# Management Accounting Fashion Setting: Studies on Supply-Side Actors in Sweden

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# ABSTRACT

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## Management Accounting Fashion Setting

Studies on Supply-Side Actors in Sweden

The successful introduction of a number of new management accounting concepts or management accounting innovations (MAIs) over recent decades, such as activity-based costing and the balanced scorecard, has had a significant impact on management accounting practice. This thesis adopts a management fashion perspective on new management accounting concepts, which views the activities of supply-side actors such as management consultants, the business press, and conference organizers, as crucial to the success of management accounting concepts in a marketplace of potential users. The overall objective of the thesis is to enhance our knowledge concerning (1) the functioning of the supply side of management fashions, specifically regarding decision-making by individual supply-side actors as well as the actions of, and interplay between, these actors in several categories during specific phases of the management fashion-setting process – the selection phase, the processing phase, and the dissemination phase – and (2) the evolution of the lifecycle pattern of and discourse on management fashions over time.

The thesis makes four overall contributions to the literature. First, it provides direct evidence of decision-making activities and the actions of and interplay between influential supply-side actors during the phases of the management (accounting) fashion-setting process. Second, the thesis emphasizes the importance of viewing the supply side as a heterogeneous grouping comprised of actors with differing processes, norms, and conditions affecting their work. Third, the thesis provides further evidence of the significance of viewing the local diffusion of globally migrating management (accounting) concepts as the outcome of a locally flavored management fashion-setting process. Finally, the thesis contributes to the on-going budget debate in Sweden, specifically the "beyond budgeting" debate, by providing empirical findings pertaining to the drivers of budgeting change (and stability) from the supply-side perspective.

**Keywords:** beyond budgeting, lean, lifecycle pattern, management accounting innovation, management fashion, management fashion-setting process, supply side

## Acknowledgements

And so the time has come to write the last lines of this thesis. Almost exactly six years ago I started the PhD program at the School of Business, Economics and Law. I remember the thoughts that went through my head - What can I expect from this? Indeed, only one person in my extended circle of friends and family had earned a PhD. I will thus begin this thesis by thanking my family for the encouragement they gave me to enter this ‘unknown’ world and also for their continuous support.

During these years, I have met and come to know many people who have influenced many essential aspects of my life. The person who came to influence me the most is Christian. From the tunes of Bob Dylan - through a simple twist of fate, times were a-changin’ for us. If not for you, I would not have thought twice, and things would not have been all right. Thank you for your tireless and devoted support!

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Elin

Askim, July 2015

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# INTRODUCTION

# 1. About the Thesis

Fashions are a central feature of modern society. Fashions come and go in many areas – clothing, music, home decor, food, art, hair, etc., making it difficult to resist them in everyday life. We become aware of fashions though magazines, television, social media, shops, and in the public space. However, the fashion phenomenon is not limited to groups such as teenagers, parents of young children, and city dwellers. It also exists in the corporate world. Ideas on how companies should manage and control their businesses go in and out of fashion, just like clothing. Thus, one speaks of management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996), which consist of specific management concepts with distinct labels, such as activity-based costing (ABC) and the balanced scorecard (BSC) (Benders and Verlaar, 2003; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2007). During the last 30 years or so, fashionable management concepts have played a major role in defining what constitutes rational and progressive management. Such fashions influence, for example, the way companies design and use management accounting and control systems; how they define, measure, and reward performance; how they formulate business discourse; and how they project their images and reputations.

Like most fashions, management fashions do not arise spontaneously or in response to popular demand but are typically the product of a fashion-setting marketplace (Abrahamson, 1996; Clark, 2004a; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005; Cooper et al., 2012; van Veen et al., 2011). Fashion setters create, communicate, disseminate, and implement fashionable concepts in businesses, and include, e.g., consultants, trade journals, conference organizers, business schools, and professional associations. They all cater to the preferences of potential adopters. Thus, there are two sides of management fashions: a supply side and a demand or user side.

There is now a growing and increasingly professionalized management fashion industry which, as a result, has a strong influence on society. At the same time, our knowledge of how the supply side works is limited (Perkmann and Spicer, 2008; Roberts, 2010; Modell, 2012; Heusinkveld et al., 2013; Hayne and Free, 2014). Little is known about how decisions to select or reject management concepts are made, how cooperation is achieved, or why some global concepts thrive in local contexts and others fail. By studying the supply side of management fashions, this thesis seeks answers to such questions.

This introduction presents the empirical context of the thesis – Sweden. Although the thesis does not focus on Sweden *per se*, an overview of the historical development and current situation of management accounting thought and practice situates the research in a broader context and also provides some rationale for using Sweden as the empirical setting. The introduction then outlines extant research on management accounting innovations in leading accounting journals, describes the overall research issue that drives the thesis, and presents the theoretical foundations – the management fashion perspective – of the thesis. Subsequent sections discuss methodological issues and summarize the research papers that comprise the thesis and the licentiate thesis.* The introduction ends with a concluding discussion of the overall contribution to the literature the thesis makes and suggestions for future research.

*The thesis consists of the introduction, a licentiate thesis, and three research papers. The licentiate thesis was successfully defended in 2012 and is not included in this publication.

# 2. FROM SOCIETY DRIVEN TO A MARKET DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING PRACTICES IN SWEDEN

The development over time of management accounting thought and practice differs widely across countries because of differences in language, culture, history, wealth, and systems of jurisprudence (Bhimani, 1996; Chapman et al., 2007). The development of management accounting in Sweden over the last 100 years has been described in several studies (e.g., Frenckner and Samuelson, 1984; Jönsson, 1986, 1996; Hägg et al., 1988; Arwidi and Samuelson, 1993; Ask et al., 1996; Samuelson, 1990, 2005; Näsi and Rohde, 2007). These studies provide a consistent picture of the evolution over time in terms of the driving forces, the origins of ideas, the organization of and key participants involved in development activities, and the channels that have been created for diffusing practices (models) to the user side. Three phases in the development of widely diffused practices emerge from the literature.

## 2.1 PERIOD 1: PRE-WORLD WAR II

The development of management accounting at the national Swedish level began in 1927 when the Royal National School Board initiated a project focusing on developing a uniform terminology of full costing for educational purposes.

At the time, the need for developing principles for costing purposes was also acknowledged. Because methods based on the idea of full costing was the approach generally used in practice, a project focusing on developing uniform principles of full costing was initiated. The responsible authorities for the project were the Swedish Standards Association (SIS) and the Swedish Association of Engineers (see Jönsson [1986], Ask et al., [1996], and Samuelson [2005] for an overview of these projects). Key arguments for the project were based on the following needs: defining the concept of full cost, developing sound principles for pricing and costing purposes, cost control of state contracts, and eliminating unhealthy competition between firms (Frenckner and Samuelson, 1984). Both the terminology and the principles project were organized into committees with key members coming from leading Swedish firms, including ASEA, L.M. Ericsson, SKF, and Volvo.

Debates took place among the committee members, who defended differing opinions about the principles involved. In this situation, university academics, for example Albert ter Vehn, “would participate and promote differential solutions by conducting studies that illustrate principles and models” (Ask et al., 1996, p. 211). The main product emanating from these initiatives, which closely resembled the ASEA philosophy (which was strongly influenced by German ideas) regarding both terminology and principles, was "Uniform Principles of Full Costing" (“Enhetliga Principer” or “EP”), which was published in 1937 and promulgated as the Swedish standard in 1938.

The principles were spread to a larger audience primarily through books (e.g., *EP,* 1937) and articles in journals (particularly *Affärsekonomi*). In the following years (both pre- and post-WW II), the principles were adapted to specific requirements of several industries, e.g., the engineering industry, the clothing industry, the paper industry, and the construction industry, and were thereby widely disseminated and put into practice through their distribution channels. These principles have gradually developed to fit the changing business environment

(Samuelson, 1970, Frenckner and Samuelson, 1984), but they still form the basis of Swedish costing terminology and practice (Ask and Ax, 1997; Nehler, 2005).

## 2.2 PERIOD 2: POST-WORLD WAR II (1945-LATE 1980S)

The development of management accounting post-WW II followed two tracks in Sweden. One track continued the pre-WW II model of developments, i.e., a practice-driven approach. The second track followed a new pattern of development.

The first track included three innovations, all of which have had a major impact on Swedish practice and education: "The Normal Chart of Accounts" ("Mekanförbundets Normalkontoplan") introduced in 1945 (The Trade Association of the Swedish Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Industries, 1945), "The RP Project" ("RP-Redovisningsplan") introduced in 1975 (Magnusson and Samuelson, 1975), and "The BAS Plan" (BAS Planen) introduced in 1976 (Arbetsgivareföreningen och Sveriges Industriförbund, 1976). The motives for developing these concepts were practice-related, such as changing accounting user needs, the need to computerize and extend non-computerized accounting systems, the demand for a methodology for developing flexible reporting, and the need for practices suitable for small and medium-sized firms (Jönsson, 1986; Samuelson, 1990; Johansson and Roots, 1984). Like the initiatives developed in the pre-WW II period, a characteristic of these post-WW II projects was that they involved committee work. The committee members came from industry associations, practice, and business schools. The initiatives were adapted to many industries, including the public sector, and became widely diffused to practice and education, primarily through publications written and published by participating associations. The RP Project and the BAS Plan are still relevant, and have evolved over time. Updated versions of key publications and supplementary material are continuously being published.

The second track (1970s) marks the development from *cost* accounting to *management* accounting, i.e., internally oriented accounting became an interest for top-management (Samuelson, 2005). Key models of this track include *budgeting* and *financial measurements*, primarily rates of return on assets, capital employed, and shareholders' equity, and the DuPont model of financial relationships (and marginal costing coming from the London School of Economics and

Political Science) (ibid.). The difference in comparison with the first track is that these new ideas were not developed in Sweden (nor were they of German origin). Instead, the new ideas came from the United States and were brought to Sweden by academics/practitioners on study trips to universities and firms (Jönsson, 1988; Åkesson, 2008). The new models were disseminated to practising managers through books published by industry associations, university publishing houses, and commercial publishing houses (textbooks). Another important channel for dissemination of these ideas was executive courses organized by the Stockholm School of Economics. These courses have attracted thousands of managers from all sectors of the Swedish economy (Åkesson, 2008).

## 2.3 PERIOD 3: 1985-PRESENT

The development of management accounting from the mid-1980s forward is distinguished by several events. First, structural changes in industry (e.g., mergers and acquisitions involving Swedish industries in Europe and the US), the oil crisis of the 1970s, computerization, and new forms of organizing operations in large firms (divisionalization) reduced interest in cost/costing related issues in industry (Jönsson, 1986). Instead, the importance of responsibility accounting and control by measuring return on investment (ROI) increased (Jönsson, 1986; Ask et al., 1996). Second, the late 1970s-early 1980s marked the end of the Swedish model of management accounting development that characterized periods 1 and 2. Managers became more interested in strategy and governance structures, and university academics focused more intently on conducting rigorous research for national and international publication (Jönsson, 1986; Ask et al., 1996). A void opened, which was soon filled by supply-side actors promoting global management accounting concepts (Näsi and Rohde, 2007).

The message of the best-selling Johnson and Kaplan (1987) book *Relevance Lost: The Rise and Fall of Management Accounting* marked the beginning in Sweden of the dissemination of globally successful management accounting concepts, such as ABC, activity-based management (ABM), activity-based budgeting (ABB), the BSC, target costing (TC), and value-based management (VBM). Some of these concepts have been highly successful in both private and the public sectors. Along with this development, the supply side has gradually become more professionalized and has attracted new actors to participate in the creation and dissemination of ideas.

It seems realistic to conclude that the days of developing management accounting ideas and practice in Sweden as an integral part of modernism are gone (Ask et al., 1996). Indeed, the last few decades suggest that such development is increasingly being driven by a global supply of "packages" containing managerial problems and challenges as well as management accounting ideas as solutions to these problems. While this pattern of development is not unique to Sweden, research has noted that Sweden is highly receptive to new ideas (Kald and Nilsson, 2000; Modell, 2009), perhaps because it has an active and well-developed supply side for managerial ideas (Ask et al., 1996; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005).

In light of this development, there is an increasing need for research on the nature of and interplay between the supply of and the demand for novel management accounting ideas in order to understand mechanisms of change in management accounting thought and practice in various contexts. In broad terms, this thesis attempts to contribute to the literature on this theme.

# 3. OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING INNOVATION RESEARCH

The introduction of global management accounting concepts over the past 30 years has had a significant impact on management accounting practice, education, and research. Survey studies conducted in several countries (and industries) generally report significant adoption rates. Most studies report adoption rates in the region of 15%-60% of ABC, the BSC and TC. For example, a recent study on the BSC reported an adoption rate of 53% among Swedish medium-sized and large manufacturing firms (Ax and Greve, 2015). Novel concepts also have an impact on university education course content and textbooks. An indication of their impact is presented by Ax and Bjørnenak (2007), who compared the concepts listed in the glossary of two editions of the globally best-selling management accounting textbook *Cost Accounting: A Managerial Emphasis* (Horngren, 1982; Horngren et al., 2005). The comparison showed that almost 60% (250) of the concepts in the 2005 edition are new compared with those in the 1982 edition, of which the majority can be explicitly linked to ideas such as ABC and the BSC. Also, 58% (234) of the concepts listed in the 1982 edition are not included in the 2005 edition.

Novel management accounting concepts have also served as a major source of inspiration for academic research. Indeed, a distinct research direction within the management accounting field focusing on such concepts from several theoretical perspectives has emerged, typically labelled management accounting innovation (MAI) research (Zawawi and Hoque, 2010; Hayne and Free, 2014). In the management accounting literature, an MAI is usually defined as an idea that is perceived and/or presented as new in a given social system (Bradford and Kent, 1977). Thus, an MAI does not have to be new to the state of the art, i.e., a concept without known precedent (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). This means that an MAI may be an old idea repackaged and presented under a new label, i.e., "old wine in new bottles".[1,2]

The bulk of extant research published in leading accounting journals can be organized in terms of four distinct phases on the demand/user side of MAIs[3] - the adoption phase, the implementation phase, the use phase, and the assessment phase. Surprisingly little research has applied a supply-side perspective on MAIs. The next two sub-sections present an overview of existing research on MAIs.

### 3.1 A DEMAND-SIDE PERSPECTIVE ON MAIs

Most research focuses on the *adoption phase*, particularly studies on MAI adoption rates in various countries (see Chenhall and Langfield-Smith, 1998; Gosselin, 2007; Hoque, 2014 for reviews of studies). A second prevalent research topic focuses on identifying contextual and firm-level factors influencing the adoption of MAIs (e.g., Bjørnenak, 1997; Brown et al., 2004; Baird et al.

[1] Other labels used to conceptualise MAIs are also found in the literature. These include management fashions, novel management concepts, novel management accounting ideas, novel administrative technologies, and contemporary technologies (Lepistö, 2015).

[2] Examples of MAIs introduced since 1990s are the balanced scorecard, lean accounting/management/production, economic value added, activity-based costing/management/budgeting, time-driven abc, beyond budgeting, the results and determinants framework, backflush accounting, performance pyramid, and zero-based budgeting. There are also MAIs that can be placed under the umbrella concept of "strategic management accounting" (Cadez and Guilding, 2008). This includes, for example, attribute costing, life-cycle costing, quality costing, target costing, benchmarking, strategic costing, and customer profitability analysis.

[3] For reviews of the MAI literature see also Bjørnenak and Mitchell (2002), van Helden (2005), Ansari et al. (2007), Anderson (2007), Gosselin (2007), Langfield-Smith (2007), Zawawi and Hoque (2010) and Hoque (2014). Research on MAIs is also published outside the accounting field. For example, ABC and target costing are popular research topics in the production/operations management field and the balanced scorecard in the public sector and service fields. This overview, however, covers only research published in leading accounting journals.

2004; Al-Omiri and Drury, 2007; Cadez and Guilding, 2008; Abdel-Kader and Luther, 2008). Popular factors/characteristics to study include firm size, intensity of competition, perceived environmental uncertainty, and business strategy. A few studies have reported results on reasons for rejecting MAIs (e.g., Innes and Mitchell, 1995; Innes et al., 2000; Bescos et al., 2001; Speckbacher et al., 2003). Among these reasons are that implementation is associated with high costs, MAIs are too time consuming to implement and maintain, other similar tools are already in use, and no essential advantages are expected from using MAIs. A third research topic uses the new-institutional perspective, allowing the view that adoption is not driven solely by rational goals of efficiency, but is also influenced by the external environment. Studies by Malmi (1999) and Ax and Greve (2015) have reported findings on the dominant drivers of adoption in successive phases of the diffusion process. A number of case studies have investigated the adoption of MAIs, particularly in the public sector (e.g., Abernethy and Chua, 1996; Lapsley and Pallot, 2000; Brignall and Modell, 2000). These studies support institutional arguments while also suggesting that the institutionalist perspective should include the idea that institutional pressures do not exclude strategic choices made by management to change accounting practices, i.e., adopt MAIs (Wagensfeld, 2013).

Research belonging to the *implementation phase* focuses on identifying the determinants of the success primarily of ABC and ABM implementation (e.g., Shields and Young, 1989; Shields, 1995; Swenson and Foster, 1997; Klammer and McGowan, 1997; Anderson and Young, 1999). These studies have reported a number of determinants, including the degree to which an initiative has the support of top management, the amount of training provided to employees concerning implementation, the amount of resources allocated to the initiative, and the degree of user involvement concerning implementation. Case study-based research has also investigated the implementation phase, characteristically from a management accounting change perspective using several theoretical perspectives, including structuration theory, actor-network theory, and old institutional economics (e.g., Anderson, 1995; Cobb et al., 1995; Kasurinen, 2002; Soin et al., 2002; Major and Hopper, 2005). See Wagensfeld (2013) for a review of findings from this stream of research.

The *use phase* includes several streams of research. Both experimental and empirical studies have investigated managerial judgment in organizational decision-making, evaluation, and design in the context of MAIs (e.g., Lipe and Salterio 2000, 2002; Ittner et al., 2002; Libby et al. 2004; Roberts et al 2004; Dilla and Steinbart, 2005; Kaplan and Wisner 2009; Cheng and Humphreys 2012). Case studies have reported findings related to the organizational use and design of and experimentation with MAIs (e.g., Kloot and Martin 2000; Tuomela 2005, Modell 2009; Woods et al., 2012). Another stream of research focuses on the nature of and evidence for the success of the organizational use of MAIs (e.g., Swenson, 1995; Swenson and Foster, 1997; McGowan 1998; Kennedy and Affleck-Graves, 2001). Finally, some studies focus on the purposes for which MAIs are used (Innes et al., 2000; Wiersma, 2009) and on determining the benefits and problems that are associated with the use of MAIs (Speckbacher et al., 2003; Cohen et al., 2005).

Research that can be categorized as focusing on the *assessment phase* investigates the impact of the use of MAIs on organizational financial and non-financial performance. For example, Gordon and Silvester (1999) investigated the stock-market effect of the announcement of ABC adoption, Ittner et al. (2002) evaluated the association between the extensive use of ABC and plant-level and operational and financial performance, Kennedy and Affleck-Graves (2001) compared the financial performance of ABC adopters with that of matched non-adopters, Davis and Albright (2004) investigated whether bank branches using the BSC outperform other bank branches within the same banking organization on key financial performance metrics, and De Geuser et al. (2009) examined whether the BSC adds value to adopters, and if so, how the BSC contributes to organizational performance.

Not all streams of MAI research fit into the demand-side phase's model. Two research streams should, however, be mentioned in this context because of their important position in the literature. A North American stream of research tests assumptions underlying MAIs, particularly ABC and the BSC. Studies have tested the assumptions that costs are driven by volume- and non-volume-related factors (see Banker and Johnston (2007) for a review), overhead costs are strictly proportional to activity (e.g., Noreen and Soderstrom 1994, 1997; Maher and Marais, 1998), and that non-financial measures are leading indicators of future financial performance (e.g., Foster and Gupta, 1997; Banker et al., 2000). Other studies have tested the descriptive validity of the activity-cost hierarchy (e.g., Ittner et al., 1997) and interdependencies between cost drivers (e.g., Datar et al., 1993). A number of studies have examined the optimal design of ABC (e.g., Babad and Balachandran, 1993; Datar et al., 1993; Homburg, 2001) and the BSC (see Luft (2009) for a review). A second stream of research takes a conceptual approach to studying MAIs. Such studies have focused on conditions under which ABC produces relevant costs (Noreen, 1991), measurement errors in product costing (ABC) (Datar and Gupta, 1994; Labro and Vanhoucke, 2007), the logic of the cause-effect principle of the BSC (Nørreklit, 2000; Brignall, 2002; Bukh and Malmi, 2005), and the design characteristics of MAIs (Bjørnenak and Olson, 1999).

## 3.2 A SUPPLY-SIDE PERSPECTIVE ON MAIS

Even if the management fashion perspective (e.g., Abrahamson, 1996) represents the single most influential perspective on the supply of management innovations in the broader business studies literature (Birkinshaw et al., 2008), only a few studies have used this perspective in supply-side studies published in leading accounting journals.[4] Ax and Bjørnenak (2005) examined the characteristics of how the BSC has been communicated by supply-side actors in Sweden. They reported that the original BSC idea has been supplemented with other MAIs and adapted to the prevailing business culture in Sweden to make the BSC more attractive to potential adopters. The process of changing or adding elements to MAIs was referred to as the 'bundling process'. Fincham and Roslender (2003) used evidence from published views of practitioners and academics on intellectual capital accounting (ICA) in order to differentiate their study from discourse on ICA and, by adopting a management fashion perspective, critically explore how ICA was being expressed and what this might mean for aspects of the occupational and organizational role of accounting. The study sees fashions as ideas constructed around occupational and organizational contexts, rather than as

[4] The management fashion perspective has also been applied in studies on the adoption of MAIs (i.e., the demand side). Malmi (1999, 2001), Malmi and Ikäheimo (2003), and Cooper and Crowther (2008) found evidence suggesting that the supply side (i.e., fashion setters) influenced firms' decisions to adopt ABC, the BSC, and VBM. Also, Carmona and Gutiérrez (2003) used the management fashion perspective in a study exploring how research fashions in management accounting are adopted by researchers affiliated with higher education organizations in various countries. They specifically looked at the case of ABC in the British and Spanish academic communities during the period 1987–1996.

static techniques or fixed systems, and applies the fashion critique to ICA as a 'symbolic narrative' that "represents accounting practices in ways that reflect new forms of control, and that allows us to explore accountancy's problems and aspirations in forging a new corporate identity." (p.783).

Drawing primarily on actor-network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1999; Law and Hassard, 1999), Gidden's analysis of modernity (Giddens, 1990), Latour's (1987) and Robson's (1992) ideas about inscriptions, and ideas in the area of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), a growing stream of research focuses on examining the emergence and evolution of MAIs in terms of translation and dissemination by tracing their original and expanded networks and alliances of support involving many (supply-side) actors, such as management gurus, management consultants, and business media, through which MAIs are promoted. Studies have focused on ABC (Jones and Dugdale, 2002; Alcouffe et al., 2008), the BSC (Qu and Cooper, 2011; Cooper et al., 2012), beyond budgeting (BB) (Becker et al., 2011), and enterprise risk management (Hayne and Free, 2014).

A few studies critically examine the rhetoric used in promoting the BSC. Nørreklit (2003) used rhetorical text analysis to investigate the means by which the originators of the BSC (i.e., Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton) have created the attention the BSC has received since its introduction in 1992. Free and Qu (2011) report the findings from a study of how graphical representations are mobilized in promoting the BSC "as a persuasive illustration of a more scientific and rational approach of management through a process we refer to as the 'scientization of management'" (p. 159).

Finally, using the market and infrastructure perspective (Brown, 1981)[5], Bjørnenak and Mitchell (2002) analysed the content of the ABC literature that has accumulated in UK and US accounting journals in the period 1987-2000. They looked at several characteristics of the literature, of which one represented the supply side of the diffusion process (in the form of messages propagating or supporting ABC).

[5] The market and infrastructure perspective (Brown, 1981) has also been applied in a study on the adoption of ABC. Bjørnenak (1997) reported that the supply side seems to influence firms' awareness of and decisions to adopt ABC in the Norwegian context.

While previous research has enhanced our understanding of MAI processes, it does not provide much insight into the phases preceding the dissemination phase of the management fashion cycle. The next section addresses this gap in the literature and discusses why it is relevant to study the supply side of the market for managerial innovations.

# 4. RESEARCH ISSUE

As indicated in previous sections, MAIs introduced in recent decades have had a major impact on practice, education and research, and have also contributed to a growing and increasingly professionalized supply-side arena. The supply of and demand for MAIs may therefore be described as important social phenomena. This thesis adopts the perspective that this development is driven to a large extent by the purposeful actions of certain categories of supply-side actors, including management gurus, the business press, professional associations, and management consultancy firms (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson and Reuben, 2014). The thesis' studies draw on the management fashion perspective, which represents the principal framework explicitly focusing on the activities of supply-side actors in creating, selecting, processing, and disseminating management concepts (Birkinshaw et al., 2008).

As indicated in the literature overview in the previous section, the vast majority of studies on MAIs has adopted a demand-side perspective. This means that research characteristically focuses on stages of diffusion subsequent to the stages involving the majority of activities on the supply side. Research typically focuses on issues such as: What percentage of firms have adopted an MAI in a certain context? What contextual and firm factors explain the adoption of MAIs? What are the financial and non-financial effects of implementing MAIs? What are the determinants of the success of MAI implementation? What constitutes successful organizational use of MAIs? And, what evidence is there of such success?

While this research has made important contributions to the literature, it ignores the market perspective on fashionable management concepts. In a broad sense, the market perspective attempts to enhance our knowledge of issues such as: How do management fashions emerge? Why and how do certain management concepts become popular? How do fashion setters work to popularize concepts? What are the patterns of the lifecycle of management fashions? And what are the attributes of managers who buy into management fashions? (Spell, 1999; Clark and Greatbatch, 2004; David and Strang, 2006; Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009). This thesis attempts to contribute to the stream of research focusing on management accounting concepts from the perspective of the supply side of the diffusion process. The overall objective of the thesis is to enhance our knowledge concerning (1) the functioning of the supply side of management fashions, specifically regarding decision-making by individual supply-side actors as well as the actions of, and interplay between, these actors in several categories during specific phases of the management fashion-setting process – the selection phase, the processing phase, and the dissemination phase – and (2) the evolution of the lifecycle pattern of and discourse on management fashions over time.

The licentiate thesis (Larsson, 2012) and two of the thesis' papers were initially motivated by observations from practice, rather than by gaps in the literature. The starting point of the licentiate thesis – "Management Fashions and Waves of Popularity: A Study of the Lean Production Concept in Swedish Popular Press 1990-2008" – and paper 1 – "Swings in the Popularity of Management Fashions: The Case of Two Fashion Curves for Lean Production in Sweden" - was the observation that the lifecycle pattern of the lean production concept seemed to diverge from the bell-shaped pattern associated with management fashions. This spurred a closer examination of the observed phenomenon. Both the licentiate thesis and paper 1 address the broad issue of why and under what conditions there can be swings in the popularity of management fashions. The topic of paper 2 – "Fashioning a Global Management Accounting Innovation in a Local Context: The Case of Beyond Budgeting in Sweden" – was brought to authors' attention by the observation that the beyond budgeting concept did not seem to be a success in Swedish practice despite the fact that it was promoted by influential actors on the supply side of the diffusion process. This observation led the authors to post the question of why the beyond budgeting concept has had limited success in business practice? The paper adopts the view that the supply side of the business fashion market is critical to the success of MAIs. This is because MAIs do not diffuse successfully by popular demand, but need to be selected, packaged, marketed, and distributed to potential adopters in order to diffuse successfully. Paper 3 – “Selection of Management Accounting Innovations by Supply-Side Actors” – addresses an important gap in the literature. The selection phase of the management fashion-setting process involves decisions by supply-side actors regarding which management concepts to develop further and provide in the market-place. Specifically, the study examines *which* decision criteria are used and *how* these criteria are used in selection decision-making on the part of supply-side actors.

The thesis sees the management fashion-setting process from a local (i.e., Swedish) perspective. Previous research points to the importance of focusing on geographically local circumstances in order to explain, for example, how, why, and under what conditions the supply of globally traveling management concepts develop in specific patterns in a country and vary between countries (e.g., Sturdy, 2004; Becker, 2008; Whittle, 2008; Meyer and Höllerer, 2010; Røvik, 2011; Drori et al., 2014). The local dimension has implications for both the theorization of management fashions and methodological choices. These are discussed in subsequent sections of the thesis.

# 5. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

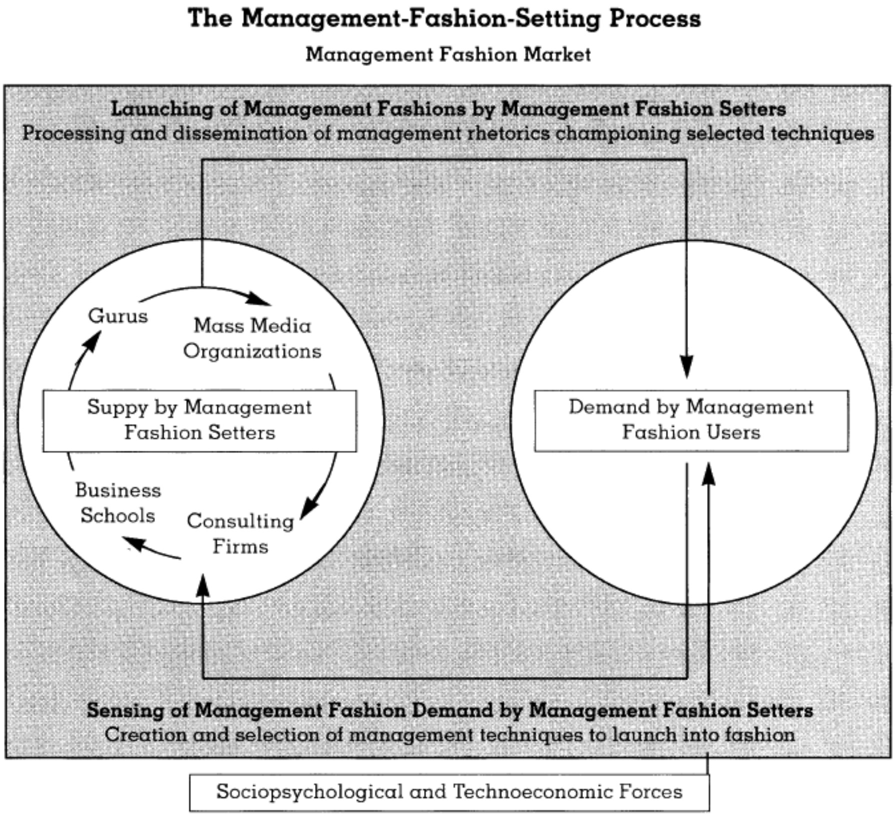
This thesis adopts the management fashion perspective (on MAIs) introduced by Eric Abrahamson in 1991 and 1996 and further developed by Abrahamson and colleagues in a series of articles published over two decades (Abrahamson and Rosenkopf, 1993; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Abrahamson and Eisenman, 2008; Abrahamson and Reuben, 2014; Abrahamson and Michigan, forthcoming). As of today, the management fashion perspective may be seen as a school of thought including several streams of research focusing on aspects of management fashions (Røvik, 2011). The first part of this section presents the theoretical pillars of the management fashion perspective, with an emphasis on the elements of relevance to this thesis. The specific elements of the perspective that are relevant to the individual studies are addressed in each paper. The second part of this section provides an overview of management fashion research in the broader literature in order to illustrate the different streams of research using the fashion perspective.

## 5.1 THE MANAGEMENT FASHION PERSPECTIVE OF THE THESIS

Abrahamson (1996, p. 257) defines a management fashion as “a relatively transitory collective belief, disseminated by management fashion setters, that a management technique leads rational management progress”. The definition highlights various aspects of management fashions. First, they are temporary phenomena. Second, they are supported by a propagating supply side that produces and disseminates them. Finally, they should represent a collective belief that a management fashion is at the forefront of management progress.

The theory specifically explains "why and by what processes particular management techniques become fashionable and when they do" (Abrahamson, 1996, p. 280). Abrahamson explains the fashion phenomenon based on the notion that management fashions are shaped by norms of rationality and progress. The argument behind this relies on the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977), who argue that organizational stakeholders expect managers to manage their organization and organizational members rationally (i.e., meet the goals of the organization in the most efficient manner). However, under circumstances of uncertainty regarding what these goals are and/or what constitutes the most rational way to meet them, managers must instead create the *appearance* that they conform to norms of rationality. Managers do this by either using or appearing to use management concepts that are perceived by important stakeholders to be rational. In a similar vein, managers must also create the appearance that they conform to norms of progress, that is, the expectation of using ever-improved management concepts for managing organizations and organizational members by applying ever-improving criteria for assessing what constitutes managerial improvements (Abrahamson, 1996). It is the work of the supply side that essentially makes management concepts appear both rational and progressive to the managerial audience. Characteristically, the interplay between the demand side - the users/consumers of management fashions - and the supply side - fashion setters or knowledge entrepreneurs (e.g., consultants, gurus, business schools, business media) - of the market for management techniques marks the very core of adopting a management fashion perspective (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Abrahamson (1996, p. 257) explains this interplay in terms of the management fashion-setting process, i.e., "the process by which management fashion setters continuously redefine both their and fashion followers' collective beliefs about which management techniques lead rational management progress". The process is conceptualized as a marketplace where the demand side and the supply side interact under the guidance of norms of rationality and progress. This is depicted in Figure 1 and will be described next.

**Figure 1.** The management fashion-setting process (from Abrahamson, 1996, p. 265)




The management fashion-setting process begins with the creation phase, in which fashion setters sense incipient preferences guiding demand for a new solution among managers and create management concepts to meet these preferences. The created concepts can be the result of either invention or improvement of already existing management concepts or of a rediscovering or reinvention of already existing concepts. Fashion setters also produce the collective belief that a management concept is innovative and superior compared with existing concepts. The collective beliefs may or may not be accurate. What matters is that a concept is *perceived* as an improvement.

In the selection phase, fashion setters select which management concepts to develop further. These concepts can be created either by fashion setters or by managers and selected into the fashion-setting arena. Concepts that are judged to satiate the demand of managers are in the end the ones selected. Such demand is driven by sociopsychological and technoeconomic forces. The influence of the sociopsychological forces is determined by individual and personal characteristics of managers, e.g., the aspiration to be perceived as energetic and assertive or the manager's own commitment to applying modern ideas at the cutting edge of managerial progress. These forces can also relate to the enhancement of a personal career and pay, frustration, or even boredom (Huczynski, 1993). Technoeconomic forces are triggered by external events in the macro environment, such as economic crises. These events, and more importantly, the consequences of the events in terms of perceived or actual performance gaps in organizations, are elements that are brought to the attention of managers in the rhetoric of the aspiring management fashion and subsequent activities of supply-side actors (see the processing and dissemination phases below). Because fashion setters introduce managers to management concepts that fit their preferences, they are therefore also involved in shaping demand.

In the processing phase, management concepts are packaged to appear attractive to managers. The packaging includes elaborating on a rhetoric to convince managers that a concept is rational, novel, and progressive. For instance, the rhetoric may highlight performance gaps and underscore how and why a concept may fill these gaps, or it might focus on successful and high-profile adopters using a concept.

In the dissemination phase selected and processed concepts are distributed through various channels, e.g., books, articles, conferences, education, consulting services, and professional networks.

In a number of publications Abrahamson and colleagues make further contributions to the development of management fashion theory. Abrahamson and Rosenkopf (1993) focus on the occurrence and effects of institutional and competitive bandwagon pressures in a collectivity of firms. Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999) and Abrahamson and Eisenman (2008) explore the development of lifecycles and waves of popularity of management fads and fashions. More recently, Abrahamson and Reuben (2014) and Abrahamson and Michigan (forthcoming) focus on the interrelation between the supply of and demand for management fashions. For example, they address the notion of co-evolution of supply of and demand for management fashions.

## 5.2 RESEARCH ADOPTING A MANAGEMENT FASHION PERSPECTIVE

Management fashion research in the broader business studies literature has focused on many issues. Five distinct streams of research emerge in the literature (Spell, 1999; Clark and Greatbatch, 2004; David and Strang, 2006; Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012; Nijholt et al., 2014).

The first research stream identifies factors that account for the popularity of particular management books and the ideas they seek to promote (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004; Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009). Studies pertaining to this stream have shown that best-selling management books are characterized by, for example, novel and superior content compared with already existing books, compliance with the needs and expectations of the managerial audience who buys the books, capturing of the zeitgeist, and case studies illustrating extraordinary success (Grint 1994; Kieser, 1997; Furusten, 1999).

The second research stream examines how fashion setters work to produce and popularize concepts (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Nijholt et al., 2014). Studies belonging to this stream have addressed in particular the work and role of management consultants in order for concepts to become fashionable (e.g., Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005; Heusinkveld et al. 2009). Other studies have investigated business media (Mazza and Alvarez, 2000; Nijholt et al. 2014). For instance, Nijholt et al. (2014) suggest that business media should be viewed as more important than simply being a channel for other fashion setters engaged in popularizing concepts (e.g., management consultants, gurus, and professional groups). Rather, the magazines (editors) should be seen as important gatekeepers handling complex tensions between the interests of other fashion setters, their own norms of newsworthiness, and resource dependencies of external parties. Other examples of studies are those that investigate the work of management gurus, for instance, the impact of their rhetoric and public performances on the success of management concepts (Huczynski, 1993; Jackson, 1996).

The third research stream identifies and explicates patterns in the lifecycle of management fashions (Spell, 1999; Clark and Greatbatch, 2004; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012; Nijholt et al., 2014). The focal point in management fashion research is that the popularity of management fashions over time, as measured by article counts in business media, follows a bell-shaped lifecycle pattern. In order to understand this pattern further, research has addressed many issues, for example how fashion setters' discourse and the rhetoric of management fashions change through the phases of a lifecycle (Benders and van Bijsterveld, 2000; Benders and van Veen, 2001; Giroux, 2006). These studies provide empirical evidence of fashions becoming more vague, ambiguous, and general over time. However, the many interpretations and uses of a fashion eventually also come to include negative and failing elements, which may lead to a fashion's collapse. Other issues addressed include the co-evolution of the popularity of management fashions on the supply side and in practice (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Braam et al., 2007; Nijholt and Benders, 2007; Abrahamson and Reuben, 2014; Abrahamson and Michigan, forthcoming) and how external triggers (e.g., macro-economic changes), fashion setters, and their discourse/rhetoric interact to produce management fashion lifecycles (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Baskerville and Myers, 2009).

The fourth research stream focuses on the evolution of management fashions on the consumption side, in particular, the institutionalization/long-term impact of management fashions in practice (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012). Studies pertaining to this stream have suggested that even if a label of a particular management fashion is no longer popular in discourse, organizations may still continue to use the practices associated with that fashion (Nijholt and Benders, 2007). In order for practices to become established in a company, studies specifically highlight the role of committed practitioners and institutional entrepreneurship, as well as the importance of legitimacy to be continuously regenerated (e.g., through top management support) (Stjernberg and Philips, 1993; Perkmann and Spicer, 2008). Thus, these studies are in line with other voices that emphasize the importance of taking more than a concept´s label into account in studies of management fashion (Benders and van Veen, 2001).

The fifth research stream, which overlaps with the fourth research stream, is an emerging stream that focuses on what happens to management fashions when they decline in popularity (i.e., in the later phases of the management fashion lifecycle). Studies belonging to this stream demonstrate strategies that supply-side actors implement in order to "stretch" the longevity of a fashion (Heusinkveld et al., 2013) and the possible staying power of a fashion coming from the efforts of committed providers on the supply side (David and Strang, 2006).

# 6. Summary of the licentiate thesis and the papers

## 6.1 Licentiate thesis: Management fashions and waves of popularity – A study of the lean-concept in Swedish popular press[6,7]

The management fashion literature describes the lifecycle pattern of fashionable managerial concepts using bell-shaped curves. Several studies have demonstrated that fashion lifecycles exhibit an upswing phase, a peak, and a downswing phase, which illustrates the transitory nature of management fashions. In order to produce such lifecycle curves, researchers typically rely on print-media indicators (PMIs). The licentiate thesis took an observation of a lifecycle pattern of the lean production concept in Swedish print media that diverged from the typical bell-shaped pattern of management fashions as its point of departure. A full bell-shaped lifecycle pattern was identified for the period of 1990-1997. However, in 2004 a re-start of a fashion cycle emerged, i.e., the lean concept entered a new phase of popularity. As of 2009, the concept was still in the upswing phase of its (second) fashion cycle. This observation prompted a systematic investigation of the phenomenon. A content analysis of all articles related to lean production published in Swedish newspapers and magazines available through three databases was conducted. The analysis focused on similarities and diff-

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[6] An electronic copy is available at: https://gupea.ub.gu.se//handle/2077/28467.

[7] The licentiate thesis is written in Swedish.

erences related to design characteristics and the rhetoric of the lean concept between the two upswing phases.

The results show a surprising consistency in presentations between the two phases regarding design characteristics, labels, principles/methods, goals/objectives, effects, and the superiority of lean production compared with other management concepts. The analysis thus concludes that the results as a whole provide support for the interpretation that the second popularity upswing phase denotes the *restarting* of the fashion cycle for the lean production concept (rather than the start of a new fashion cycle for a concept with the same name [i.e., 'lean production'] but associated with a different content). However, a significant difference between the phases was also observed. The geographical context in which the lean production concept is presented is more distinctly Swedish in the second upswing phase. This development is attributed not only to growth in the number of articles presenting the concept in a Swedish context, but also to a striking decline in articles presenting the concept in an international context. In fact, the international element is only marginally present in the second upswing.

The licentiate thesis provides five main contributions to the literature. First, the study documents a previously unreported lifecycle pattern. Second, the study identifies a possible source of an explanation of the phenomenon of a second upswing phase of management fashion lifecycles. Third, the study raises questions regarding the fundamentals of the management fashion theory, e.g., the requirement of novelty for the popularity of management concepts, and the source of triggers and downswings of management fashions. Fourth, the study reveals a new manifestation of the variability of management concepts, namely the geographical context in which a concept is positioned. Fifth, the study answers to calls for research on the content of management concepts.

## 6.2 PAPER 1: SWINGS IN THE POPULARITY OF MANAGEMENT FASHIONS – THE CASE OF TWO FASHION CURVES FOR LEAN PRODUCTION IN SWEDEN

The study in paper 1 attempts to enhance our understanding of why and under what conditions the popularity of management fashions can fluctuate by rising, falling, and rising again. More specifically, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of management fashions by examining the causes of the second popularity boom of the lean production concept in Swedish print media discourse identified in the licentiate thesis. The study identifies mechanisms driving the reporting of the lean concept in the articles through the use of a qualitative content analysis combined with the use of publicly available data (websites and publications). The study finds that the large majority of the articles can be linked to national campaigns initiated by governmental agencies (i.e., national collaborative initiatives involving public and private organizations designed to improve Swedish manufacturing industry). Such national initiatives drive not only the popularity in terms of volume of discourse that promotes lean production, but also the onset of the popularity (in terms of being the initiators of discourse in the second popularity boom). A closer examination of articles linked to the national initiatives indicates that they reflect institutional work being carried out.

One cautious conclusion of the study is that the launching of national initiatives triggered a second popularity boom in the Swedish manufacturing context. This development seems to have stirred supply-side actors to (re-)engage in supply activities related to the concept. Thus, the second upswing in popularity of the lean concept seems to be driven by both institutional work and ‘conventional’ fashion work by fashion setters. The study offers three main contributions to the literature. First, the study explains a lifecycle pattern of a management concept not previously described in the literature. The findings broaden the prevailing view in the literature that management fashions have a (single) bell-shaped lifecycle pattern and that the end of the downswing phase of the lifecycle necessarily marks the close of the fashion lifespan. Second, the study contributes to the literature that emphasises the importance of focusing on geographically local circumstances in order to explain how, why, and under what conditions the supply of, demand for, and implementation/use of global management concepts develop in specific patterns in a given country while varying between countries. Third, the findings contribute to the emerging research stream focusing on what happens to management fashions when they decline in popularity.

## 6.3 PAPER 2: FASHIONING A GLOBAL MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING INNOVATION IN A LOCAL CONTEXT - THE CASE OF BEYOND BUDGETING IN SWEDEN

The study presented in paper 2 attempts to add to our understanding of the functioning of the supply side of the diffusion process for MAIs. Specifically, we attempt to understand the limited success of the 'beyond budgeting' (BB) concept in business practice. The study was originally motivated by the observation that BB appears not to have become a success in practice despite the fact that the concept was promoted by influential actors, similar to those that have promoted other globally successful MAIs. Despite these supply-side efforts, survey studies of developments in and perceptions of budgeting practice in several countries show firms are generally content with existing practices and perceive them to be value-adding, and that the uptake of the BB ideas is limited. These studies are, however, limited insofar as they do not provide much insight into *why* BB has failed to become a success. This study addresses this issue by adopting a management fashion perspective. Key supply-side actors are identified and interviewed about their participation in the management fashion-setting process related to the BB concept. More specifically, we investigate how and why supply-side actors select or reject, process and disseminate BB, and how they interact to do so. The study's view is that globally spreading MAIs are evaluated in light of and adapted to local circumstances when they enter a local context. We conceptualize this as a local (Swedish) management fashion-setting process. The outcome of this process in this study can be summarized as follows: a weakly mobilized supply side has produced heavily reduced, heterogeneous packages of design characteristics and rhetoric regarding the BB concept that have reached only a small portion of the target audience of potential adopters. Thus, the lack of a mobilized supply side seems to have hindered the efficient diffusion of the BB concept to the user side.

The study provides three contributions to the literature on MAIs. First, the study is the first that that directly investigates the decision-making and actions of and interaction between categories of supply-side actors in phases of the management (accounting) fashion-setting process preceding the point when MAIs have been broadcasted to the user side. The insights from this analysis are important because they add to our understanding of how and why the outcomes of these early phases determine which MAIs are effectively diffused and which are not, the content of MAIs that are supplied, and how and through which channels MAIs are communicated and distributed to the managerial audience. From this perspective, we explain why and how the work of the supply side in these phases has contributed to the unsuccessful diffusion of the BB concept in Swedish practice. Second, the study provides further evidence to the importance of local (national) circumstances in understanding how, why, and under what conditions the supply of and demand for of global management concepts develop in specific patterns in local contexts. Third, we contribute to the literature that explores difficulties that global MAIs may meet when trying to enter local contexts or diffuse across organizations - emphasizing that the diffusion of MAIs is not merely a process of relocation, i.e., the transfer of MAIs from one context to another.

## 6.4 PAPER 3: SELECTION OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING INNOVATIONS BY SUPPLY-SIDE ACTORS

While extant research has made important contributions to furthering our understanding of the supply of and demand for MAIs, they do not say much about the phases preceding the dissemination phase of the management fashion cycle. The research presented in this paper focuses particularly on the selection phase of the management fashion process. This phase is critical because it involves decisions on the part of supply-side actors about which innovations to develop further and provide in the marketplace. A lack of systematic knowledge about the MAI selection decision-making process represents an important gap in the literature because of its significant influence on practice, research, and education. The objective of paper 3 is to address this gap in our understanding of the functioning of the supply side of the diffusion process. The study's empirical data were collected by means of 31 interviews with Swedish supply-side actors in seven key categories about *which* decision criteria are used and *how* these criteria are used in the MAI selection decision-making process.

Regarding the *which*-issue, the study finds on an aggregated level that supply-side actors use a broad set of decision criteria, but that market-related criteria are the most widely used. In addition to market-related criteria, supply-side actors typically also consider whether the necessary organizational capability/resources are available to be able to disseminate the MAI to potential users. Moreover, the great majority of actors apply criteria that are locally flavoured, for example the existence of local success stories or local expertise about an MAI. Surprisingly, few actors use criteria related to the content of the MAI. Regarding the *how*-issue – which focuses on key characteristics of the decision-making such as the number of decision criteria and decision stages, the sequence in which criteria are evaluated, and the involvement of external players in the decision-making – the study finds that the majority of decision models are straightforward, including merely one or two decision stages, but typically with more than one criterion being evaluated at each stage. The involvement of external players in the decision-making is almost non-existent.

A comparison of categories of actors identifies differences in decision-making between categories. First, the academic author group is the only category of actors that do not use market-related decision criteria. Second, the academic author and management consultant groups evaluate the match between an MAI and factors relating to organizational or personal (academic authors) features (e.g., experiences with an MAI, interests in an MAI, the compatibility between an MAI and organizational norms/beliefs). Third, the professional association group is the only group that relies on external agents in decision-making. Finally, book publishers comprise the only category of actors that rely almost exclusively on industry-specific decision criteria (e.g., the quality of a submitted manuscript).

The study provides three key contributions to the literature. First, it offers the first account of MAI selection decision-making of several categories of supply-side actors, and also shows how categories of actors differ in their decision-making. Second, further evidence for the importance of understanding the management fashion-setting process (and the diffusion process) from a local perspective is provided. Specifically, the study extends previous research by presenting evidence as to how local circumstances may influence the outcome and process of innovation selection decision-making. Third, the study suggests an image of supply-side actors' work that differs from what is reported in the literature. The findings complement presentations of supply-side actors as reflective, analytical, and strategic decision-makers in the management fashion-setting process.

# 7. METHODOLOGY

Every research project makes methodological choices regarding such matters as sampling, constructs, and measurement. While the specific choices relevant to the three studies are discussed in the respective papers that comprise this thesis, the present section considers particular methodological issues from the perspective of the thesis as a whole and their relevance to the interpretation of the findings reported.

## 7.1 THE SUPPLY SIDE OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING FASHIONS IN SWEDEN

The thesis addresses the supply side of management accounting fashions in Sweden. What is the validity of this statement? Is the supply side sufficiently represented in the thesis? This issue is addressed in two parts because the thesis has two (three) basic types of studies – database (and content analysis) and interview studies.

The licentiate thesis and paper 1 use archival data from databases to examine the supply side as represented in print media. The three full-text databases used cover the entire study period (1990-2012) and together cover more than 700 major Swedish journals, newspapers, and magazines. Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that Swedish print media are well covered in the thesis. A more fundamental issue, however, is the degree to which the supply side is adequately represented by the print media. The management fashion literature contends that the frequency of discourse in print media on a management concept reflects its popularity on both the supply side and the demand side of the fashion market (e.g., Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999).

The ‘supply side’ is an umbrella term for categories of supply-side actors populating the management fashion arena. These actors have differing roles, perform distinct activities, and interact in the management fashion-setting process (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001; Clark 2004b, Perkmann and Spicer, 2008; Roberts, 2010). In the early phases of a management concept’s lifecycle, supply-side actors write or provide material for articles to media outlets to spread the word to the managerial audience about a new management concept and to associate their names with it. However, the question is, to what degree do the thesis’ print-media data represent the 'entire' supply side? To the best of my knowledge, there is no method available that can be used to decide that. However, one way to provide validity to the research is to use indicators of representation. The articles covered in the research were (i) written by or based on materials provided by key groups of actors on the supply side of the market, (ii) published in numerous newspapers and magazines, (iii) published in print media belonging to several business sectors in the manufacturing industry, and (iv) were published in both national and local newspapers and magazines. Taken as a whole, these indicators suggest that the articles used in the licentiate thesis and paper 1 represent ‘the supply side’ very thoroughly. A limitation of these studies is, however, that they do not include data on the implementation of lean production. Thus, it is difficult to argue for the occurrence of supply-demand co-evolution; that is, the extent to which the discourse in print media also mirrors managerial interest in lean production is not clear.

While the database studies strive to include a broad range of supply-side actors, the interview studies (papers 2 and 3) focus on leading supply-side figures in the Swedish management accounting fashion market. However, the literature does not provide much guidance on the meaning of ‘leading’ actors in certain geographical contexts. The two studies identified leading supply-side actors through a systematic investigation of the involvement (degree of activity) of supply-side actors in the Swedish management accounting fashion market in recent decades. This approach was viable because the Swedish management accounting fashion market is relatively small so that a limited number of individuals are involved. The mapping and involvement of the suppliers was completed based on several sources, including invitations to conferences, articles in the business press, books, and web searches. In addition, a group of well-known supply-side actors were asked to indicate which organizations or individuals they consider to be the leaders in the field. The result was a list of more than 30 organizations and individuals. All were contacted about their willingness to participate in the studies. All but one agreed to participate. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to argue that the research reported in the thesis is actually based on interviews with leading members of the management accounting fashion arena in Sweden.[8]

## 7.2 THE DYNAMICS OF MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS AND THE USE OF SEARCH WORDS

In the thesis, management (accounting) concepts are understood to mean “prescriptive, more or less coherent views on management, which are known by a particular label” (Benders and Verlaar, 2003, p. 758). The licentiate thesis and paper 1 focus on ‘lean production’. Specifically, the studies searched for articles on the lean production concept in the manufacturing context by using the search word ‘lean” and frequent Swedish translations of the concept. As a result, the studies cover only articles including ‘lean’ and Swedish translations.

Administrative concepts such as lean production are intangible objects lacking a material component (Benders and van Veen, 2001). This may lead to varying interpretations and uses of the concepts. For example, the literature presents several cases in which the labelling of concepts has become only loosely coupled with its content (e.g., Braam et al., 2002). Presentations of concepts may thus differ from what was initially intended (e.g., Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005). Another example is when the content of a concept becomes decoupled from its label, either by being replaced by another label (see Benders and van Veen, 2001) or when elements of the concept start circulating on their own (see Becker et al., 2011).

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[8] The thesis excludes actors who target only the public sector. Previous research has shown that public sector organizations are to a large extent influenced by other variables than the supply side, e.g., statutory requirements (Lapsley and Wright, 2004). The thesis also excludes international actors participating in the supply of MAIs in Sweden. These actors are typically the originators or gurus of particular MAIs and participate (in these roles) as guests in other supply-side actors’ arrangements, for example at conferences and workshops.

The search approach employed here does not capture articles in which lean production elements have been decoupled from the lean production label. Thus, the thesis may have underestimated the popularity or criticism (both of which are measured by the amount of discourse) of the lean production concept (which in turn may have affected the content analysis component of the studies). However, the degree of underestimation of the popularity of the concept in this study is difficult to judge. Nevertheless, it is not very likely that this limitation has had any significant effect on the starting point or the findings of the studies.

## 7.3 THE LACK OF FINDINGS SUPPORTING OFTEN-CITED AND ACCEPTED IDEAS IN THE LITERATURE

Papers 2 and 3 collect data by means of interviews with supply-side actors about decision-making and actions within the management fashion-setting process. While these studies provide insight into this process from the perspective of various categories of actors, they also indicate that certain often-cited and accepted elements linked to the management fashion-setting process do not appear to be important to the people interviewed. For example, no interviewee pointed to the importance of management accounting concepts as having elements that can be linked to 'interpretative viability' (Benders and van Veen, 2001) or 'pragmatic ambiguity' (Giroux, 2006). The literature clearly indicates that this is critical for a management concept to become a success (e.g., Benders and van Veen, 2001; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005). Moreover, little evidence was found that decision-making or actions were linked to factors such as supply-side institutional or competitive bandwagon pressures, national culture, or local (Swedish) norms and traditions. Finally, in determining which management accounting concepts to develop further and provide to the market place, supply-side actors rely almost exclusively on external criteria (e.g., market demand) or internal criteria (e.g., the availability of needed organizational resources). Criteria related to management concepts such as functionality, the cost of using and maintaining the concept, complexity, user-friendliness, or the fit between the concept and existing organizational culture were ignored by the majority of those interviewed. It is difficult to explain why these elements were not identified in the studies. The interviews were carefully planned and conducted. For example, the interviews targeted actors responsible for or significantly involved in supply-side-related decision-making and actions about management accounting concepts, used an interview guide (also including introductions to each area of investigation), highlighted examples to 'stimulate' discussion, and were tape recorded and later transcribed. Obviously, these steps do not preclude the possibility that characteristics of the interviews may have influenced the answers provided by the respondents. However, at this stage these characteristics remain unclear.

# 8. DISCUSSION

The overview of extant research provided in section 3 shows that the vast majority of research has adopted a demand-/user-side perspective on MAIs, while only a few studies have examined MAIs from a supply-side perspective. The overall goal of the thesis is to enhance our knowledge regarding the functioning of the supply side of the management fashion-setting process and the evolution of the lifecycle pattern of and discourse on management fashions over time. The thesis makes several contributions to the study of the supply of fashionable management concepts.

First, the thesis provides, to the best of my knowledge, the first direct evidence of decision-making activities and the actions of and interplay between several influential supply-side actors during the phases of the management (accounting) fashion-setting process. These phases are important because their outcomes determine which innovations are diffused and which are not, the content of innovations (i.e., design characteristics and rhetoric), and how and through which channels innovations are marketed and distributed to reach the managerial audience. Overall, the findings strongly suggest (i) that relatively basic decision-making models and market-related decision criteria are predominant and that there exists little interaction and collaboration between supply-side actors or between supply-side actors and outside experts in the selection phase, (ii) that the processing of innovations is an infrequent activity, (iii) that the conditions for processing design characteristics and/or rhetoric do not appear to be highly valued elements of innovations among supply-side actors, and (iv) that supply-side actors rely primarily on channels controlled or organized by themselves for innovation diffusion.

A key insight from the thesis is that supply-side actors seem to pay little attention to and rarely investigate the design characteristics, i.e., technical elements, of innovations in any of the three phases of the management fashion-setting process investigated. This is a surprising finding since MAIs typically have significant technical content. Scholars have pointed to the fact that innovations typically are based on technical conditions that have to be satisfied in order to deliver benefits as promised. For example, ABC relies on conditions under which relevant costs for product decisions are produced and that these conditions rule out nonlinear cost functions (i.e., ABC assumes that costs in an activity cost pool are strictly proportional to the activity cost pool's cost driver) and nonzero fixed costs at the level of the activity cost pool as well as joint processes (Noreen, 1991; Noreen and Soderstrom, 1994). The BSC relies on the condition that nonfinancial performance targets/measures are leading indicators of financial performance (Ittner and Larcker, 1998) and the logic of cause-and-effect-relationships between performance targets/measures (Nørreklit, 2000, 2003; Bukh and Malmi, 2005) (see also section 3.1).

Another technical concern relates to the use of innovations in practice. The thesis indicates that supply-side actors devote little effort to the analysis of, for example, the functionality of MAIs, the costs associated with using and maintaining MAIs, or the degree of producer- or user-friendliness of an MAI. However, the thesis identified examples in which the rhetorical content of MAIs was processed. These examples are characterized by the simplification/reduction of MAIs rather than by elements of expansion or transformation. This was particularly evident in studies focusing on the beyond budgeting concept and lean production. In cases where rhetorical elements are added to the content of MAIs, they focus on presenting MAIs in a local (Swedish) context. Future research might shed further light on these issues and could also expand the scope of the analysis. For example, studies could investigate the reasons why the content of an innovation, especially its design characteristics, do not play a more important role in the management (accounting) fashion-setting process.

Second, the thesis underlines that the supply side of the management fashion market should be seen as a heterogeneous grouping comprised of actors experiencing differing processes, norms, and conditions in their work. Previous research in the broader literature on fashionable concepts has noted differences between categories of supply-side actors (e.g., Abrahamson, 1996; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001, Roberts, 2010), but has, however, focused on only a few groups of actors, particularly management consultancy firms. The approach taken in this thesis allows the analysis of several key categories of supply-side actors. The thesis reveals several differences between actor categories regarding the management (accounting) fashion-setting process. Differences that stand out link mainly to academics and management consultancy firms. For example, unlike other actors, these actors focus more explicitly on the content of innovations, and the fit between innovations and organizational or personal experiences, interests, norms/beliefs, and profile/image. This thesis is, however, just a first step in building a body of knowledge that advances our understanding of the roles, organization, decision-making, and actions of categories of supply-side actors. Future research should examine the underlying bases for differences between actors and the lack of interest in the content of innovations among most categories of actors. Also, little evidence of organized collaboration between supply-side actors either within one category of actors (e.g., conference organizers) or across categories of actors (e.g., between software vendors and management consultancy firms) was found. This is a rather surprising finding in light of the emphasis given to multiple types of collaboration in the management fashion literature (see Madsen and Slåtten (2013) for an overview of the literature). However, because organized collaborations were not the main focus in any of the thesis' studies, future research could investigate this issue more fully with a design focusing, for example, on types of and motives for collaboration, benefits and costs associated with collaboration, and the necessary conditions to begin and achieve success with different types of collaboration. While there were few signs of organized collaboration between actors, looser or temporary forms of alliances were more frequent. Such alliances include, for example, software vendors' participation in conference organisers' events, academics or management consultants' contribution to articles in print media, and guest lectures by early adopters in courses organized by professional networks.

An interesting conclusion in this context is that several actors note that their participation in the supply of innovations depends on input from other supply-side actors (including early adopters, i.e., "success stories") or outside experts. In particular, the thesis shows that influential actors such as conference organizers, book publishers, professional associations and interest groups, and the business press depends heavily on input from academics in certain phases of the management (accounting) fashion-setting process. Indeed, the lack of input may even produce a state of involuntary inactivity in the management fashion market. Such input includes, for example, presentations at public meetings, writing articles for newspapers and magazines, planning and completing professional education, providing expert advice, and writing books. Interestingly, the interviewed supply-side actors explain that they believe that the category of experts delivering reliable and unbiased input almost exclusively comprise academics, thereby rejecting players such as management consultants and practitioners. There is little previous management accounting research in this area. Future research could investigate, for example, the conditions of, the benefits for, and problems with various types of actor alliances, and the roles and influence of academics in the management fashion arena.

Third, the thesis furnishes further evidence pertaining to the significance of viewing the local diffusion of globally traveling MAIs as the outcome of a locally flavoured management fashion-setting process (e.g., Sturdy, 2004; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005; Whittle, 2008; Perkmann and Spicer, 2008; Meyer and Höllerer, 2010; Røvik, 2011; Drori et al., 2014). The thesis clearly demonstrates that local supply-side structures influence the success or failure of globally traveling MAIs in the local context. Specifically, it is shown that university academics serve a gatekeeping function in the Swedish management fashion arena because their opinions about a candidate MAI influence whether the diffusion of the MAI “takes off” or not. There is a twofold explanation of this observation. First, because supply-side actors generally regard academics as reliable and unbiased experts on MAIs (see above), they are often hired to evaluate MAIs, for example concerning novelty, benefits and costs, user-friendliness, fit with national business practice and culture, and staying power. If such evaluations produce negative conclusions, they typically result in MAI rejection decisions by supply-side actors. Second, because of the prestige of academics in the Swedish fashion market, their support of and participation in supply-side activities are highly sought after. Indeed, as noted above, several actors admitted that if they fail to involve academics in internal and external supply activities, they are typically forced to refrain from carrying out these activities. Thus, the thesis suggests that a negative academic opinion about an MAI prevents the mobilization of the supply side force required to successfully popularize an MAI in the Swedish context. Interestingly, these results differ from previous research which typically suggests that the most influential and central actor category in the fashion market is that of management consultancy firms (e.g., Jung and Kieser, 2012). Future research could therefore focus on the roles and influence of various categories of supply-side actors on the success and failure of MAIs in local settings with differing societal or supply-side structures. Another interesting insight from the thesis relates to the literature that points to the importance of the local adaptation of global MAIs to fit with existing business practice, institutional conditions, traditions, and ideals (e.g., Bourguignon et al., 2004; Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005; Cooper et al., 2012). However, as indicated above, the thesis identified relatively few signs of radical adaptation of either MAI design characteristics or rhetoric in the Swedish context. Because the thesis provides little insight into why there appear to be few elements of MAI adaptation and also because the findings challenge previous reports of MAI adaptation in Sweden (Ax and Bjørnenak, 2005), this issue represents a fruitful avenue for future research. Finally, the thesis provides evidence that local circumstances may produce different lifecycle patterns of management concepts in different contexts, e.g., countries. More generally, the thesis improves our understanding of why and under what conditions there can be such swings in the popularity of a management concept in a local context. The thesis' findings challenge the notion of a bell-shaped lifecycle pattern of management fashions that suggest that the end of the downswing phase of the lifecycle marks the close of the fashion lifespan. Because previous research has not reported on the occurrence of such popularity swings, more research on this issue is needed. Future research could examine, for example, the occurrence of and conditions for swings in the popularity of management concepts in a wide range of contexts.

Finally, the thesis contributes to the on-going debate in Sweden about the relevance of budgeting, specifically the beyond budgeting or non-budget management debate (e.g., Wallander, 1994, 1999). Previous research has typically contributed to the budgeting debate(s) by examining the design and use of and planned and actual changes in budgeting practice (e.g., Arwidi and Samuelson, 1993; Arwidi and Jönsson, 2010). These studies analyse the development of budgeting practice from the managerial perspective. Thus, the national understanding of how and why budgeting develops in certain directions is typically based on a one-sided perspective on the drivers of change. This thesis adds to the analysis by providing empirical findings pertaining to the drivers of budgeting change (and stability) from the supply-side perspective. The thesis points to the importance of considering both supply- and demand-side perspectives analysing the directions and driving forces of the development of budgeting practice. More research is needed to increase our understanding of the role of the supply side and of how supply- and demand-side forces interplay to influence the development of budgeting practices in Sweden.

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