The interdependence of work norms and sanctioning behavior

An example of the rotation system at an international chain hotel

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Introduction

The debate on norms in social sciences is extremely heterogeneous: it confronts us with partly contradictory theoretical premises explaining the origin of norms. To illustrate the point, let me introduce some major issues in dispute. Norms can be viewed as constraints on action or as flexible constructs emerging in the course of interactions. The classic example of norms as hard constraints is Parsons' concept of norms (Parsons 1937; 1952). Rational choice approaches and game theories also belong to this group (e.g. Coleman 1990; Hechter & Opp 2001; Voss 2001). In contrast, norms can be viewed as social constructs emerging during interactions and having a great degree of flexibility (e.g. Garfinkel 1959; 1976; Fine 2001). Another disagreement concerns the question of whether there is a consensus on norms or if their ambivalent characteristics inevitably cause conflicts. On the one hand, we can witness a clear trend in theoretical concepts towards normative consensus: starting from Parsons' concept of norms, which presumes a total consensus that emerges due to the internalization of cultural values shared by all society members, to contemporary approaches that understand norms as »rules, about which there is at least some degree of consensus« (Horne 2001: 5). However, on the other hand, approaches that claim the conflictual nature of norms can also be found (e.g. Popitz 2006; Burns & Flam 1987).[1]

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1   The characteristics of normative conflicts will be elaborated in the following with regard to the thesis on the interdependence of norms.

Simultaneously, a variety of concepts of norms share the view of normative behavior as behavioral regularity supported by sanctions in the case of deviant actions. Some other approaches supplement the definition by the ›oughtness‹ characteristic of norms, which rests on some kind of standard value that is (without further justification) considered valid and, to some extent, socially shared (Hechter & Opp 2001: 404). In the following, I will limit my analysis to sanctioning because this characteristic seems to be particularly problematic for the definition of norm-following behavior.

The idea of sanctions as the basis of norm-following behavior in the contemporary social science debate is developed within the instrumental concepts of norms: rational-choice and game theorists stress that actors calculate the costs of sanctions. Sanctions are normally classified by two types: ›internal‹ and ›external‹. The rational motives of behavior are associated with external sanctioning. Instead, intrinsic sanctions »involve elements of the actor's personality« (Giddens 1976: 109) and are normally connected with norms internalized by actors in the course of socialization. The idea of internal sanctioning is elaborated in Parsons' concept of norms.

However, defining norms by means of sanctioning, which is also often taken as its empirical measure, seems to be insufficient as a way to understand empirical evidence of norm-following behavior. In turn, in sociological debates more and more often attempts have been made to rethink the concept of sanctions and their interrelation to norms. For example, Beckert calls into question whether sanctions can generally be considered an integral characteristic of norms:

> we cannot reduce social norms to economic acts of maximization but rather must grant them an autonomous status which excludes the explanation of norms within the economic model of behavior. This exclusion does not claim that sanctions have no significance for maintaining norms but only *denies the possibility of reducing norms to sanctions* (Beckert 2002: 35, italics by the author).

A similar view is held by Lindenberg, who claims that norms cannot be grasped »as simple instruments of control in which concrete instructions are enforced by […] sanctions« (Lindenberg 2008: 79).

My argumentation that sanctions cannot be regarded as an integral characteristic of norms is based on the analysis of the qualitative data from my case studies. First, it seems to be problematic to assume that interaction between groups is completely transparent.[2] For example, in work organizations employees may demonstrate shirking-behavior in those areas of their activity where managers will never notice it and, therefore, cannot impose sanctions.

Second, it turns out to be misleading to define power in terms of a group's resources related to the higher status in the organizational hierarchy and sanctions as a privilege of those who have more resources. Rather, if we take the example of a work organization once again, both managers and employees may impose sanctions and influence the process of the emergence of norms. This thesis results from understanding the genesis of norms as the process of communicating, negotiating and learning[3] norms in which employees are much more than simply passive norm-followers. These are employees who actively implement norms into practice: they have the power to decide whether to follow a norm or not as well as in which form to apply a norm. This points to the fact that

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2   In this connection Beckert claims: »a purely instrumental attitude towards norms would not lead to the desired results of action because, especially in big groups, sanctions could not be optimally imposed because of incomplete possibilities of mutual observation of the action of every other actor« (Beckert 2002: 260).
     Similarly, Popitz explains the limits of sanctioning by »the paradox of punishment«. In his view, since actors' behavior is not completely transparent, sanctioning is imposed only in few cases of deviance. This allows a norm system to keep existing. Otherwise, the overload of sanctioning would lead to the collapse of the whole system (Popitz 2006).

3   I borrow different approaches such as ethnomethodological studies, symbolic interactionism, and the framing approach of Lindenberg to depict the process of the emergence of norms (Lindenberg 2006; 2008; Garfinkel 1959; 1976; Fine 2001).

they may impose sanctions towards managers. The sanctions of employees take different forms: from complaints and threats to shirking-behavior and quitting organizations. At first glance, this idea may seem to overlook hierarchical relations, but it gains in importance when one considers that employers are highly dependent on the norm-following behavior of employees. Managers only make decisions and formulate organnizational rules, i.e. they give an impetus for newly emerging work norms, but their implementation and establishment results from employees' reactions to newly emerging work norms.[4]

Third, my major argument that sanctions cannot be regarded as an integral characteristic of norms refers to considering them to be embedded in a system of interdependent norms. This approach presumes that several norms are normally brought into play in one setting simultaneously. Contradictions between norms mean that certain norms can be followed only if others are infracted (e.g. Esser 2000: 133).[5] Therefore, one can analyze a deviant form of behavior and resulting sanctioning only in connection with a system of interrelated and competitive norms.

The three comments were provided to illustrate some gaps in the general definition of norms and its inadequacy if one tries to apply it to processes observed in the everyday practices of work organizations. In this paper I will concentrate on the second and third aspects – the flexible understanding of power relations and the phenomenon of the interdependence of norms which seem to be significant for rethinking the interrelation between norms and sanctioning. I assume that deviant behavior is inevitable within a system of competitive norms where employees impose sanctions when they resist following contradictory norms. I will

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4   I make use of micropolitical theory and social rule system theory to illustrate a flexible understanding of power relations between distinct groups of actors. Furthermore, the idea of sanctioning by employees is mentioned but not elaborated in the work of Popitz (2006).

5   Based on this assumption, I designate such norms as contradictory or competitive. The theoretical foundation of the idea of interdependence of norms is tackled in the subsequent section in more detail.

illustrate the interdependence of norms by an example from my case study.

Simultaneously, it seems to be a challenge to find a concept of norms that would link theoretical and empirical aspects of norm-following behavior in one framework or context. From a variety of approaches to norms I use social rule system theory which seems to be particularly appropriate for understanding the interdependence of norms.[6] It was developed as a link between concepts orientated toward social agents (e.g. phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism) and such theories as structural functionalism, structuralism, and system theory. At the same time, social rule system theory is an empirically oriented theory which focuses on the practical implementation of norms in concrete social settings.

The topic of my paper is discussed by three major steps. First, I will elaborate what I understand by the interdependence of norms and normative conflicts. Being interested in processes through which norms are established, I concentrate on the theoretical issue of emergent qualities of normative structure. Therefore, second, I will make use of the concept of the dual interrelation of structure and action, in order to clarify a general mechanism of the construction of norms. It will be taken as a basis for the explanation of the emergence of competitive norms within one setting. Third, I will illustrate my assumptions by using an example from the case study of an international chain hotel in Germany. This empirically demonstrates how the interdependence of distinct norms results in sanctioning behavior on the part of employees.

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6   The concept of norms by Burns et al. is a part of social rule system theory. Norms are considered a type of a social rule. However, in the scientific debate there is no consensus on this question: some link social rules with norms (Esser 2000), whereas others contrast them (Gloy 1975). In my study, I do not differentiate between social rules and norms, as it is the case in social rule system theory. Instead, I consider norms to be including social rules at the different stages of their emergence.

The interdependence of norms:
definition and theoretical framework

The interdependence of norms enables the integration of the different types of norms in the course of their emergence. A certain norm goes through interaction with other types of norms, so that the constellations or, in other words, systems of interdependent norms are established.

The idea of the interdependence of norms was mentioned in sociological discussions but not elaborated in detail. It originates from Durkheim's thesis that every norm presumes a parallel adherence and violence (Durkheim 1933; 1950). Popitz writes about conflicting norms that inevitably emerge, since individuals are simultaneously embedded in several contexts with different roles (Popitz 1980; 2006). Symbolic interactionists point out the ambiguity and variability of norms in one setting which causes normative conflicts. The resolution of conflicts arising through different norms is achieved by negotiating a »working consensus« (Strauss 1971; Fine 2001). In the contemporary debate on norms, the need to analyze the interdependence of norms is recognized by the contributors to the rational choice approach: »norms do not exist in splendid isolation; instead they are linked in various ways to other norms« (Hechter & Opp 2001: 401). Furthermore, some empirical studies investigate the impact of conflicting values due to different systems of norms on organizational commitment (e.g. Hult 2003). Thus, the idea of interdependent norms is closely associated with normative conflicts.

The thesis of the interdependence of norms is greatly elaborated within social rule system theory (Burns & Flam 1987). Following this theory, the implementation of social rule systems and changes in them are the object of struggles between agents who regulate differences in interests. According to Burns and Flam, »rules reflect in large part the crystallization of power exercised in establishing and developing the particular rule systems« (Burns & Flam: 75, 79). They are designated as »grammas of social domination« with different types of roles for the distinct groups of actors. Both – different roles performed by actors and the discrepancies in power associated with them – may lead to the formation of contradictory rule systems that provoke conflicts.

Thus, social rule system theory provides us with two important contributions to the understanding of the interdependence of norms. First, the process of the emergence of norms is connected with conflicts when competitive norms come into play within one system.[7] Therefore, following this approach, norms are embedded in the system of interdependent, partly competitive norms. Second, this theory elucidates situations in which competitive norms may come out within one system: every group of involved actors may refer to different norms, in order to assert their own position. Additionally, in the course of my empirical study I was able to identify further factors explaining the emergence of conflicting norms within one work organization. It is related to a situation in which a newly introduced norm is inconsistent with already existing norms. This phenomenon can be grasped by the dual interrelation of structure and action – a theoretical framework clarifying emergent qualities of normative structure.

Emergent qualities of normative structure

The concept of the dual interrelation of structure and action may be found in the structuration theory of Giddens or in the micropolitical theory (Giddens 1984; Ortmann 1988). In my approach it serves to illustrate two aspects: First, how available normative structures influence the emergence of new normative structures (existing norms create a framework for actions, so that the process of constructing new norms can be started), and second, how new normative structures are estab-

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7   In this regard, my view of norms differs from the assumptions of classic rational choice theories and game perspectives. In their interpretation, norms are understood as a coordination instrument that imposes restrictions to non-cooperative behavior of individuals. Therefore, they connect the genesis of norms with the establishment of a normative consensus. Following social rule system theory, I claim that a normative consensus is just momentary, since norms result from ongoing power struggles. It is presumed that norms need to be negotiated on a constant basis.

lished (newly emerging norms).[8] In this way, the concept of the dual in-
terrelation of structure and action provides us not only with knowledge
about emergent qualities of normative structure, but it is also linked with
the idea of interdependence of norms. I differentiate between two types
of norms that were identified in the context of work organizations. On
the one hand, there are norms which are strongly correlated to organi-
zational structure (I designate them as indirect existing norms). For ex-
ample, a developed hierarchy in the work organization will result in the
preservation of a norm of inequality. On the other hand, the second type
of norms presumes a process of the emergence of work norms resulting
from interactions between distinct groups of actors through communi-
cating, negotiating and learning. These norms may be exemplified by
newly emerging work norms initiated by managerial decisions, and I des-
ignate them as direct operational norms. At the same time, both types of
norms are interdependent. Indirect existing norms provide actors with a
framework for the negotiation of newly emerging work norms. There-
fore, direct operational norms are activated by means of interpretative
schemes resulting from indirect existing norms. In turn, newly emerging
work norms may change already existing norms that are related to or-
ganizational structure.

In summary, the first type of norms turns out to be the footing that pro-
vides actors with a framework for starting a process of constructing new
norms. The second type of norms exemplifies newly emerging norms
that are practically applied in a concrete situation. At the same time, both
groups are intertwined in the dual interrelation of structure and action. It
turns out to be important to differentiate between indirect existing
norms related to organizational structure and direct operational norms
practically applied for the explanation of normative conflicts that emerge

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8   When linking norms to the concept of structure, it is important to differ-
     entiate between distinct theoretical traditions. Here, norms as structures
     are understood not as constraints on human behavior, as assumed in
     classic rational choice theory or game theories, but rather, following the
     ethnomethodological approach, they are flexible guidance instructions
     for actions.

when competitive norms are identified in one setting. In the following, I will provide an empirical example from my case study where a norm resulting from a managerial decision is inconsistent with indirect existing norms related to the organizational structure of the work organization.

An empirical example: the introduction of the rotation system

Description of the study

The focus on how norms are interrelated in the course of their implementation is embedded in the general research question of my study on the emergence of norms. The topic is exemplified by the system of interdependent work norms. This means that I investigate emerging work norms by their interrelation to other types of norms, e.g. professional norms or justice norms. In the course of my empirical study I combined participant observation and semi-structured interviewing. Bringing together both methods promotes a fuller understanding of my research question through the comparison of doing (information gained from observations) and talking (reflections of actors expressed in interviews).

The research question is illustrated on the basis of several case studies conducted at hotels of the same international chain. In my study I attempted to identify recent changes in the operation of hotels that were connected to the introduction of new organizational rules. The focus of my observations was on contradictions and the clash of different norms, explicit or latent, designated as conflicts. Afterwards, I conducted interviews about the observed situations regarding the introduction of organizational rules. Here it was important to get the interpretation of those situations from three major groups of actors involved in the hotels' organization: First, managers who initiate and give instructions for changing organizational rules; second, supervisors who control work operation and the implementation of organizational rules; and third, employees who apply these changes. In the following, I will limit my analysis to the case of one international chain hotel in Germany which empirically demonstrates the thesis of the interdependence of norms.

Empirical field:
the characteristics of the international chain hotel in Germany

The investigated hotel belongs to the category of luxury business hotels in a large city in Germany. It has 380 rooms with price rates varying between 220 and 8,500 Euros. With regard to its position on the market, the hotel has a long history and an established reputation. It is an attractive employer for beginners of professional careers in the hospitality business. Getting a job at this hotel is considered evidence of good qualifications. Personnel reserve here consists of a large number of trainees who complete an internship during vocational education. The studied hotel receives more applications for jobs than it actually can employ and therefore does not face the problem of labor shortage due to recruitment difficulties.[9]

The configuration of positions at the hotel includes four levels. At the top are key managerial positions such as general director and executive manager. At a lower level are distinct departments which are headed by the managers of the middle level. The biggest departments are operating departments, i.e. those which provide guests with services: the housekeeping department, the food & beverage department together with the kitchen, and the front office. These departments were the focus of my empirical study. In the following, I will concentrate on the housekeeping department in which the rotation system of work was introduced. Additionally, there are a number of departments that fulfil a supportive function towards operational departments, i.e. they provide resources necessary for the operation of the hotel. These include, for example, the purchasing department, the human resources department, the accounting department, and the public relations and sales department. Since the hotel has been in operation for many years, it has a high proportion of permanent staff, including departmental heads. The positions of top-

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9   It is worth noting that the staff situation is different at small German hotels which often experience serious recruitment difficulties because of labor shortage.

managers, however, are subject to fluctuation more often than the positions of the middle management. This causes considerable changes in the management style of the hotel.

The studied hotel was not fully staffed during the time of my research stay. The shortage of personnel resulted from the policy of the top-management to reduce the number of staff as a consequence of the financial crisis. For example, in the housekeeping department, of 25 positions of room attendants available according to the budget, only twenty positions were occupied during my research. A large part of work in the housekeeping department is accomplished by means of personnel from an outside cleaning company. The management of the housekeeping department has a long history of cooperation with the outsourcing company. Employees from the outside are paid not by the hour but by the number of rooms cleaned. It allows the supervisors and managers of the housekeeping department to control the quality of rendered services. Additionally, the cleaning company has its own supervisors who check the work of their personnel in the first place. Only afterwards is the room checked by the supervisor from the permanent staff of the hotel. Generally, the practice of hiring casual staff from outsourcing companies characterizes the labor market of low qualified employees in the hotel industry of Germany. It allows managers to bring about a shift to flexible employment and to reduce personnel costs.

With regard to the organizational structure, the hotel is characterized by many hierarchical levels. Practitioners of the hotel industry state that hierarchical structures generally prevail in the organization of the hotel industry:

> As for the structure at a hotel, there are real hierarchies, perhaps even more than in other firms. You start small and at the bottom, and then you go up. As you go up, someone else is beneath you whom you trample on. You are trampled on again by someone from above, but you trample on someone below. This is the case at many hotels (Expert Interview No. 4).

Hierarchical structures are inevitably connected with status differences. In the case of hotels it is intensified by the obligation to wear a uniform which symbolizes a certain status (e.g. Whyte 1948: 12, 33). Hierarchical structures result in the formation of two internal labor markets at hotels – for low skilled workforce and highly qualified employees, whereas mobility between these two markets is limited (Durst 1993: 103). For example, promotions for room attendants are in most cases possible only within the housekeeping department, and even at large chain hotels the number of such promotions is low (Hieming et al. 2005: 162). In this context, the idea of careers in the hotel industry as an open road to the top, which is often put forward by the management as a motivation tool, cannot be applied to all groups of employees. Another example of inequality at hotels concerns the position of guests with an ascribed privileged status. Therefore, rank differences are established not only between the different groups of personnel, but also between employees and guests. Furthermore, the hierarchical organizational structure generally contributes to the establishment of low solidarity at hotels. Status characteristics limit the field of actions, which are strictly subordinated to the logic of hierarchy and underlie the restricted voice-possibilities of employees. In the following, I will use a concrete example to illustrate how the organizational structure of a developed hierarchy facilitate the establishment of the norm of inequality and how this complicates the introduction of the rotation system associated, in turn, with the norms of cooperation and equality.

The Example of Introducing the Rotation System

Conflict potential

The case is about the introduction of a structural change of organizing work operation in the housekeeping department of the German hotel. Before the introduction of the new organizational rule, room attendants – at least the group of permanent personnel – were assigned to a certain section on one floor. This practice may be designated as the system of fixed sections, i.e. they used to clean the same rooms every day. This was altered for the rotation system by the distribution of work tasks: now room attendants were supposed to clean different rooms every time. In

this regard, both the group of permanent staff and the group of personnel from the outside cleaning company got similar ways to organize work flow – according to the rotation principle.

This change was based on the decision of the departmental head, who was able to make the decision without confirmation by the top-management. The autonomy in making this decision is explained by the fact that such changes do not comprise a money factor, and therefore the decision of how to organize work operation is delegated to the level of departments. The arguments the departmental head offers in favor of the new organizational rule are, to a great extent, consistent with the formal organizational discourse of the hotel. The housekeeping manager introduced this change under the motto »teamwork instead of individual work« (from the informal conversation with the housekeeping manager). The orientation towards teamwork is in line with the company's policy of setting lean structures in the organization of hotels belonging to the chain. It means that the introduction of the rotation system is aimed at reducing competitiveness among employees and facilitating cooperation and equality. Room attendants are supposed to understand that the profit of the hotel results not from cleaning separately allocated rooms but from the common product created at the hotel: »money from one and the same pot« (ibid). Another point made by the departmental head was that the quality of cleaning increases when different room attendants get an impression of the same room. On the one hand, employees identifying deficits of work done by their colleagues may learn from each other. On the other hand, employees indignant about the behavior of those who work unthoroughly may develop sanctions against ›black sheep‹. In this case, the manager hopes to reduce control inputs within the department under the condition that employees check on each other.

In addition to the mentioned arguments of the departmental head in favor of the change, a conflict potential related to the established internal hierarchies can be indentified. From interviews and informal conversations with employees and supervisors it turned out that frequent conflict situations between room attendants had preceded the introduction of the rotation system:

> Some believed that they are better than others and there was a lot of fuss about this which is in fact nonsense. Everyone has strong and weak points (from the informal conversation with the supervisor).

The background of this conflict is related to the fact that room attendants who have been working at the hotel for a long time feel superior towards other employees, in particular towards those from the outside cleaning company. The system of fixed sections allowed employees with long job tenures to demonstrate the high quality of their completed work which, at the same time, for them served as a criterion of their superiority. In this way they constructed the internal hierarchy among the different groups of room attendants which inevitably resulted in frequent conflicts.

Thus, an important reason that leads to the introduction of a new organizational rule in this case turns out to be the necessity to regulate the conflict situation within the department in which such established internal hierarchies exist. In the following, I will depict the responses of employees to the introduction of the rotation system.

Sanctioning behavior of employees in the context of interdependent norms

The reactions of employees to the introduction of the rotation system varied, depending upon their job tenure. Room attendants who were new or had been working at the hotel for a middle-length term (2-5 years) tended to accept the change without problems. Those who had been employed at the hotel for a longer period of time tended to resist the change. For example, a room attendant with a long job tenure believes, in contrast to the departmental head, that the rotation system impedes providing the good quality of cleaning rooms. What seems to be more important, her reasoning about the changed rule comprises clear indicators of the construction of a hierarchy between room attendants who work on a permanent basis and casual staff from the outside cleaning company:

> We have also an outside company here. And they don't do things like we do, they don't work like we do. They are also not there every day. One will be here and there. I think it suffers from this a little bit. Not everybody does this the same way. I think it's a pity – that's what I have said (Interview N09_HK14).

The stressed »we and they« hierarchy points out the informally established norms of inequality between employees. This can be explained by the fact that by their interpretations of norms room attendants with long job tenures tend to repeat and confirm organizational structures that facilitate inequality. They reproduce hierarchies at the level of employees and informally try to establish the norm of inequality in social relations between different groups. However, the introduction of the rotation system deprives the room attendants with long job tenures of an instrument to demonstrate their superiority and puts them on the same level with employees from the outside cleaning company. Therefore, the norms of cooperation and equality associated with the rotation system simultaneously presume the infraction of the established norm of inequality in social relations between room attendants.

Generally, this case illustrates that, under the influence of hierarchical organizational structures at the hotel, the norm of inequality tends to be constructed and provides appropriate interpretative schemes for the actors. Therefore, the norm of inequality at the investigated hotel turns out to serve for employees as a framework for the construction of other norms. It means that a certain group of actors, e.g. room attendants with long job tenures, interpret other norms while taking »rank inequality« as a starting point. In turn, this may explain why the introduction of the new organizational rule by the department head does not receive positive feedback from them but rather leads to a sanctioning behavior by these employees. The rotation system resulting from the managerial decision presumes the norms of cooperation and equality which contradict the norm of inequality established under the organizational structures of the hotel. Thus, the context of the hotel and the appropriate norm of inequality are inconsistent with the norms of cooperation and equality. This inevitably leads to a conflict between competitive norms within a work

organization that is, in turn, connected with the resistance of employees to the new organizational rule. Their hostile reactions could be understood as sanctioning behavior within a system of competitive norms when the implementation of norms of cooperation and equality would mean the infraction of established inequality norms related to internal hierarchies. Employees impose sanctions by refusing to follow contradictory norms. Therefore, a system of competitive norms provokes sanctioning behavior on the part of employees.

The case of the introduction of the rotation system illustrates very well that different groups of norms may co-exist in one setting. On the one hand, there may be identified norms that are established under the influence of organizational structures. On the other hand, in the course of my study I also observed norms that directly result from managerial decisions but are inconsistent with given organizational structures. In my empirical case, both groups of norms come into conflict.

In the following section I will concentrate on the analysis of the interdependence of norms. I will illustrate how managerial decisions contrasted existing professional norms and how justice norms at the hotel lead to the emergence of competitive norms. Here, the introduction of additional types of norms into the analysis of the case is worth explaining. On the one hand, this is in line with my approach to norms as a constellation of interdependent, partly competitive norms. It presumes that operational norms in a work organization are not isolated but related to further norms. On the other hand, the contradictions between different types of norms can be particularly well illustrated by contrasting direct operational norms with indirect existing norms related to given organizational structures, such as professional norms.

Professional norm of flexibility

Work organizations and corresponding systems of norms are not isolated but embedded in a context of further norms. For example, the environment of large chain hotels comprises specific professional norms. In the following, I will elucidate inconsistencies between the professional norm of flexibility and the direct operational norm resulting from mana-

gerial decisions that lead to the emergence of a system of competitive norms within one work organization.

The knowledge of professional norms in the industry of large international chain hotels may provide new insights for the analysis of the introduction of the rotation system at the German hotel. Professional norms seem to be strongly formed under the influence of organizational structures observed at hotels. They have a strong impact on interpretative schemes which are used for the negotiation of newly emerging work norms. Therefore, they may be considered norms that create a framework for starting the construction process of newly emerging work norms.

As mentioned before, empirically observed professional norms may be matched and, to a great extent, explained by typical organizational structures of international chain hotels. This can be well illustrated by one of the most developed professional norms at hotels – the norm of flexibility related to a frequent change of jobs. In the following I will argue that its establishment is strongly influenced by the conditions of low wages and high turnover rates in the hotel industry. At the same time, it is interesting that in organizational discourses the norm of flexibility is often justified by the need of ›gaining experience‹. As one expert interviewee claims, work experience at different houses is an important element of a career in the hotel industry. Simultaneously, the respondent emphasizes some degree of irrationality of the norm of flexibility connected with additional costs for frequent re-employment and training:

> It is mostly a problem for the enterprises, because certainly they have to train new employees, and it costs. But on the other hand, it is also demanded, partially. This is contradictory in itself. After vocational training it is common to work in several different hotels in order to gain experience (Expert Interview No. 4).

This ambivalence in the interpretation of the professional norm of flexibility calls into question whether it is only for gaining experience, as proclaimed in the organizational discourses. I assume that the prevalence of the norm of flexibility may be further explained in interrelation to the

organizational structures of hotels. On the one hand, for the group of employees the norm of flexibility mitigates the negative consequences of the level of low payment because the frequent change of jobs allows them to gain increases in salary. On the other hand, for the group of managers the norm of flexibility seems to legitimize the high turnover rates in the hotel industry which, in reality, are related to low payment and difficult work conditions. The frequency of guests' visits can hardly be planned: it is not arranged in the form of long-term contracts but rather proceeds through individual contingent requests. Thus, the unpredictable character of hotel operation makes hotels, to a high degree, dependent on the occupancy rate and economic cycles. These characteristics result in the establishment of practices of temporary staffing. At the same time, flexibility in the behavior of employees at the workplace, i.e. flexibility as a norm, is expected both with regard to working time and in interactions with guests. The latter is connected with a prevailing situation-dependent form of decision making when decisions are often supposed to be made in the course of direct interactions with guests. Additionally, the system of guests' needs at luxury hotels is expected to be so complex that it is hard to anticipate and, therefore, to formalize a wide spectrum of services. Altogether, these features point out the situational dependence of hotels – their specific structural condition that facilitates the norm of flexibility in different aspects of hotel operation.

Furthermore, the organizational structure influencing the expansion of the norm of flexibility may explain why low significance is attached to solidarity at chain hotels. To summarize briefly, the polarized personnel structure – meaning that both qualified and not-qualified employees are involved in the operation of hotels – work inputs in the form of soft skills that are difficult to measure, and prevailing individualized contracts may explain the low level of unionization in the hotel industry. Taken together, these structural conditions seem to impede the development of solidarity among employees.

Thus, the investigated hotel is a work organization with strong hierarchically determined constraints that, due to the particularities of work operation, requires the professional norm of flexibility. At the same time,

it is characterized by low group solidarity, which is intensified by the expansion of the norm of flexibility, when the frequent change of workplaces does not allow employees to identify themselves with one work organization. In the following, I will attempt to identify justice norms that are in line with given organizational structures and related professional norms of the investigated hotel.

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The system of professional norms,
justice norms and direct operational norms

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The role of justice norms cannot be neglected, since they have the character of a generalized expectation imposed by the environment. Work organizations are confronted with this expectation and have to adjust to it. As my empirical evidence proves, different groups of actors frequently apply to justice norms in the course of negotiating the content of newly emerging work norms. In this connection, I will concentrate on the justice norms which are apparent at the investigated hotel. I will examine what kinds of justice norms are formed under the influence of the organizational structure. Furthermore, I will investigate if competitive justice norms can be identified. For this purpose, I will compare justice norms related to professional norms and justice norms associated with managerial decisions.

For my analysis of justice norms I will follow the classification of Wegener (1995). At the level of society, he differentiates between four justice ideologies and related justice norms: First individualism; second etatism; third ascriptivism; forth fatalism. An individualistic justice norm is characterized by social inequality and distributive principles according to market mechanisms. Therefore, competition orientation and work performance as a belief that a person has his or her own impact on making progress in life are inherent to this type of norm. At firms, individualism presumes that hierarchically determined constraints are weak and group solidarity is low (Wegener & Liebig 2000: 184). Etatism is considered to be the opposite of individualism because it presumes the intervention of the state in the distribution of goods. This justice norm is often combined with egalitarian principles such as equal opportunities in line with the individual needs of group members. At the firm level,

Lengfeld and Liebig designate the justice norm of etatism as collectivism which is characterized by strong group ties but less by developed hierarchical constraints than ascriptivism (Lengfeld & Liebig 2002: 253). In ascriptivism, the social order is defined through given social positions and rigid rule systems. At the firm level, it takes the shape of a justice norm with strong group ties and strong hierarchical structures (ibid). Fatalism tends to be identified in societies where actors show weak solidarity among groups as well as where there is a developed hierarchical organization of social positions. The members of such societies »blame the ›system‹ for their unfortunate situations. Feeling they are at the mercy of a society that denies them justice, they tend to accept their situation *fatalistically*« (Wegener 2003: 214, italics in the original). At the firm level, this justice ideology is close to the norm of bureaucratism:

> only high-ranking company officials are granted legitimate decision-making authority, they have the ultimate power to define what is considered just. The ideology is thus also characterized by an element of fatalism (Lengfeld & Liebig 2002: 252-253).

Thus, it turns out that in organizations with a developed hierarchy authorities tend to influence the interpretation of justice norms to a great extent.

Now let us have a look at how this classification of justice norms can be applied to the investigated hotel. The professional norm of flexibility is associated with individualistic justice norms. This is inherent to the nature of market-oriented firms such as large chain hotels. The norm of flexibility presumes that actors believe that success in their career directly depends on their own input. For example, promotions at large chain hotels are supposed to be the result of good work. At the same time, the personality of employees and their soft skills will be appreciated more than their qualifications regarding education and work experience:

> a receptionist does not need to have experience, he is only supposed to be able to treat people well, to enjoy working with people, to be able to smile. We can teach the rest (Interview N09_FO21).

In this regard, one can identify the idea, at least frequently mentioned in the organizational discourse of hotels, that reaching higher positions is possible even with minimal human capital if one demonstrates good work results. However, if employees do not have a feeling of being encouraged for their input, their preferred strategy is to choose an exit-option and to change the workplace. This behavioral pattern is legitimized by the norm of flexibility which impedes the formation of self-identification with one concrete work organization. Therefore, the belief in one's own progress in life and career success in combination with low group solidarity observed at the hotel indicate the established individualistic justice norm.

However, there is one characteristic in the structure of the investigated work organization that is inconsistent with the understanding of hierarchy within a firm according to the individualistic justice norm. As discussed in the previous sections, strong hierarchy and rank inequality can be identified at the investigated hotel, whereas weak hierarchically determined constraints are supposed to characterize the context of individualistic justice norms. This serves as evidence that individualistic justice norms co-exist with some other justice norms. For example, weak group solidarity together with a developed hierarchical organization of social positions may indicate those fatalistic justice norms that are designated as the norm of bureaucratism in work organizations. Therefore, parallel to individualistic justice norms the norms of bureaucratism are apparent at the hotel. When comparing to what extent they are consistent or competitive, it turns out that they are not much different: both presume inequality and do not imply high solidarity among employees. However, in work organizations where the norm of bureaucratism is apparent, hierarchical authorities have strong influence on the interpretation of justice norms, whereas individualistic justice norms would rather be associated with more leeway in the negotiation of justice norms between managers and employees. Thus, at the investigated hotel the norm of bureaucratism and the individualistic justice norm are formed under the influence of given organizational structures and do not lead to

conflicts but rather supplement each other. In this regard, one may state that these norms are only partly competitive.

However, inconsistency between justice norms turns out to be serious in the case of the introduction of the rotation system with the purpose to facilitate more cooperation and equality. This norm, based on a managerial decision, seems to be in line with egalitarian justice norms. However, the latter cannot be related to any organizational structures of the investigated hotel. Instead, egalitarianism completely contradicts the individualistic justice norm and the norm of bureaucratism. For this reason, in the case of the introduction of the rotation system, we can witness the formation of a system with a number of competitive norms. I assume that contradictions between the indirect existing norms related to given organizational structures and the direct operational norms resulting from managerial decisions significantly impede the acceptance of the change in the work organization.

Normative conflicts may serve as an explanation of difficulties connected with the introduction of new organizational rules. Therefore, taking into account existing organizational structures and corresponding norms in the course of the implementation of changes may be of practical importance for managers in work organizations. A classic explanation in sociological debates on hostile reactions of employees to the introduction of new organizational rules is related to the idea of routines (e.g. Giddens 1984). Routines allow employees to identify themselves with their work situation and, therefore, provide them with emotional stability. Changes in work operations disrupt established routines. Additional efforts of employees for the construction of new routines result in resistance to changes. A further explanation elaborated in this study stresses the emergence of normative conflicts when a newly introduced norm is inconsistent with already existing norms. A system with competitive norms results in sanctioning behavior of the employees who resist following contradictory norms.

At the theoretical level, this phenomenon may illustrate a shift to considering double interrelation between structure and action for the depiction of newly emerging norms and the analysis of contradictory norms in one

setting. This presumes that I supplement the thesis of the interdependence of partly competitive norms with one more explanatory factor. On the one hand, the groups of actors, in the course of negotiating the content of a norm, may simultaneously refer to different norms. On the other hand – and this is the message of my paper – competitive norms emerge if indirect existing norms that are related to prevailing organizational structures and provide actors with interpretative schemes are inconsistent with introduced direct operational norms.

Conclusion

Rethinking the concept of sanctioning does not mean that its role for understanding norm-following behavior should be completely neglected. Rather, it seems to be important to bring the concept of sanctioning closer to the diversity of empirical evidence which demonstrates that norms are not isolated but interdependent. Within a system of competitive norms, sanctioning behavior turns out to be the strategy of employees who cannot simultaneously follow contradictory norms.

Additionally, sanctioning in interrelation to norms appears to be a complex phenomenon. In this context, the question arises whether one can regard sanctions as an integral characteristic of norms. This issue has to be considered in the case of identifying empirical indicators of norms. Can we automatically speak of norms if responses to deviant behavior are observed in the form of sanctioning? But this means that we would ignore norms which are not supported by sanctions or cases where sanctioning is not easy to follow. At the same time, it seems to be important to extend the understanding of sanctioning behavior, particularly in organizational contexts where interactional groups, both managers and employees, may impose sanctions. This assumption is based on the idea that the emergence of norms results from ongoing power struggles between different groups in order to regulate differences in interests.

In summary, due to its multidimensional nature it turns out that sanctioning could be considered as a separate object of examination. For empirical research on norms it is difficult to regard sanctioning as a definitional attribution of norms and a major empirical measure. One pos-

sible way to investigate the interrelation between norms and sanctions could be to depict sanctioning as a mechanism that is flexibly applied by different groups of actors in the course of the emergence of norms.

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