretative study was designed to shed light on the change of ambidexterity in an organization with centralized and decentralized distributed organizational units to derive the process of ambidexterity change at multiple levels and multiple sites. The design was based on the assumption that 'practically useful research on change should explore the contexts, content, and process of change together with their interconnections through time' (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 268). A single-case study approach was chosen because especially extreme cases can make a phenomenon 'transparently observable' (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990) and deliver a 'thick description' (Geertz, 2008). With the aim of investigating the organizational enacting and construction of ambidexterity change and development processes in a distributed organizational context, our attention was directed to multi-level interactions and learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997; Weick, 1977). With a focus on the activities of the actors inside the organization, we were redirected to the behavioural roots of March (1991).

3.1 Research Setting

The research presented here is the result of an ongoing two-year study of a distributed organization (MultiCorp¹) in the German tertiary higher education sector (THES). MultiCorp is a prestigious multi-campus institution of higher education that has several campuses throughout Germany. With around 34,000 enrolled students, it is one of the largest multi-campus universities in Germany and the largest higher education institution in the German Federal State of Baden-Wuerttemberg. Germany's THES is characterized by a landscape of state and state-accredited institutions of higher education. These are divided into universities, universities of applied sciences, and colleges of art and music. While universities traditionally focus on research, universities of applied sciences traditionally focus on practical relevance. Today, MultiCorp has, as a positive consequence of its successful educational innovation², a special position in the field of higher education. Having successfully operated since 1974, MultiCorp received legal university status in 2009. As a result, Germany's THES added another type of higher education institution: the university with dual education – which is comparable with universities of applied sciences but differ in the unique combination of theory and practical development.

¹ We use MultiCorp as a pseudonym.

² The unique combination of theory and practice developed at MultiCorp is characterized by a curriculum that combines higher education and on-the-job training at numerous partner companies.

In addition to its legal establishment as a university, MultiCorp’s history has other important strategic inflection points. These include its merger, the restructuring and formation of a central organizational level to focus on its changing exploration-exploitation configuration. Today’s structure is the result of a particularly huge merger that occurred in 2009. Before 2009, the DecentralOrgs were separate and independent from each other³. As a common denominator, all shared an innovative concept of dual education, and, in 2009, the organization was granted the legal status of a university, as mentioned above. The organizational structure of MultiCorp is unique in Germany, for it is comprised of both the central level (headquarters) and the decentral, local level (universities). Altogether, MultiCorp consists of one central organization (headquarters) and nine former independent decentral organizational units at nine locations (i.e. cities). Because of their successful dual study concept, the organization has grown massively over the past 40 years. It grew from 164 students and 51 partner companies in 1974 to 34,000 bachelor’s and master’s students in 2016/2017 and 9,000 partner companies. See Figure 2 for an overview of the central and decentral organizational units by the years of their foundation and sizes. The nine former independent entities differ in their years of foundation and sizes. As a result, some of the decentral organized entities benefitted more or less from the merger. The smaller ones particularly benefitted, as the larger ones could also exist as independent universities in their respective cities.

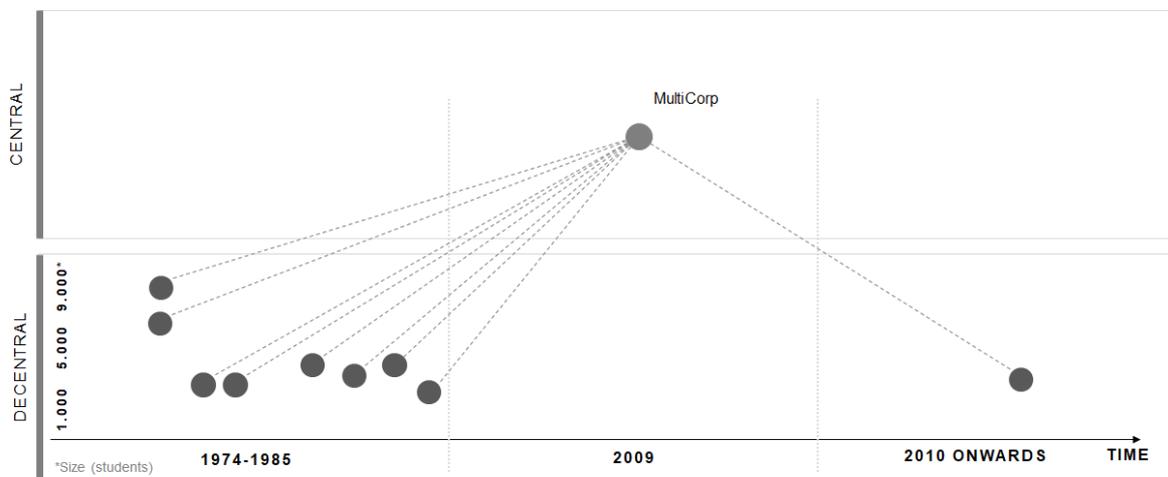


Figure 2: Central and decentralized organizational units (own illustration)

While the organization is currently undergoing a large-scale strategic development initiative, which was launched two years after the arrival of a new president, access to conduct an in-depth study was granted. The first author of this study (the observer) enjoyed full access to the organization as a researcher to accompany the strategic development initiative and was able to participate in senate meetings, advisory boards, workshops and daily activities. In addition, the first author was able to conduct the interviews and were given full access to documentary data. This provided the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the organization and its need to develop its exploration-exploitation configuration, allowing for an understanding of the ambidexterity change context. The second author of this study had worked within the organization for more than eight years, which provided another evidential source, and helped in reviewing the interpretations made by the observer. While these two authors adopted the insider perspective, the third author employed the outsider perspective to avoid the risk of biases and to further increase the study’s credibility and reliability. This individual was not an

³ We use CentralOrg and DecentralOrg¹⁻⁹ as pseudonyms for the central and decentral organizations.

observer, interviewer or organizational member. Thus, we adopted a two-perspective strategy with an insider and an outsider view in accordance with Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991).

The case of MultiCorp is well-suited to building process theory on multi-level ambidexterity change in a distributed organizational context for several reasons. First, large public universities are appropriate research sites in general for strategic process researchers due to certain special characteristics, such as the existence of ‘multiple goals, diffused power, seemingly chaotic decision making processes, and frequently politicized in their workings’ (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 436). Second, MultiCorp provided an empirical setting with its complex and, in the Germany university sector, unique organizational structure, which enabled this research to adopt both a multi-level and multi-site perspective. Third, during the data collection, MultiCorp was undergoing a large-scale strategic development initiative with the aim to increase efficiency (exploitation) and drive innovativeness (exploration). MultiCorp received the mandate to further develop its organization with its multiple sites – with the prospect of ending up with an experimentation phase to put ideas into practice. The broader research project and ongoing strategic development initiative officially started in 2017. Our data collection for this study started at the end of 2018. At that time, MultiCorp had just completed the initial stage of its strategic change effort and thus was looking back on one year of intensive self-reflection and just starting to put some initial ideas into practice. The ongoing strategic development initiative was a good starting point at which to examine the organization’s current enacting and changing processes in-depth and in real-time while collecting retrospective data from past processes.

3.2 Data Collection

Our longitudinal data was derived from several sources (real-time observations, unstructured interviewing, documentary research and semi-structured interviews). While the primary sources of data, solely conducted by the first author, were semi-structured interviews and real-time observations of key events regarding the organizational development initiative, an intensive documentary research was included. We collected data on multiple levels (i.e. individual, team and organization) in the central organization (headquarters) and selected decentral organizational entities that were representative of the complex organizational structure. We decided to collect data from decentral units that represented different sizes and founding years. Time was captured through a combination of retrospective and real-time analyses (Pettigrew, 1990).

Observations

We closely followed the dynamics made in the strategic development initiative in real time. Observations lasted between three hours and two days and were recorded through notetaking. In total, we participated in about 81 hours and collected documentary data from a total of 19 events over a period of one year (May 2018 to June 2019). As our informants came from different levels and sites and operated in different roles, different perspectives were included. Informants included board members, headquarters (presidium) employees, senate members, project leaders, sub- and core-project team members and workshop participants. In addition, we took part in the headquarters organization one to two days per week, participating in weekly meetings regarding project teams or daily businesses, and had the opportunity to get in touch with employees through informal discussions. See Table 1 for a detailed overview of our observations.

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Event history</i>	<i>Informants^a</i>	<i>Participatory observation data^b</i>	<i>Documentary data^c</i>
1	May 2018	Core team meeting (3 rd meeting)	Core team members	yes	yes
2	June 2018	Core team meeting (4 th meeting)	Core team members	no	yes
3	July 2018	Advisory board meeting II	Advisory board members	yes	yes
4	July 2018	Two-day retreat supervisory board	Supervisory board members	yes	yes
5	August 2018	Core team meeting (5 th meeting)	Core team members	no	yes
6	August 2018	Core team meeting (6 th meeting)	Core team members	no	yes
7	September 2018	Senate meeting project future		Yes	yes
8	October 2018	Joint meeting supervisory board + senate	Supervisory board and senate members	yes	yes
9	November 2018	Meeting of the extended presidium	Members of presidium and rectors	yes	yes
10	November 2018	Core team meeting (7 th meeting)	Core team members	yes	yes
11	December 2018	Core team meeting (8 th meeting)	Core team members	yes	yes
12	December 2018	Senate meeting, TOP future project	Senate members	Yes	yes
13	January 2019	Core team meeting (9 th meeting)	Core team members	no	yes
14	February 2019	Core team meeting (10 th meeting)	Core team members	no	yes
15	March 2019	Future conference	Selected member from the workshops in the sub project core and service functions (CSF)	yes	yes
16	March 2019	Core team meeting (11 th meeting)	Core team members	yes	yes
17	March 2019	Senate meeting, TOP future project	Senate members	no	yes
18	May 2019	Strategy and leadership forum		no	yes
19	May 2019	Advisory board meeting III	Advisory board members	yes	yes

^aCore team members: 17 organizational members from different decentral and central units and 3 non-organizational members

Advisory board member: 10 members (internal/ external)

Supervisory board members: 19 members (internal / external), the supervisory board is responsible for the development of the university and

proposes measures to enhance the profile and increase the performance and competitiveness of MultiCorp.

Senate members: 5 members of the presidium of MultiCorp, the chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of the commissions, and the equal opportunities officer at the central level belong to the senate. On the basis of elections, the senate also has voting members whose numerical composition determines the basic order and who are directly elected according to groups from all study academies.

In total 29 members. The senate decides in matters of research, art practice, artistic development projects, teaching, study, dual education and further education, as far as these are not assigned by law to another central body, the faculties or study academies.

^bSeveral memos & observation notes

^cDocumentary data: Protocols, presentations, e-mails, phototakes from flip charts, written statements

Table 1: Detailed overview of observations

Interviews

To capture both real-time and historical dynamics, semi structured interviews with narrative elements were carried out with informants from multiple organizational levels and sites to obtain ‘both retrospective and real-time accounts by those people experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest’ (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 19). The interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 2.5 hours but were typically 90 minutes long. Altogether, we conducted 16 interviews with individuals from both pillars relevant in the university context – the pillar of research and teaching and the pillar of administration. Interviews took place in the interviewee’s office or a meeting room on site. Interview partners were rectors, prorectors, dean faculties, course managers, professors, administration directors, administrative secretaries, executive officers and administrative staff. The interviews were recorded electronically and fully transcribed. Data collection is still ongoing, and additional interviews are scheduled in 2019. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) addressed each individual’s experience and perspective on the organization as a whole and the perspectives of the decentral organizational units regarding the whole organization’s exploitation and exploration configuration. To investigate the organization’s exploitation and exploration activities and their changing investments over time, the interviewees were asked to illustrate their executions with concrete examples. This helped in discussing different understandings of exploration and exploitation and to address past, present and future configurations of exploration and exploitation. It also helped to identify initiatives that drive exploration and exploitation. To match the complexity of the research topic, we used the element of visualization and drawing based on the illustration of Birkinshaw

and Gupta (2013, p. 295) to illustrate the various investments and combinations in exploration and exploitation and to discuss our special interest in the dynamic aspects (see Figure 4). Table 2 gives a detailed overview of the interviews.

	Interviewpartners / Informants	Pillar	Central	Decentral large/mid/small	Recorded	Time [hh:mm:ss]
1	Prorector/Dean	Research & teaching		x	yes	01:21:17
2	Senior staff	Administration	x		yes	01:25:21
3	Staff	Administration		x	yes	01:00:00
4	Senior staff	Administration		x	yes	01:37:13
5	Prorektor/Dekan	Research & teaching		x	yes	01:25:55
6	Senior staff	Administration		x	yes	01:51:54
7	Senior staff	Administration	x		yes	01:29:13
8	Senior staff	Administration	x		yes	00:49:26
9	Course manager/ Professor	Research & teaching		x	yes	00:57:08
10	Course manager/ Professor	Research & teaching		x	yes	02:10:32
11	Course manager/ Professor	Research & teaching		x	yes	01:53:44
12	Rector	Research & teaching		x	yes	01:32:14
13	Prorector/Dean	Research & teaching		x	yes	02:07:06
14	Staff	Administration		x	yes	01:09:22
15	Course manager/ Professor	Research & teaching		x	yes	01:34:45
16	Administrative director	Administration		x	yes	02:31:23

Table 2: Detailed overview of interviews

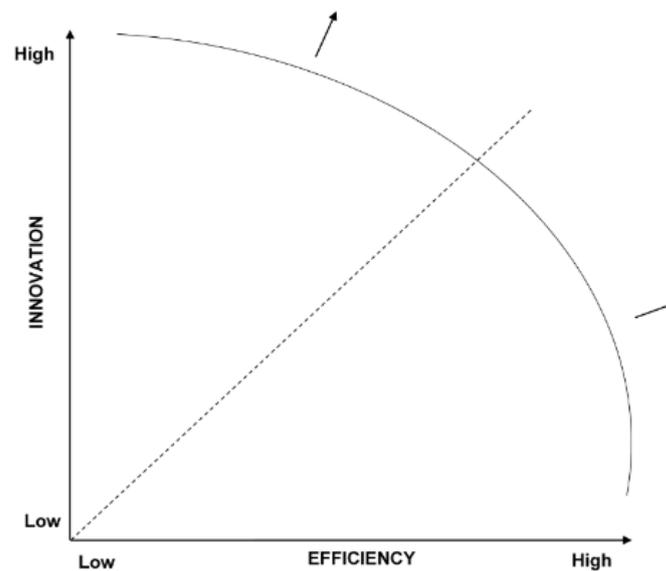


Figure 4: Interview visualization of exploration-exploitation configuration (own illustration with reference to Birkinshaw and Gupta (2013, p. 295))

Documentary data

Furthermore, access to documentary data was granted. Documents such as internal newsletters, project reports, strategy documents, e-mail correspondences, written statements, presentations and internally used videos were included. Publicly available data, such as press releases, newspaper articles, videos and websites, was also included. For internal purposes specifically, produced videos were a useful additional source of data, as these comprised interviews or statements with individuals from multiple levels and sites in the past. For instance, we were able to include statements from 38 interviews with individuals from the organization that were conducted in the past.

Our interpretative research – both the interview portions and the observations – was characterized by a ‘designed-in flexibility’ (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013, pp. 19-20), which means that we were open to making adjustments to our data collection procedure. For instance, after conducting the first semi-structured interviews, we recognized that it would make sense to start with a discussion on different understandings of innovation and efficiency in the context of a university and the special context of MultiCorp. We actively incorporated this in subsequent interviews. Data collection was considered complete when additional observations confirmed current results rather than yielded new insights. Table 3 illustrates the research sites, data sources and research phases.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were coded using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA. We used a constant comparative method of analysis to identify common themes and generated theory grounded in the data gathered (Glaser, 1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our analysis thus followed the principles of grounded theory. Given the multi-level interest in real-time and historical dynamics, we followed a contextualist approach in our analysis (Pettigrew, 1990). According to Pettigrew (1985), a contextualist analysis of a process “draws on phenomena at vertical and horizontal levels of analysis, and the interconnections between those levels through time” (p. 64). The first round of coding was focused on the identification of different periods of time based on strategic inflection points and thus built the horizontal levels of analysis. Our analysis suggested three time periods. The first period can be described as the ‘startup-and growth phase’ before receiving the legal status of a university (1974–2008), a phase characterized by high levels of autonomy and growth. The second period can be described as the phase of ‘merger and continued growth’, having received the legal status of a university and the corresponding centralization (2009–2017). The third phase can be described as the phase of ‘development’, in which the organizational development ‘project future’ initiative and data collection started (2017–2019). See Figure 3 for an overview of these periods and important steps in history (i.e. strategic inflection points). Those horizontal dynamics mirrored the historical element of the dynamics observed. For instance, as data revealed the importance of the dynamic of ‘identity formation’ in the context of MultiCorp, we were able to describe its dynamic in relation to its historical component. Given our contextualist approach, we further separated coding of vertical components and thus analysed data regarding the multi-level multi-site effects that occur. For instance, we observed that “trust building” played a profound role in observing the dynamics of identity formation between the central and decentral level and between hierarchical levels inside sub-organizational units. The analysis of the dynamics of ambidexterity was thus conducted in relation to multiple levels (organization, business unit, team and individual) and multiple sites (central and decentral levels) in order to understand how these multi-level dynamics can be influenced inside a multi-campus university.

In the second round of coding, we applied line-by-line coding procedures and, whenever possible, in vivo or first-order codes to observation field notes, interview transcripts, video transcripts and written documentary data. Following previous research on the dynamic aspects of ambidexterity (e.g. Zimmermann, Raisch, & Birkinshaw, 2015) this inductive analysis was followed by a phase of deductive reasoning in which we searched for theoretical themes. For example, statements about ‘different understandings of innovation and efficiency’ and ‘perceived higher degrees of innovativeness or efficiency’ are grouped into the theoretical dimension of ‘ambiguity’. While this ambiguity refers to OA, we labelled this second order theoretical theme as ‘OA ambiguity’. We then grouped the themes into the aggregate dimensions of ‘triggers’ and ‘dynamics’ of OA change and built a model of OA change in the context of MultiCorp. See Figure 3 for an overview of the data structure.

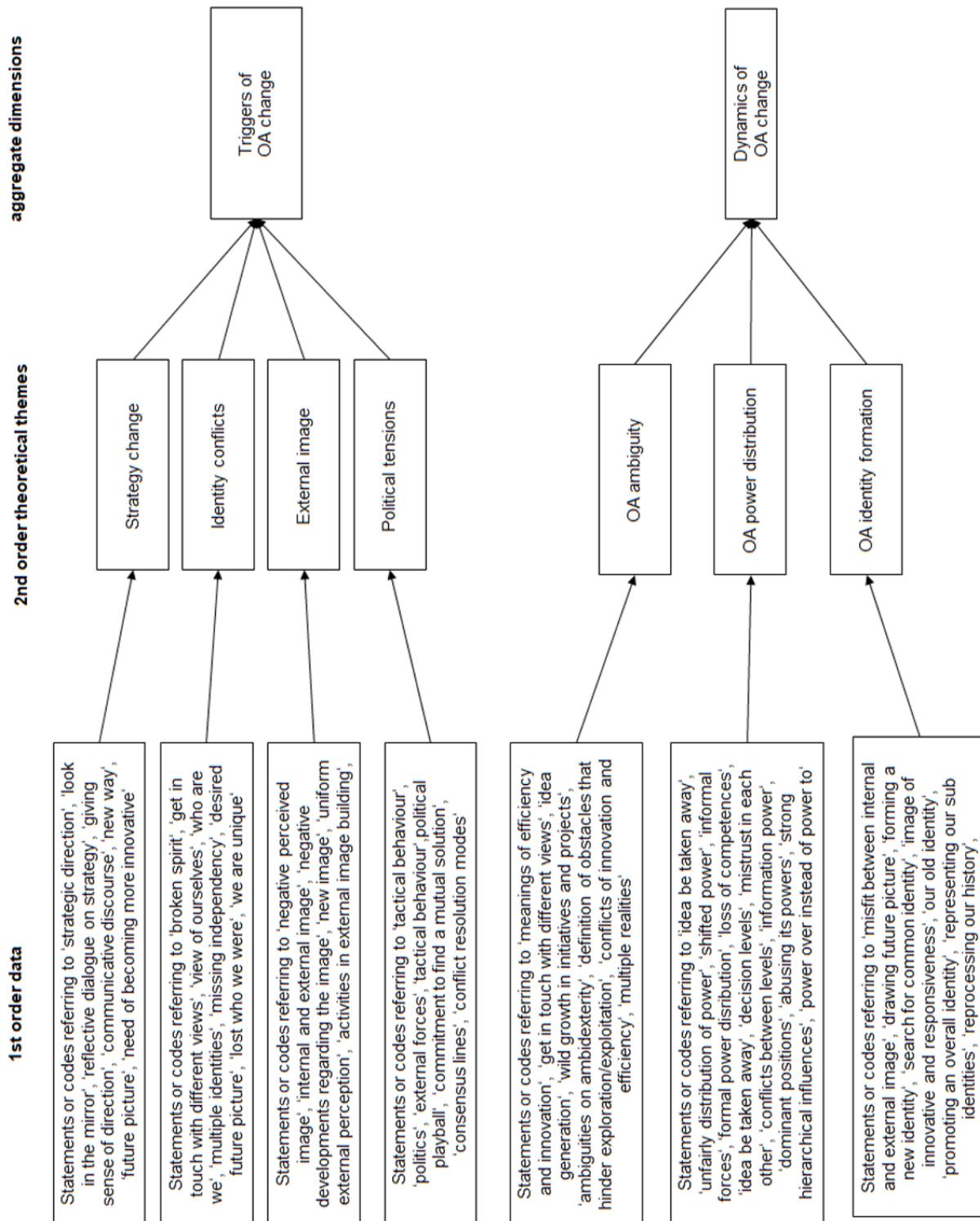


Figure 3: Data structure

Stages	Research Site	Focus (time/context)	Perspective/Level	Informants ^a		Data Source(s)	Data Collection				
				Pillar 1: Teaching & research	Pillar 2: Administration		Timepoint	Observation	On-site (Headquarter)	Documentary data	
Ethnography (Direct observation of the strategic development initiative) and documentary data	Strategic development initiative & headquarter observation	Real-time analysis, following forward-data (Langley, 2009; Pettigrew, 1990) & focus on initiatives (explorative/exploitative) ^c	Central top-level perspective (headquarter) combined with multiple views through the observation of strategic development process with a participatory approach (decentral middle- and bottom-level)	Board, headquarters (presidium), senate, project leaders, sub- and core-project team members, workshop participants ^a	Real-time participant observations, unstructured interviewing, documentary research	2018/19	81 hours data from observation of 19 events regarding the organization development initiative	1-2 days per week, 12 months (about 400 hours)	> 300 pages of protocols, memos, meeting reports, presentation slides, charts from workshops, photo documentary 2 videos & 38 interview videos [duration between 01:30 and 02:15 mm:ss]		
							Pillar 1: Teaching & research	Pillar 2: Administration	Pillar 1: Teaching & research	Pillar 2: Administration	Total
Semi-structured interviews (Verifying observations and first impressions)	MultiCorp (6 representative research sites, located in different German cities) Decentral large-org: BigDecentral_1 Decentral mid-org: MidDecentral_1 MidDecentral_2 MidDecentral_3 Decentral small-org: SmallDecentral_1 Central org: CentralOrg_1	Combination of real-time and tracing back (Langley, 2009; Pettigrew, 1990) Focus on initiatives (explorative/exploitative) ^b	Decentral perspective(s) of multi-level of multi-sites	Hierarchical levels: Administration director, senior staff, and administrative staff	Semi-structured interviews, documentary research	2019	8 semi-structured interviews Σ 11:53:52 \emptyset 1:37:50	8 semi-structured interviews Σ 13:03:41 \emptyset 1:29:14	16 semi-structured interviews Σ 24:56:33 \emptyset 1:33:32		
							Pillar 1: Teaching & research	Pillar 2: Administration	Pillar 1: Teaching & research	Pillar 2: Administration	Total

^a Board = Chair, co-chair, representatives; Headquarters (presidium) = president, vice-president, chancellor, representatives; Senate = Headquarters, professors, students, research associates, employees; Project Lead(ers) = project, subprojects 1 and 2, sub- and coreproject teams = internal and external experts (employees and consultants), employees from headquarters and decentral organizations; workshop participants = employees from headquarters and decentral organizations (decentral/central organizations and departments, e.g. finance, human resources, IT)

^b Central organization (headquarters) and selected decentral organizational entities are representative for the complex organizational structure.

^c e.g. initiative 'group-wide software implementation', 'research free semester', 'foundation of a central unit for master courses', process harmonization initiatives, 'future funds', 'future conference'

Table 3: Overview of sources of data and research sites

4. Findings: Towards a model of ambidexterity change

4.1 The ambidexterity change process at MultiCorp: OA change triggers and dynamics

A model that describes the ambidexterity change process emerged from this case. This model is grounded in the outer and inner context of MultiCorp (Pettigrew, 1990). As illustrated in Figure 5, MultiCorp's ambidexterity change process can be described by four crucial triggers of OA change and resulting OA change dynamics, indicated by the outcome of the inductive analysis of this case. These dynamics represent the multi-level, multi-site dynamics' embeddedness in time and thus represent both a vertical and a horizontal perspective. The data revealed that in MultiCorp's case, in the change of ambidexterity from an ambidexterity configuration in t_1 towards the reconfigured configuration in t_2 , three OA change dynamics occur: (1) OA ambiguity, (2) OA power distribution and (3) OA identity formation. It was further discovered that these dynamics are triggered by (1) strategy change, (2) identity conflicts, (3) external image and (4) political tensions. We begin the presentation of our findings with descriptions of the triggers of OA change.

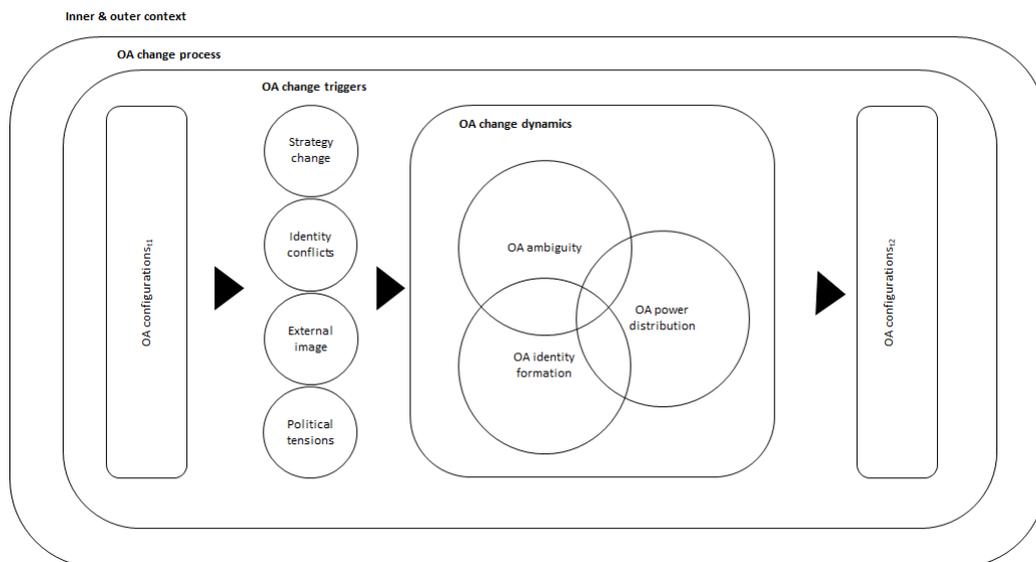


Figure 5: The ambidexterity change process (own illustration)

Triggers of OA change

Strategy change. Having gone through a phase of massive growth and corresponding strategy, the first trigger of OA change was the initiation of a new strategic direction set from the top. This change in strategy was politically conditioned, as it occurred due to a new structure and development plan to initiate a phase of consolidation. Politics stopped the massive growth that had had MultiCorp diving into a financial crisis. MultiCorp was not able to perform with its financial resources. After years of growth, further development in various core areas was necessary in the consolidation phase. The goal is the strategic positioning and differentiation of MultiCorp as a unique and innovative university model in the THES. MultiCorp is characterized by a strategic and service-oriented management architecture at the central and decentralized level with recognizable, recognized added value based on sustainable financing. In hand with the strategy change, MultiCorp started an organizational development process that was funded for three years to further develop the organization to become more agile, innovative and efficient. This triggered the re-configuration

of existing OA configurations in t_1 . Table 4 gives an overview about some illustrative quotes on the triggers of OA change.

External image. Another trigger that influences the OA change dynamics that were observed was MultiCorp's external public image. According to Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994), members identify with organizations that have an attractive image. MultiCorp's image is and has been an attractive one over years, as the organization was recognized as a unique success model that is based on innovation. This image was damaged the first time during the organization's immense growth phase when negative newspaper articles wrote about a financial crisis occurring inside the organization and negative developments. MultiCorp's external image was also marked by reports regarding assumed internal mismanagement and influences through politics and expert reports on the quality of the dual study. In regional press statements, one of the decentral units was under particular criticism, which had a negative effect on MultiCorp as a whole. In external perception, MultiCorp was still perceived as a form of education rather than an academic career opportunity. This view of MultiCorp was supported by the fact that some previous professors at MultiCorp had no doctoral degree, and there was a group of individuals that did not promote research assignments. Also, several earlier terms, such as 'education', were used more often than 'study', in the organization's internal and external communication. This promoted an image of a scholastic type of university rather than an innovative research institution in the THES.

Political tensions. Data also revealed political tensions as a trigger of ambidexterity change. As the model on which MultiCorp is based was initiated with economy and politics, and because both are part of the organization, political tensions often influenced changes inside MultiCorp. In particular, they influenced MultiCorp's investments in exploration-exploitation and thus the dynamics of ambidexterity change because their penetration into the organization is significant. For instance, the supervisory board of MultiCorp is led by the Minister of Science and one member of a DAX 30 company's management. In addition to the initiation and support to start a large-scale organizational change initiative to further develop the organization and the emphasis of its return to its innovativeness, rapidity and responsiveness – MultiCorp is seen as 'transfer and innovation partner for business and society' – data revealed political tensions, as some individuals and documents described MultiCorp as being abused as a 'plaything of politics'. These dependencies repeatedly led to aspirations of self-employment and independence.

Identity conflicts. Historically, MultiCorp was grounded decentrally, and former independent entities clashed when multiple identities were brought together through the merger in 2009. Data revealed that MultiCorp missed out on bringing these together and on forming a common identity of the newly formed organization consisting of a combination of central and decentral units. This became visible through discussions surrounding the 'fight' between 'us', which refers to the perspectives and thus the formed identity of the different decentral units, and 'them', which refers to the central organization (headquarters). In addition, MultiCorp's 'we', which refers to the group's identity as a whole with its combination of one central and several decentral units, was a trigger that influenced the dynamics of ambidexterity. In addition to identity conflicts that occurred due to the merger, the organization had to deal with their understanding and positioning in the THES and thus obtaining a university status, in accordance with the previously described perceived external image. As a result, MultiCorp struggled with its understanding of being innovative, especially regarding the research capacity and understanding of research in the specific context of MultiCorp. These identity conflicts influenced the dynamics of ambidexterity through, for instance, resulting indifferent understandings about where innovation actually can take place and what efficiency means in the context of this unique organizational structure.

Dynamic	Theme	Illustrative quotes
OA change triggers	Strategy change	<p>‘We must focus on innovation and responsiveness, and we have to find a new way.’</p> <p>‘Our new direction is that we now want to grow together as a group.’</p> <p>‘After years of pursuing a growth strategy, we must now focus on consolidation.’</p>
	External image	<p>‘In terms of our external image, we have a large number of changes to process.’</p> <p>‘Our external image changed a lot from positive to negative.’</p> <p>‘This expert report is a slap in the face for all of us: the professors, the students, and our employees.’</p> <p>‘Our visibility has increased.’</p> <p>‘We still have a positive image through effective external publicity and a number of public relations.’</p> <p>‘As students of MultiCorp, we are proud to be part of this unique and innovative university and also want to be recognized as students of an innovative university.’</p> <p>‘Success model MultiCorp goes on’, ‘perfect entry for graduates’, ‘MultiCorp has the best students’, ‘companies are the biggest fan of the MultiCorp model’, ‘MultiCorp growth continues’, ‘MultiCorp is the most innovative university’, ‘trouble with the success model’, ‘financial crisis is played down’ [regional newspaper article, October 2016].</p>
	Political tensions	<p>‘I’m still sceptical, because if the policy has something else in mind, then we will simply go wrong there. I just do not know if they have something in the drawer that they want to fix differently.’</p> <p>‘If we then go further to the Ministry, they are even further away, and then things happen and decisions are made that make the job very difficult at the frontline.’</p> <p>‘But now again comes the policy; now digitization is the big buzzword – there will probably be funding for programs again that influence us internally.’</p> <p>‘we should not do that for political reasons’, ‘from the political side came headwind’, ‘discussions about tactical behaviour as in the following statement of one informant’, ‘I have got the feeling that the journey is the goal and that we have to learn that escalation is important to get on with our issues’, ‘currently, nobody is ready or brave enough to go this way’.</p>
	Identity conflicts	<p>‘We directly drove in an identity crisis.’</p> <p>‘There are unsolvable identity conflicts based on our decentral and central structure... insurmountable differences will always remain.’</p> <p>‘Multiple identities clash.’</p> <p>‘We are unique, yes, but this makes it more difficult to find our place. We are not comparable to a university or a university of applied sciences.’</p> <p>‘The new generation of (younger) professors may have the right background and the right experience in their field, but they don’t know MultiCorp and its past, and with their strong aim to do research, they clash with our past of a practically oriented higher education organization.’</p> <p>‘Are we one or multiple MultiCorps?’</p>

Table 4: Triggers of OA change

OA dynamics in MultiCorp's change process

(1) OA ambiguity

OA ambiguity is one of three identified dynamics in the context of MultiCorp. OA ambiguity refers to the horizontal and vertical dynamics that result from multiple interpretations and different ways of understanding and configuring innovation and efficiency (i.e. ambidexterity). Our data revealed that multiple exploration-exploitation configurations co-exist at multiple levels and sites with regard to their historical dimensions. For instance, we observed differences between levels, sites, and historical dimensions of the changing investments in exploration and exploitation in the past, present and future. Some remembered the time prior to obtaining a university status as highly innovative, while others were reminded that this time was characterized by high levels of chaos and inefficiency. So, in MultiCorp's case, the initiation of the ambidexterity change was full of ambiguities and when individuals tried to make sense of the requested ambidexterity change, this occurred in multiple ways while moving closer 'to the flux of ambiguity' (Weick (2015, p. 117). Table 5a presents some illustrative quotes on OA ambiguity.

Horizontal perspective. Ambidexterity ambiguity emerged from a historical perspective, when individuals discussed the past, present and future of MultiCorp and tried to simplify the changing investments in exploration and exploitation in time. For instance, some informants discussed that in the past, decisions were made faster at the decentral units and required fewer administrative hurdles to face. Dynamics occurred in discussions surrounding common reflections around these and other memories through the exchange of different understandings and memories. The feeling was that at that time, innovativeness was much greater. Other informants emphasized that over the years, the combination of exploration and exploitation had changed. These individuals argued that innovativeness becomes 'more a relic of the past', as one interviewee puts it, or described today's reality of MultiCorp as 'a reached degree of formalization that stifled in the bud every idea to bring the group forward'.

Vertical perspective. From a vertical perspective, ambidexterity ambiguity emerged when individuals discussed different understandings of innovation and efficiency with regard to multiple levels. For instance, understandings of the investments in exploration and exploitation differed between the central and decentral levels. From the perspective of the central unit, efficiency is positively influenced by the implementation of central units, such as central departments for budgeting, human resources, legal or quality management with corresponding rules and regulations for the decentral entities. However, from the decentral perspective, this centralization does have a positive effect on the sites' harmonization but at the same time increases bureaucracy and thus hinders decentral organizations' innovativeness. In addition, different understandings and views of the different decentral entities, including those inside these entities, exist. Several decentral, former independent entities were perceived to have higher levels of innovativeness or more successful ideas and initiatives for pushing efficiency.

Dynamic	Theme	Illustrative quotes
OA ambiguity	Horizontal OA ambiguity	<p>'We have an inferiority complex.'</p> <p>'Innovativeness, responsiveness and agility becomes more a relic of the past.'</p> <p>'We must grow up and find out what focus we want to push [referring to the perception of an innovative university].'</p> <p>'If we are honest, we actually weren't more innovative in the past; we were more chaotic and had less regulations, which led to the feeling that we were able to put every idea into practice.'</p>

	Vertical OA ambiguity	<p>‘Discrediting the central level as bureaucratic.’</p> <p>‘Our problem is the over-centralization. For instance, regarding future funds [i.e. an internal initiative to push innovativeness], how can it be that the central units decide which projects are fundable and innovative enough and which are not?’</p> <p>‘The state university model makes sense for this organization but was implemented incorrectly’, ‘...the central level should actually push innovativeness and efficiency.’</p> <p>‘Innovativeness is high at our site, much higher compared with MultiCorp as a whole. Most of the important initiatives, such as the establishment of a new centre, started here.’</p> <p>‘One should express major criticism regarding the method that was used in recent years; efficiency at the locations changed over the years due to the massive growth of bureaucracy.’</p> <p>‘From my perspective, innovation happens at the sites and is not promoted by the central unit.’</p> <p>‘Reaching fully harmonic integration between the central and decentral levels is not possible, as it is an insoluble conflict; only approximation is possible.’</p>
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Table 5a: OA change dynamic of ambiguity

(2) OA power distribution (and politics)

Our data revealed power distribution as a theme that describes horizontal and vertical dynamics resulting from different forms of formal (hierarchical level) and informal power (network position). The data also revealed the distribution of power inside the multiple levels and sites of MultiCorp. According to Brass and Burkhardt (1993), ‘power is viewed as the inverse of dependence’ (p. 444). They further emphasize that people in central positions have extensive knowledge and ‘thereby increase others’ dependence on them’ (p. 444).

Horizontal perspective. Prior to the establishment of a powerful central unit that decides how to distribute resources and allocate power, the decentral units had direct contact with the ministry and were responsible for topics such as budget and were able to decide on initiatives locally on their own. With the receipt of the university status and the focus on centralization, power was shifted towards the headquarters. As a result, the decentral units and their leaders lost the capacity to make their own decisions. Even if the rector of a site (to whom, in the past, a large amount of responsibility was assigned) felt like they were being ‘downgraded to a caretaker’, the tasks and power remained the same from the perspective of the decentral units. In addition, political conflict concerning power and the distribution of resources leads to a climate of mistrust and competition. The team spirit that had seen MultiCorp as a group was massively damaged because power was perceived as unfairly distributed over the years. Misdistribution of power leads to high levels of mistrust and misunderstandings and a lack of exchange.

Vertical perspective. The data revealed the question of power distribution and inter/intra-organizational power and politics on multiple levels on site, in the interplay between the central and decentral levels, and between multiple sites. First, we found that dynamics of OA power distribution arose between levels. The data revealed that the current distribution of power and decision levels tend to hinder rather than promote explorative and exploitative initiatives. Some individuals tried to push their locally born ideas but failed. Alternately, when an idea was brought to the central decision level, that idea was sometimes fused with an initiative of another decentral unit. Even when the reasons for that could be understandable by the initiator of the initiative, it was a perceived failure and a loss of control and power. This is best illustrated by the following situation. As part of a strategic initiative, the organization decided to offer funding for ideas that push either the interplay between different sites and thus the efficiency of core

functionalities in the organization or have to do with the future of MultiCorp and thus are part of an innovative idea (so-called future funds). This initiative seemed to work well from the perspective of the organizational level, as good ideas were submitted. However, from the perspective of the individuals, another dynamic was felt. Although some felt the dynamic to drive innovativeness and efficiency, they felt at the same time confused because the ideas submitted sometimes years ago had not been addressed. What we observed was a negative dynamic because a smaller group (including top-level managers) organized as part of the central organization decided which ideas were worth funding and which were not. The results were then given back to the submitters. The initiative thus worked out negatively. Second, we observed that some decentral units became more powerful through the building of strong relationships with other decentral units. Relational dependencies existed between some decentral units. These connections influenced whether the initiatives were driven or not – either through joint initiatives or through coalitions in committees that have a wider influence on activities inside the organization. More often, these relational dependencies and connections were historically grounded (see the horizontal perspective) or due to regional proximity. Other coalitions and teams were found to be more powerful as a group through the use of network forces or instruments, such as the lodging of complaints, to influence the decisions that were made.

Dynamic	Theme	Illustrative quotes
OA power distribution	Horizontal OA power distribution	<p>‘Feels like there is a two-class society in the organization’</p> <p>‘We should generate the decentral ideas and then decide centrally what to push and what not to push.’</p> <p>‘If the idea comes from [name of city 1], it is OK; if it comes from [name of city 2], it is not.’</p> <p>‘Will my idea be taken away from me?’ ‘Who decides on universally valid processes? Every location finds solutions.’</p> <p>‘So many ideas to bring the group forward, but I don’t see a way to bring these to the street.’</p> <p>‘Who drives innovativeness/efficiency initiatives?’ ‘In order to create something new, leaders must have integrity.’ ‘With bottom-up ideas, it is unclear – Who gave you the order to do that?’</p> <p>‘There is a culture of “knowledge is power” and this affects both efficiency and innovation.’</p> <p>‘Informally, power distributions other than the formal ones exist.’</p> <p>‘What are the competences of the central unit, and which competences should be decentralized?’</p> <p>‘If you experience that the initiative you have pushed and worked for over years is just taken away from you and brought to another site or level, you will think twice about whether you tell others in the network about your project and idea...you would even accept that it is not efficient because multiple groups work on the same idea without realizing synergies.’</p>
	Vertical OA power distribution	<p>‘It was a good idea; however, nobody cared about how it would be processed at our sites, and now, we failed with an originally good initiative.’</p> <p>‘A university is not a hierarchy-free space.’</p> <p>‘By law, I am no longer responsible for that. But I still live it that way. All decisions go through my desk.’</p> <p>‘...one person is responsible for all decentral units but actually cannot cope with it for all locations...Internally, I would definitely delegate that again. Also, because it is actually lived that way.’</p> <p>‘Today, if a person on the site makes nonsense, then he is responsible.’</p> <p>‘Why do we not delegate more responsibility down again?’</p> <p>‘Auditors from the court of auditors today say to me: “You do not have to worry. You are not responsible for anything.”’</p>

		<p>‘You do have the power to build your own kingdom here, and hopefully, this will also be possible in the future.’</p> <p>‘Our problem area is over-centralization’</p> <p>‘Consistent projects must be brought to an end.’</p>
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Table 5b: OA change dynamic of power distribution

(3) OA identity formation

The data revealed identity formation as a theme that describes horizontal and vertical dynamics and results from the collective process of developing an understanding of ‘who we are’ and ‘who we want to be in the future’ (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013).

Horizontal perspective. From a horizontal perspective, the data revealed dynamics of identity formation in terms of their historical component, as identity is developed through past experiences. The process of forming identity and respective sub-identities was, at MultiCorp, seen as an ongoing process of development, as MultiCorp is a young university; however, differences referring to the three main phases were identified. First, our analysis exposed the building of multiple identities, referring to a high degree of decentralization in phase I followed by a phase of identity struggling, when these former built identities and related sub-level identities were damaged by high levels of centralization. The analysis further revealed that these identity conflicts were partially solved as part of the process of growing together during the phase of organizational development. This historical heritage contributes to identity formation at multiple levels and sites and thus forms the point of departure for identity change.

Vertical perspective. From a vertical perspective and thus from the view of interactions between levels, we first observed the influence of identity formation through the differences in the identities of the central and decentral units. With the strong forces towards centralization, the former decentral entities and their sub-processes of sub-identity formation clashed when they lost their independent status and thus an important part of their identity. Dynamics occurred in the exchange between these levels and the exchange of existing identities. Second, we observed dynamics of identity formation from a multi-site perspective as the multiple identities that were formed at different sites clashed with different understandings – especially with regard to the question of one MultiCorp vs. multiple independent states. An important element in answering this question was to set core elements that are fixed and that all can agree on. Regarding these elements, a place for sub-identities was given; this was a place to draw different pictures and discussions around the identity that fits an organization with a central units and multiple decentral units, which seemed to be important in this particular regional organization that is anchored to its past. Dynamics further occurred through different views of MultiCorp – most often illustrated through the exchange of pictures and metaphors.

Dynamic	Theme	Illustrative quotes
OA identity formation	Horizontal OA identity formation	<p>‘...spirit of the past has been broken.’</p> <p>‘We come from a time without having the right to award academic degrees.’</p> <p>‘We still have professors without doctoral degrees, and this of course influences our understanding of ourselves as a whole university.’</p> <p>‘I think we have done a lot in previous years to form a new identity.’</p> <p>‘We have to ask our ourselves who we want to be in the future instead of constantly asking who we were in the past.’</p>

	Vertical OA identity formation	‘Do we want to be one MultiCorp or many?’ ‘Shift from a silo mentality to one group thinking.’ ‘We have a very good and innovative product and need to be more self-confident about it.’ ‘We have to grow up.’ ‘We have to convince ourselves first what we want to be.’ ‘Currently, we are paralysed and far away from being innovative.’ ‘It is my intrinsic motivation whether I decide to push innovativeness or efficiency and respond to the activities currently made at the subsidiary...this is part of my identity.’
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Table 5c: OA change dynamic of identity formation

5. Discussion and future directions

This case study showed that there are different triggers and opportunities to promote the change and development of ambidexterity. However, there are multi-level interactive dynamics that influence how specific impulses are worked out at the lower levels. While this is in line with previous research findings – for instance, the findings of Zimmermann et al. (2015), who demonstrated the importance of emergent processes at different levels – our focus on the actors who enact and change within the organization at multiple levels brought about greater insights into the dynamics.

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the multi-level dynamics of ambidexterity to derive how the processes of change and development can be influenced inside a distributed organization in the THES (a multi-campus university). Through the use of a longitudinal case study with ethnographic and interview data from one of the largest universities in Germany that has a unique centralized and decentralized organizational structure undergoing strategic development, this study extended ambidexterity theory with a dynamic and multi-level view. The focus on the actors enacting and changing inside the organization was grounded in our assumption that ambidexterity is a dynamic multi-level construct that must be observed at a micro level and our perception that ambidexterity is achieved through managerial capability. This study offers, initial implications on how the continuous (re)-configuration of the exploration and exploitation occurring inside the organization can be influenced on multiple levels through emphasizing the importance of differing dynamics among levels. Based on the proposed model, it should be further discussed how these enacting and changing impulses play out across levels in more depth. More historical data is needed to determine how the dynamics can be influenced.

In conclusion, this study outlined the importance of studying ambidexterity from a dynamic and in-depth perspective. In doing so, the study is able to make three distinctive contributions to the ambidexterity literature. First, it offers a more nuanced view and dynamic understanding of ambidexterity and thereby contributes to the emerging dynamic ambidexterity debate (Birkinshaw et al., 2016; Luger et al., 2018). In line with previous research, we found that in order to promote ambidexterity, it is important to focus on both structural and contextual antecedents. However, in contrast to the often adopted ‘high-level’ perspective, we emphasize the importance of a multiplicity of impulses that actively trigger the processes of reflection and interpretation concerning exploration and exploitation – and, in this context, the importance of managing different expectations. Second, by studying multiple levels and multiple sites, our findings suggest a multi-level model of ambidexterity change in distributed contexts and thereby respond to calls for research examining the interrelations between levels (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). This model draws attention to the roles of ambiguity, power and identity in the specific context of a multi-campus university.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Economy and Culture (MWK) for funding this project. They would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on an earlier version that helped to improve this conference paper.

Appendix A

<p>Theme part I: Narrative generating entry [CV]</p> <p>1.) Where do you come from and what is your MultiCorp story? Please tell me.</p> <p>Theme part II: Site strategy/corporate strategy</p> <p>Organization member before MultiCorp foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- You have been at the location [city] since [year] and can thus report something about the time before and after receiving legal university status. How do you see MultiCorp? How do you see your site? Compared then and now. <p>Member of the organization since foundation of MultiCorp</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- You have joined MultiCorp in [year] at the location [city] and thus entered after receiving legal university status. How do you see MultiCorp? How do you see your site? <p>Additional questions in theme part II:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where does MultiCorp want to go as a whole?- How do you see [name of the city of the decentral unit] as a location?- How should MultiCorp change?- Where do you see development potential? Can you further explain.- Did MultiCorp grow together?- Possibly ask for the image of MultiCorp (for example metaphor) <p>Theme part III: [OA] Innovation and Efficiency (MultiCorp Site)</p> <p>Show graphic and explain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where do you see the MultiCorp in terms of innovation and efficiency? See Figure 4- Where do you see the location in this context?- What does innovation and efficiency mean in context of MultiCorp. Can you illustrate with examples, such as initiatives/projects/activities? <p>Additional questions in theme part III:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where should MultiCorp go? (referring to the graphic)- Where do you see development potential in terms of innovation and efficiency?- How do you see the interaction between central / decentralized in this process?- How do the other levels hinder you in what you want to do?- What are you doing to move here?- How much time does MultiCorp invest in projects that deal with the future? And short-term optimizations?

Figure 6: Interview Guide

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