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## **A patient is not a car**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*'But now I know these concepts can be translated to healthcare beautifully. And it is not about whether I understand these concepts, but instead about how well I can explain them to a doctor. So I hope to translate what, in fact, is an underlying Lean concept, in such a way that doctors become enthusiastic to agree among themselves on certain objectives.'* (Informant 32)

*'And actually, applying Lean to a hospital setting is a whole lot more difficult. Because the way in which Toyota equips a factory with Lean is not the way you can set it up in a hospital. So the translation necessary is a whole lot more extensive. You can extrapolate ideas from the techniques but you can't copy them exactly.'* (Informant 3)

These quotes, by two implementation managers who were part of this research project, nicely set the scene for this dissertation. Lamenting on the difficulties of adapting 'Lean' from car manufacturing to healthcare, they summed it all up in just a few words: How do we, key actors, contribute to transforming a management concept so it becomes meaningful in a new context?

The translation of ideas—or management concepts as I will refer to them—is the central topic of this research. Fascinated by the changes these concepts may undergo as they travel from context to context, I was given the opportunity to study how the concept of Lean has been implemented in a network of Dutch healthcare organizations. Lean does require some translation as illustrated by the common refrain of my interviewees: 'A patient is not a car' and I was interested in how specific agents in this healthcare context actively respond to and enact the implementation of Lean, as they champion it in its new location. Analyzing the local variations of Lean, as well as the individuals driving these changes, allows for a completely different picture of the concept than when it is just treated as a 'thing' that hardly changes when diffused. Such an approach holds enormous potential for broadening our understanding of what happens when ideas and concepts spread and are given new meaning in different localities. Specifically, my aim is to advance our comprehension of how key actors translate Lean to their local contexts. In doing so I hope to explore, refine and extend the conceptualization of human agency in the translation of management concepts.

## 1.1 STUDYING MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Embracing the principles once developed in the context of car manufacturing, the implementation of Lean principles in a number of Dutch hospitals constituted the basis for the creation of the national network ‘LIDZ’ (Lean in de zorg, which translates to Lean in healthcare) in 2011. The enthusiasm of this network of Dutch healthcare organizations to work with Lean is not unique; in fact, it is in line with a broader phenomenon where practitioner communities embrace management concepts outside of their field in order to gain a competitive advantage, a sense of control, or to secure legitimacy and power positions (Sturdy, 2004; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016). TQM, TOC, BPR, Six Sigma and Agile are other, not too sexy, labels and acronyms that most of us will recognize as world-famous management concepts.

But what are they? Interestingly and despite the proclaimed value of these concepts and the fair share of academic interest they have received, there is remarkably little consistency in the terminology used to describe them (Ansari, Fiss and Zajac, 2010; Birkinshaw, Hamel and Mol, 2008). Scoping studies by Sturdy (2004) and Birkinshaw et al. (2008) show there is a multitude of labels, ranging from ‘management idea’ ‘management fashion’ ‘administrative innovation’ to ‘organization concept’. Each label signals slightly different theoretical approaches with idiosyncratic definitions. Birkinshaw et al. (2008), for example, differentiate between abstract ‘management ideas’ which they explain as ‘fairly stable bodies of knowledge about what managers ought to do . . . a system of assumptions, accepted principles and rules of procedure’ (p. 828) and the more operational level ‘management practices’ ‘management processes’ ‘management techniques’ and ‘organizational structures’ which they explain as ‘different facets of the rules and routines by which work gets done inside organizations’ (p. 828). Roughly speaking then, these different labels refer to the same empirical phenomenon, but signify different schools of thought and research traditions. Unfortunately, this has scattered our knowledge of the flow and impact of management concepts across literatures, blurring the boundaries and the specific contributions of this area of research. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, for the sake of readability and in an effort to contribute to conceptual clarity, I will use the term ‘management concept(s)’ as an umbrella term to cover this full range of labels. In line with Benders and Verlaar (2003), I will define it quite narrowly as the ‘relatively coherent prescriptive vision[s] on how to deal with specific organizational issues, which are coined with a particular label’ (Benders and Verlaar, 2003, p. 758; Van Grinsven, Heusinkveld and

Cornelissen, 2016, p. 5).

A relatively large volume of literature has examined the flow and impact of management concepts. Particularly, in the last two decades we have witnessed an ever increasing expansion of this research field, evidenced by the growing number of articles and special issues on management concepts in general (e.g., *Organization Studies*, *Organization*, *Management Learning*, *European Management Review*). We can identify three focal areas of research: the creation, diffusion and adoption-adaptation of management concepts (also known as: production, transmission and consumption) (Sturdy, 2004; see also Heusinkveld, 2011). The first area argues that concepts and ideas ‘do not spring forth full-blown but are made somewhere by somebody’ (Peterson, 1979, p. 152 in Clark, 2004). It therefore studies the role of management experts or ‘knowledge entrepreneurs’ as primary actors in the creation and development of novel ideas in the management knowledge industry. The subsequent adoption and implementation of concepts are seen as logical outcomes of their efforts (Heusinkveld, 2011). The second focal area takes a diffusion perspective, utilizing a macro-level approach and focusing primarily on the dissemination of these concepts between contexts, be they organizations, countries, fields, or institutions. Ending their analysis by looking at which concepts or practices get adopted (Reay et al., 2013), these scholars are interested in what characteristics of both the concepts and adopters, make them spread more or less easily (Rogers, 1983). In the third area of research, the adoption and adaptation of management concepts and the meaning given to them by recipients is central (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001). Going beyond merely looking at their adoption, the organizational impact of these concepts is the focus of this area of research. However, ‘our understanding of what happens within organizations when new practices are adopted remains at a distinctly nascent stage’ (Gondo and Amis, 2013, p. 229) and much still needs to be done to explore the processes through which management concepts are adapted to practice (Reay et al., 2013). This is especially remarkable given the continuous calls during the last two decades that the consumer of management ideas is understudied (see also Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001) and despite different special issues that sought to address this gap (Clark, 2004; Engwall and Kipping, 2004).

A number of theoretical perspectives inform our understanding of the impact these concepts may have on management and organizations (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Parush, 2008; Sturdy, 2004). Going beyond the conceptualization of these concepts as forms of management

practice or control, as well as veering away from the normative stance that discusses their positive or detrimental effect on popular discourse, business school curricula and organizations and their employees (e.g., Guillén, 1994; Knights and McCabe, 1998; McGabe, 2011; Shenhav, 1999; Willmott, 1993), these theoretical perspectives aim to answer the question of why exactly ‘new’ ideas are embraced in practice and for what reasons they seem to gain such popularity. Not necessarily mutually exclusive, these perspectives have different starting points and range from rational, political, dramaturgical, psychodynamic, institutional and cultural views (Sturdy, 2004). Whereas, for example, the rational view explains the adoption of management concepts based on their level of effectiveness, the institutional view, in contrast, stresses the exposure of organizations to institutional forces that lead them to behave in similar ways as they search for legitimacy in their environments. This latter, (neo-)institutional view has developed into a dominant theoretical perspective for studying management concepts and has been a source of inspiration and conceptual positioning for the translation perspective in this dissertation.

## **1.2 A TRANSLATION PERSPECTIVE ON MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS**

In order to grasp translation as a perspective for analyzing management concepts, we need at least some basic understanding of how it gained prominence in exploring the flow and impact of management concepts, as well as in its own right. Translation is strongly associated with and considered to be one of the central pillars of, ‘Scandinavian Institutionalism’ (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Røvik 1996; Sahlin-Andersson 1996). In the eyes of early translation scholars, institutional theory—a dominant theoretical perspective within organizational research (Davis and Marquis, 2005; Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby and Sahlin-Andersson, 2008; Mizruchi and Fein, 1999; Palmer and Biggart, 2002)—was too concerned with stability and standardization and did not adequately address and explain the issue of change (Czarniawska, 2008). Instead, institutional theory explains why organizations tend to adopt the same sets of concepts and ideas through its emphasis on how social environments exert mechanisms of coercion, imitation and normative pressure (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1991). From a translation perspective, institutional models are critiqued for emphasizing linear diffusion processes with clearly delimited phases (Mica, 2013), paying limited attention to both the variation that may occur as a result from the use of concepts in specific contexts and the process through which these changes take place. In addition, translation scholars disagree with the notion that individual

agency is constrained by institutional environments that force actors to simply comply with contextual pressures in order to find and maintain legitimacy (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009; Creed, Scully and Austin, 2002).

Taking issue with this deterministic position, early translation scholars sought to distance themselves from neo-institutional approaches. As 'a distinctive version of institutionalism' (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009), translation theorists drew on the insights of Actor-Network Theory (or a Sociology of Translation) (Callon 1986; Latour 1986, 1987; Law 1986, 1991) to study the social processes through which ideas and concepts acquire new meaning as they travel between contexts and to address the 'second career' and reinterpretation of a management concept after its discrete adoption (Nicolai and Dautwitz, 2010). By shifting the focus to the ways in which agents actively respond to, as well as enact regulations, norms, values and cultural-cognitive beliefs, they highlighted organizational variation and distinctiveness over stability and standardization (Frandsen and Johansen 2013). By critiquing the diffusion models of innovation underlying the institutional traditions of organization theory, translation has proliferated quietly but rapidly as a theoretical perspective that can be used to study the flow and impact of management concepts (Sturdy, 2004).

Translation perspectives adopt a constructivist and denaturalizing ontology. This ontology assumes that reality does not exist 'out there' but is instead continually made and remade as meanings are produced through networks of people, artifacts and institutions (Whittle and Spicer, 2008). Scholars who ascribe to a translation perspective have demonstrated that widely diffused concepts or practices are not fixed or 'thing like' but are reconstituted as people work with them in new environments (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevon, 1996; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). In and of itself, as well as in an attempt to avoid an oversimplified view of the way ideas may spread, a translation perspective aims to explain the inconsistency between the institutional pressures for organizations to adopt the same sets of ideas and these ideas being enacted in very different ways in various contexts (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Spyridonidis, Currie, Heusinkveld, Strauss and Sturdy, 2016).

### ***Three central aspects of translation***

Despite different interpretations of what translation entails, 'the growing number of studies on translation share a focus on the modification of ideas by agentic actors in relation to a specific

context' (Van Grinsven et al., 2016, p. 2). Hence, three aspects are central to our understanding of translation: (1) the role of context, (2) the modification of ideas and their characteristics and (3) the role of agentic actors in establishing change.

The first aspect relates to the context of idea modification. Translation scholars distinguish between the 'context of origin', in which the idea was initially created, and its recipient context (or 'context of destination') in which the idea comes to be used (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Munir, 2005; Zilber, 2006). In studying processes of translation, researchers have aimed to demonstrate that as practices are diffused, they acquire new meanings through establishing a connection or 'fit' between the abstract characteristics of a concept and the specific locality where the concept is applied (Boxenbaum and Battilana, 2005; Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009). Key to this tradition of research and its understanding of the circulation of ideas, objects and practices, is the 'travel of ideas' notion—a metaphor with a disembedding/re-embedding dialectic (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Mica, 2013). One of the main theoretical assumptions of this metaphor is that the degree of translation required for an idea to be reapplied in a new setting depends on the geographical, contextual and temporal distance the idea is traveling between its original and destination context (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Nicolini, 2010).

The second aspect in this tradition of research concerns the actual translation processes between these contexts can be deconstructed and analyzed to better understand the actual modification of ideas (Zilber, 2006). Sahlin-Andersson (1996), for example, introduced the notion of 'editing' to describe the process through which experiences and models are re-contextualized as they are applied to a new setting. She suggested that translation is governed by different editing rules: editing rules changing the context, the logic as well as the formulation of these concepts (see also Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). Additionally, Zilber (2006) distinguished three types of translation: changes as broad accounts are reshaped in order to more precisely fit a local context; changes over time; and changes across institutional spheres. Gond and Boxenbaum (2013) looked into how actors employ three types of contextualization work—filtering, repurposing and coupling—to overcome any disconnect between an imported practice and a new local context. Doorewaard and van Bijsterveld (2001), as well as Spyridonidis and Currie (2016), drew upon five key 'plots' (Callon, 1986; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995) to study the events through which ideas are translated into practice: problematization, intressement, enrollment,

mobilization and translational outcomes.

The third aspect addresses the undervalued role of ‘actants’. Some translation theorists therefore focus on the role of agentic actors in establishing change. As Sahlin-Andersson (1996, p. 69) argues, ‘if we acknowledge that organizations consist of thinking and acting persons and that each change in organizational practice or organizational form requires that people act, we will find that the mechanical explanations leave unanswered most of the questions about why organizations adopt new trends.’ By highlighting the role of actors in reproducing and transforming concepts and practices, the meanings attached to these concepts and the new relations with local structures and practices (Reay et al., 2013), as well as by emphasizing the mobilization of interest in creating practice variation (Zilber 2006), a translation perspective has helped us ‘[gain] a more detailed and process oriented understanding of the way by which social meanings are mobilized and gain... support in the innovation processes’ (Waldorff 2013, p. 220). By viewing actors as being able ‘to define the world in their own terms’ (Latour, 1999, p. 20), this perspective aims to understand actors’ lived reality (Whittle and Spicer, 2008).

With its focus on these three aspects, a translation perspective of organizational innovation puts local-variation concepts, processes of adaptation and individual agency at the center of analysis in a more (social) constructivist approach than (neo-)institutional traditions, making translation one of the ‘expanding horizons’ of institutional thinking (Greenwood et al. 2008; Nielsen, 2014) and at the very least ‘a vibrant and growing research field’ in its own right (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016). It has proven to be a useful analytical lens for scholars working in different traditions. Additionally, the growing academic interest in translation has recently culminated in a special issue of the *International Journal of Management Reviews* (Spyridonidis et al, 2016), which highlights several theoretical contributions and developments in this specific field.

### ***A critique of translation***

Despite ‘the recent burgeoning interest in translation studies in the management and organizational change literature’ (Teulier and Rouleau, 2013, p. 313) there remains considerable room to further develop translation approaches in the study of the flow and impact of management concepts. Two problems make a more reflexive theoretical approach seem worthwhile.

First, translation is persistently, yet unwittingly, presented as a fairly coherent and delimited perspective, with little acknowledgment of its internal variation (Van Grinsven et al., 2016). Despite its merits, translation research has come to accommodate a growing range of different interpretations and ‘has developed over recent years without much critique on, for instance, its underlying assumptions, or at least without much pausing for reflection’ (Spyridonidis et al., 2016, p. 232; see also O’Mahoney, 2016). This tendency is especially striking, given that the very point of translation is to capture the process through which variation occurs (Van Grinsven et al., 2016); yet, we have a limited understanding of how translation developed in its own right. This under-theorized and fragmented discourse hampers a reflexive understanding and appreciation of different approaches, as well as interferes with an informed comparison and integration of sub-streams, blurring both the boundaries and specific contributions of translation in studying the flow and impact of management concepts.

Second, this relative neglect of fragmentation becomes problematic insofar as scholars of translation assume the perspective to be a ‘ready-made’ agentic approach, without carefully scrutinizing the extent to which primacy is actually given to different actors in developing ideas and practices (Sturdy, 2004). Although it proclaims agency as one of its main stakes in the conceptual battle with the diffusion model, the idea that, in and of itself, the translation perspective carries the contribution of agency, has produced a paradoxical effect in which researchers have become less inclined to reflect upon what this agency entails, as well as how it should be studied. Consequently, there appears to be little agreement about the extent to which agency is attained as some argue that ‘the analytical lens of translation implies an ‘active host’, [o]rganizational actors are not passive adopters; they are active translators’ (Nielsen, Mathiassen and Newell, 2014, p. 170; Røvik, 2011). Whereas others disagree and indicate that ‘only a few studies, . . . have moved from local and context-specific descriptions of individual behaviors to theories on the role that specific cadres of actors have during the translation of ideas’ (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016, p. 2). Even though translation research claims to adhere to the perspective’s proclaimed agentic focus, in actuality, it often only looks at the actual transformation of ideas—or the dynamics by which this transformation is achieved—while neglecting how the actors and their individual practices drive the translation process (Reay et al., 2013; Teulier and Rouleau, 2013). Zilber (2006, p. 300), in a widely cited paper with a strong translation perspective, notes ‘within the translation framework, agency relates to the role of

translators or editors [but] I did not explore the actual acts of translation as such [and] neglected the questions of social actors and agency'. Indeed and more generally: '[w]hile acknowledging the role of managers in adaptation and translation, the primary focus of the adaptation and translation literatures is the changing nature of the practices as they move across time and space. . . . The people involved in changing the practices their experiences, interpretations and decisions are not at the center of the literature. . . .' (Huising, 2016, p. 388). Agency may then impact translation in a way that is currently under-recognized, possibly leading to an overestimation of a concept's 'interpretative viability', that allows for multiple interpretations and adaptations of a concept to different agendas. This dissertation therefore builds specifically on the work of Zilber (2006, p. 300) who stated, 'research is still needed to explore the role of agency in translation' in order to understand the processes through which concepts are made locally meaningful as they are embraced in new contexts.

The assumption that translation, as a perspective, is both inherently coherent and agentic, is underlying a growing range of different interpretations, where little attention is given to explicitly describing or systematizing the diversity (Van Grinsven et al., 2016). This has obscured the perspective's conceptual clarity, letting it linger in a state of latency, both in its own right and in its contribution to institutional and organization theory.

### ***Agency in translation***

By problematizing this assumption (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) I aim to contextualize and deepen our understanding of the specific possibilities and limitations of alternative translation approaches, as well as to explore the potential for a more agentic focus in translation. Especially considering recent calls for increased micro-theorizing in translation research and for the integration of translation with other theories (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016), drawing on agentic perspectives seems fruitful in this context.

There is already a long-standing tradition of studying the role of agency in organization theory. Sociological conceptions typically suggest that agency denotes 'an individual's capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual's own work' (Mantere, 2008, p. 300) which arises from 'the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array' (Sewell, 1992, p. 20–21). While emphasizing the intentionality of actors, recent work transcended this notion and conceptualized actors as drawing upon the past,

the present and the future to inform their practices (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Howard-Grenville, 2005). In recognition of different and competing paradigms and traditions of agency research (Caldwell, 2005), my intent here is not to draw too heavily on these conceptions or to contribute to the conceptualization of agency in organization or social sciences in general. Rather, my aim is to advance our comprehension of what, in translation, key individuals do and how, as well as to explore, refine and extend the conceptualization of agency within the realm of translation (Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011). By drawing on agentic perspectives, my reference to agency is thereby restricted to actors' (accounts of their) roles, experiences, interpretations and decisions in translating management concepts to make them locally meaningful.

In this dissertation, I maintain that, while translation theorists in management are increasingly recognizing agency, theoretical and empirical work on the role of agency in translation remains rather narrow and scarce. Even though agency is assumed, its role remains under-theorized and literature is lacking on what agents do in practice, as 'no study has investigated translation as a role that [key agents] perform . . . as part of their core responsibility' (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016, p. 17). More specifically, how organizational translation of concepts takes place across intra-organizational boundaries and the link between actors' engagement with ideas and their translation efforts, are issues that need to be addressed. In recognition of these challenges and needs, I draw upon perspectives of boundary spanning and identity work to explore the role of human agency in the translation of management concepts. This will be further explained in chapters three and four. The question of the role of human agency in the translation of management concepts will be used as broad and overarching to frame the conceptual and empirical investigation of this dissertation and for which I will raise and answer three specific sub-questions in the next three chapters. First, to identify the analytical boundaries of academic fields that follow a translation perspective in studying the flow and impact of management concepts, we need to know: how is the translation of management concepts conceptualized and what is the role of agency? Second, to address agency in translation and to understand how intermediate actors engage in specific sets of practices to create dynamic links within organizations, I raise the question: how do key intermediate actors translate management concepts across organizational boundaries? Third, to reach a better understanding of the role of identity in translation I explore the question: what is the relationship between the identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts?

### **1.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

To address and answer these questions and to further understand the role of agency in the translation of management concepts, this dissertation follows a qualitative approach. Gondo and Amis (2013, p. 244) stress that despite a recent focus on interests and agency in institutional explanations of transmission, opening up the ‘black box’ of what happens in organizations when new practices are adopted, remains in a nascent state. Edmondson and McManus (2007) argue that for such nascent and intermediate researched areas, qualitative research provides a good opportunity to explore and observe. Moreover, the goal of this research is to explore how specific organizational actors define Lean and undertake its translation, in order to understand what happens when ideas and concepts are given new meaning in different localities. This makes an interpretative approach and a qualitative methodology most suitable. Qualitative research, however, is a broad umbrella term that covers a wide array of methodologies, techniques and perspectives and the approach of this research warrants a closer explanation. The (Scandinavian) tradition of translation research approaches data analysis as a contextual act, rather than as a normative one. Therefore, it requires researchers to be very much aware of their own position towards their object of study and to constantly question the epistemological assumptions underlying the situated nature of knowledge production (Læg Reid, 2007 in Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 197). To do justice both to this reflexive epistemology of translation research and to a personal interest in reflexivity—which has developed in response to an increasing awareness of my own role in the research process—I propose that an abductive, qualitative approach would suit the aspiration of the research at hand. In contrast to traditional perspectives, abduction does not view knowledge as being devoid of ambiguity and subjectivity (Bartel and Garud, 2006; Schwab, 1980), but this kind of inferencing rather requires a reflexive and self-critical approach on the part of the researcher. Abduction stimulates a continuous dialogue between theory and data to achieve conceptual inferences that are inspiring and innovative (Peirce, 1978). The point of abduction is not that we let the data lead us anywhere, but we frame and construct it as encountered surprises in the empirical material encourage us to rethink and problematize dominant theory (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007).

#### ***Research setting***

To study agency in the translation of management concepts under an abductive, qualitative

approach, I looked at a network of Dutch healthcare institutions united around the introduction of Lean. ‘Lean Management’ or ‘Lean Thinking’ (often simply Lean) has been extensively promoted in managerial discourse over the past few decades and is associated with substantial organizational change. Lean can be traced back to the Toyota production system (TPS), where the concept was developed from the 1950s onwards to reduce and eliminate waste in the production system of vehicle assembly (Holweg, 2007; Inman, 1999; Ohno, 1988). Womack and Jones popularized the term ‘Lean production’ when they presented Lean thinking to the Western world with their book *The Machine that Changed the World* (1990; 2007).

As management concepts are widely recognized as being highly ambiguous (e.g., Benders and van Veen, 2001) and since the main goal of this dissertation is not to claim epistemological privilege myself, but explore instead how specific organizational actors define Lean and undertake its translation I will try to veer away from a strict definition of Lean. Broadly speaking however, Lean has come to be associated with process improvement and waste reduction (Womack, Jones and Roos, 1990; 2007; see also Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Morris and Lancaster, 2006). Lean principles imply the constant maximization of customer value and the elimination of wasteful (non-value adding) activities (‘muda’) through continuous quality improvement (‘kaizen’) and radical improvement activities (‘kaikaku’) (Womack, Jones and Roos, 1990). Through its principles, methods and techniques, Lean aimed to resolve many of the motivational and organizational deficiencies associated with ‘traditional’ mass-production manufacturing systems (Treville and Antonakis, 2006).

The seemingly universal relevance of Lean (Morris and Lancaster, 2006), with its principles arguably appropriate for various organizations in the public and private sectors (McCann, Hassard, Granter and Hyde, 2015), has allowed the concept to spread from manufacturing to services. However, the application of Lean in a healthcare setting is still a relatively new phenomenon (Burgess and Radnor, 2013; Graban, 2009); the first references to Lean in healthcare appeared at the start of the new millennium at the NHS Modernization Agency (UK), the Thedacare Center for Healthcare Value (USA) and the Virginia Mason Medical Center (USA) (Brandao de Souza, 2009; see also Benders, Van Grinsven and Heusinkveld, 2014). But, ever since its introduction, there has been a strong practitioner and academic interest in how to ‘revolutionize’ healthcare by adopting Lean principles (e.g., Eaton and Phillips, 2008; Graban, 2008; McCann et al., 2015; Radnor, Holweg and Waring, 2012).

### ***Lean in Dutch healthcare: the foundation of a national network***

In the Dutch healthcare system, the first hospital-wide implementations of Lean started in around 2006 (Benders et al., 2014). The implementation of Lean principles in a number of pioneering hospitals constituted the basis for a still-growing movement pushing for the adoption of Lean in healthcare. The early experiences of a Dutch teaching hospital were published in the book *Lean denken en doen in de zorg* (Thinking and doing Lean in healthcare) in 2009. Shortly after, representatives from this hospital and a representative from a Dutch health insurance company exchanged their experiences with Lean. Realizing the similarity of their goals and methods, they decided to connect their initiatives in a collaborative approach. In 2011, this culminated in the creation of the national network 'LIDZ' (Lean in de zorg, which translates to Lean in healthcare). Its goal is to form a learning community that encourages the use of Lean principles to continually advance cure and care processes, as well as to improve the problem-solving capabilities of the Dutch healthcare system.

The network carries out a variety of activities to promote knowledge exchange (website, symposia and company visits); knowledge enrichment (training and education for different target audiences); and knowledge development (scientific research). At the time of study 57 healthcare organizations had joined the network. Of these 57 member organizations, 40 are hospitals, of which 38 are Dutch hospitals (general and university), 15 are care organizations providing somatic care, psycho-geriatric care and home care and the final two are laboratories. Conditions for membership include: an active approach towards the optimization of healthcare, a willingness to share knowledge with colleagues and a financial contribution in the form of an annual fee. In addition, members were asked to self-indicate their 'Lean phase' on a scale from one to four, which reflected the development of Lean implementation ranging from 'early stage' to 'advanced' in the organization as a whole.

### ***Data collection***

I chose to study the introduction and adaptation of Lean in this network of healthcare organizations for three main reasons. First, despite claims about the universal relevance of the concept (Womack and Jones, 2003), applying Lean principles to healthcare is a relatively new phenomenon (Burgess and Radnor, 2013; Graban, 2009) and implies major adaptations. Healthcare differs significantly from large-scale car manufacturing in terms of market structure,

product-service characteristics and work processes, which was illustrated by the common refrain of my interviewees, ‘a patient is not a car’. This difference provided an ideal setting for studying the translation of a concept, as it is persistently assumed that ‘large distance transfer is likely to require substantial re-interpretation’ (Morris and Lancaster, 2006, p. 214; Nicolini, 2010). Second, the empirical context of the network allowed for a simultaneous focus on both intra-organizational and inter-organizational translation dynamics as ‘the dearth of attempts to bridge inter-organizational mechanisms of diffusion with intra-organizational implementation and adaptation is striking’ (Ansari, Fiss and Zajac, 2010, p, 68; Huising, 2016). Lastly, as well as being an excellent context for the theoretical motivations of the study, healthcare is an important sector in which the stakes are high and where the implementation of new concepts may lead to improvements in the quality and cost-efficiency of healthcare, directly impacting the lives of patients.

A case study of departments was part of this initial research strategy. Following a theoretical sampling procedure to choose cases within relevant theoretical dimensions, I did some piloting and exploratory research. I conducted ‘semi-deep’ interviews with the implementation managers of four of the hospitals to verify the relevance of specific departments as comparative cases. I also inquired about the activities these individuals engaged in to move between organization and network-level realms to transform Lean into activities that were meaningful for the particular hospital for which they worked (Huising, 2016). As part of this initial strategy, I also started to observe a number of so-called ‘Gemba walks’—a core activity of the network. Gemba walks entail visiting the organizations affiliated with the LIDZ network; I was therefore able to witness both the application of Lean and ‘live’ exchanges of experiences among hospitals.

Although my original research motivations, framework and research strategy guided the entry to the field, I encountered several surprises during these first few interviews that encouraged me to rethink my approach. The role of inter-organizational dynamics in translation processes seemed less significant to these individuals than their specific position among the different stakeholders within their organization. Moreover and without exception, each individual stressed how their personal relationship with Lean shaped their efforts in translating it. Therefore, after a number of conversations with field experts and some careful deliberation, I decided to pursue an interview approach with all the implementation managers in the network, rather than analyzing how translation occurs in a small number of organizations in a case study approach. An

interview approach would allow me to identify patterns in their translation efforts and to go deeper into the role of key agents in the introduction and co-construction of Lean in the hospitals being studied. Hospitals are complex organizations where it is difficult for higher-level management to impose changes because medical professionals—often privileged actors—hold the discretion to resist changes (e.g., Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin and Waring, 2012; Ferlie, Fitzgerald, Wood, and Hawkins, 2005; Kellogg, 2009). However, in spite of this, there is plenty of opportunities for local experimentation; so, the context therefore offers an ideal place to study specific key actors who must work in a complex array of various stakeholders. Since imposing change based on hierarchical position, resource control, or expert knowledge is unlikely to succeed (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016), I expected to find these managers engaging in significant agentic efforts to translate Lean within the interstices of their professional and managerial hierarchies (Kellogg, 2014).

Data collection occurred in a time-span of a year and a half (July 2014 - January 2016). This is shown in a separate table (Table 1.1), which indicates the type and amount of data and their role in analysis and theory development (Reay, Golden-Biddle and Germann, 2006). The primary data comprise interviews and observations of ‘Gemba walks’. Contextual data were gathered to gain a better understanding of the implementation of Lean in a hospital context (see Table 1.1 and Appendices 1 and 2 for an overview and detailed description of the data). The specific methodological approaches and considerations for each of the empirical studies of this dissertation are also outlined in their respective chapters (chapters three and four).

**Table 1.1 Type and amount of data**

Type of Data	Amount of Data	Use in Analysis and Theory Development	
<b>Primary data</b>			
<b>- Interview data</b>			
Individual, face-to-face retrospective interviews with key agents with formal role in the implementation of Lean in the hospitals of the network	40 interviews (48 hours, 720 pages of transcripts)	All interview data were transcribed and coded. Identification of the accounts of experiences, challenges and efforts of key agents in the translation of Lean in the hospitals under study.	A back and forth between theory and primary data (interviews and 'Gemba walks') led to the development of:
Individual, face-to-face retrospective interviews at network level and with external consultants	5 interviews (8 hours, 90 pages of transcripts)		- Micro-practices for aligning the meaning of Lean across organizational boundaries that vary as a function bridging, buffering and blending modes ( <i>chapter three</i> ).
<b>- Observational data</b>			
Observations of 'Gemba walks'	10 'Gemba walks' observed (29 hours, 300 pages of transcripts)	Transcribed and coded. Identification of the (accounts of) experiences, challenges and efforts of key agents in the translation of Lean in the hospitals under study, without intrusive role as an interviewer.	- Four broad types of narrative, which we labeled as forms of identity work ( <i>chapter four</i> ).
<b>Contextual data</b>			
<b>- Observational data</b>			
Company visit to a local factory of Scania	8 hours	Not transcribed and coded. Provided background information on the 'context of origin' of Lean (car manufacturing)	
<b>- Archival data</b>			
Internal documents by interviewees (annual reports, power point presentations, books and web pages).	75 pages	Provided background information on Lean initiatives and added contextual depth in understanding the translation of Lean to the 'recipient' hospital context.	

I collected data via face-to-face, retrospective interviews with the 38 implementation managers of the Dutch hospitals in the LIDZ network. These agents shared similar tasks and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of Lean in their hospitals (see Table 1.2 and Appendix 1), were in direct contact both with higher-level managers and with work-floor professionals, and were able to provide a rich chronological account of the evolution of the concept and of their relationship to it. In addition to these interviews, some exploratory interviews were conducted

with the chairman of the network, the network coordinator, the representative of the health insurance company and with two external consultants. With the goal of not claiming epistemological privilege, the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees to invite comments and reflections, but also to achieve shared ownership of the interview insights. In total, 45 retrospective interviews were conducted, which yielded 56 hours of recordings and 810 pages of transcripts (see Table 1.2 and Appendix 1).

**Table 1.2 Interview data**

1 Senior Consultant Lean	16 Head healthcare logistics	31 Program manager, Coach, Trainer
2 Consultant Process improvement and innovation	17 Program leader Lean	32 Program manager Care logistics
3 Manager Lean	18 Manager Innovation and Quality - Program manager new construction	33 Senior consultant, Lean coach
4 Consultant, Lean coach	19 Consultant Care Innovation	34 Head Quality and Safety
5 Manager Lean and care logistics, Chairman LIDZ network	20 Process coordinator, Lean manager	35 Coordinator Quality Assurance
6 Manager innovation	21 Senior consultant	36 Program manager Lean Six Sigma
7 Consultant and Program manager Operational Excellence	22 Senior policy officer	37 Management Consultant
8 Manager care, Program manager care innovation	23 Consultant Consultancy and Policy	38 Head Policy and Organization - Lean coach
9 Program manager Streamlined working	24 Program manager Lean	39 Member board of directors
10 Lean coach	25 Consultant Staff department Quality and Safety	40 Strategic consultant Lean and Capacity management
11 Lean coach Program healthcare innovation	26 Lean consultant, Head of unit	41 Coordinator LIDZ network, Lean coach
12 Program leader Lean Quality and process innovation	27 Quality manager	42 Consultant Lean (external)
13 - Project manager Lean/Trainer Lean Six Sigma - Project manager Lean Six Sigma, Lean coach and Trainer	28 Staff member Quality and Safety - Lean Six Sigma	43 Consultant Lean (external)
14 Manager ward, TOC consultant	29 Program manager Lean	44 Representative health insurance company
15 Innovation coach, primary process in check, care group management	30 - Policy officer, Official secretary - Team leader, Project manager Lean	45 Website Manager LIDZ network

- Please note that, for reasons of anonymity, the order of the interviewees in this table does not correspond to the in-text interviewee numbers.
- See Appendix 1 for a more detailed overview of the interview data

In addition to the interview data, I continued to observe ‘Gemba walks’ as they provided an excellent means to become acquainted with the network and to witness conversations regarding the experiences and challenges of translation without needing to take an active and intrusive role as an interviewer. In Japanese, Gemba means ‘actual place’ and refers to the work floor—the place where ‘value is created’ (Fine, Golden, Hannan and Marra, 2009). Gemba walks aim to deepen the understanding of Lean among participants and to contribute to their expertise in the application of Lean in their respective organizations. In my study, Gemba walks generally included an introduction of the implementation of Lean, one or multiple (simultaneous) visits to the work floor where its application was visible and a plenary part in which the attendees of the Gemba walk shared their experiences with the hosting organization. Gemba walks lasted three hours on average and were tape recorded with the approval of the hosting organizations and the attendees and were, for most part, transcribed verbatim (see Appendix 2). This yielded 29 hours of recording and 300 pages of transcripts.

To gain background information and to add conceptual depth to the translation of Lean from its ‘context of origin’ (car manufacturing) to the ‘recipient’ hospital context, I also gathered contextual data. This included associated documents and other archival material such as annual reports, PowerPoint presentations, books published by members of the network and web pages outlining specific initiatives. Furthermore, a company visit to Scania, a local factory, allowed for a closer understanding of Lean in the ‘context of origin’. Scania, a Swedish automotive industry manufacturer of commercial vehicles was heavily inspired by Toyota and has been applying the Lean concept to its production for over twenty years. The majority of the interviewees had also visited Scania and often mentioned it as an important influence in the translation of Lean to their own contexts.

#### **1.4 DISSERTATION OUTLINE**

This research comprises three main projects through which I aim to answer sub-questions that—together—enable a more advanced understanding of the role of agency in the translation of management concepts. Chapter two is a conceptual study in which I conduct a systematic literature review to answer the question: how is the translation of management concepts conceptualized and what is the role of agency? Drawing on this systematic literature review I identify two theoretically relevant dimensions that mark important variations between the

different strands of translation research: the source of variation and the object of variation. A key contribution of this study is its development of four alternative approaches to translation. By articulating the assumptions underlying these approaches and by defining how key elements are understood, I show how the assumptions of institutional, rational, dramaturgical and political perspectives are echoed in various, yet polarized, interpretations and conceptualizations of translation. This allows for more specified translation approaches and opens up possibilities for enhanced integration by reflexively intertwining perspectives.

Chapter three and four are empirical studies based on the qualitative data outlined before. Chapter three focuses on the boundary-spanning practices of intermediate agents championing the implementation of Lean in hospital settings. I develop a theoretical model of boundary spanning in translation. The findings show a set of three practices that intermediate agents draw on to align the meaning of Lean across professional and managerial boundaries. I specify how these practices vary as a result of contextual conditions and strategic orientations in modes ‘bridging’, ‘buffering’ and ‘blending’. In doing so, I found buffering to be a significant, yet paradoxical and under-theorized part of translation.

Chapter four investigates how the translation of management concepts is connected to identity work. I focus on the tension between an individual’s identification with Lean and the perceived demands of their organizational context. I found that individual actors engage in narrative constructions to create a coherent sense of self in relation to Lean; I identified four distinct categories of translation-as-identity-work: externalizing, professionalizing, rationalizing and proselytizing. A key contribution of this study is the understanding that through three attributes of identification—salience, transience and valence—identity work mutually affects the actor and the concept.

Chapter five summarizes the key findings from the studies. I discuss the general theoretical and practical implications of my main research question and show how this dissertation may be positioned within a wider field of literature by touching upon its relation to institutional and organization theory. I also reflect upon my ontological and epistemological position relative to the object of study. After this, I discuss the practical implications of this research and I indicate how the limitations, boundary conditions and findings of the study may provide bases for future research.

Table 3 provides the outline of the projects that are part of this dissertation. As the

individual studies developed through multiple stages and culminated in conference presentations and journal publications, the output for each of the projects is listed here. The projects that were part of the PhD-trajectory, but that fall beyond the scope of this dissertation are mentioned for the sake of completeness.

Throughout this dissertation I alternate between ‘I’ and ‘we.’ As the project-chapters (two, three and four) represent papers written with different co-authors, I use ‘we’ to refer to the collaborative work of these studies. I mostly use ‘I’ when reflecting on my personal considerations.

**Table 1.3 Dissertation outcomes**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Presentations, publications and recognition</b>
Translating management concepts: Towards a typology of alternative approaches (Chapter two)	Van Grinsven, M. Heusinkveld, S. Cornelissen, J.P.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published as: Van Grinsven, M., Heusinkveld, S. And Cornelissen, J. (2016). Translating management concepts: Towards a typology of alternative approaches. <i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>, 18(3), 271–289.</li> <li>Included in the IJMR top articles list of 2016</li> </ul>
Aligning the meaning of Lean: Boundary spanning agents in the translation of management concepts (Chapter three)	Van Grinsven, M. Heusinkveld, S. Benders, J.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented at the annual conference of European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) – Athens, Greece (2015)</li> <li>Presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting – Anaheim, CA, USA (2016)</li> <li>Published as short paper: Van Grinsven, M., Heusinkveld, S. and Benders, J. (2016). Aligning the meaning of Lean: Boundary spanning agents in the translation of management concepts. <i>Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings</i>.</li> <li>Best Paper Award Management Consulting Division Academy of Management (2016)</li> <li>R&amp;R at Journal of Management Studies (JMS)</li> </ul>
Translating identities: Management concepts as means and outcomes of identity work (Chapter four)	Van Grinsven, M. Sturdy, A. Heusinkveld, S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented at Paper Development Workshop (PDW) on Organizational and Institutional change – AMJ (OMT), University of Edinburgh (2016)</li> <li>Presented at the annual conference of European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) – Naples, Italy (2016)</li> <li>Submitted to Organization Studies</li> </ul>

*Note: Projects outside the scope of this dissertation but part of the formative trajectory:*

- Van Grinsven, M., Heusinkveld, S., Clark, T. and Gross, C. Impact of management concepts: the intermediary agency of managerial actors.
  - o Presented at the annual conference of European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) – Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2014)
  - o Presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting – Vancouver, Canada (2015)
  - o Chapter in: Heusinkveld, S., Clark, T., Greatbatch, D., Van Grinsven, M. and Gross, C. (contracted). *Management Ideas: Gurus, Knowledge and Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Benders, J., Van Grinsven, M. and Heusinkveld, S. (2014). Tussen verbeteren en continu verbeteren. In M. Ruppe van der Voort and J. Benders (Eds.), *Verder met Lean in de zorg* (pp. 25–35). Amsterdam: Boom uitgevers.
- Benders, J., Van Grinsven, M. and Ingvaldsen, J. (forthcoming). How framing kept Lean moving. In A. Sturdy, S. Heusinkveld, T. Reay, and D. Strang (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Management Ideas*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.