THE CONSTRUCTION AND CUSTOMIZATION OF STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS IN DIFFUSING POPULAR MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING CONCEPTS

Based on a field study in a specialized management-consulting firm, this paper gathers initial evidence on how consultants construct and customize the Balanced Scorecard (BSC). Abstract universal generalizations about the BSC obscure wide variations within its use and implementation. Drawing on actor-network theory, this paper seeks to understand how consulting knowledge pertaining to the BSC is constructed, what is the role of consultants in its production and diffusion, and how this consulting knowledge differs from other forms of knowledge such as academic knowledge. This paper provides preliminary evidence on how management accounting ideas and techniques are transformed and reconstructed during a consulting process in which the BSC is made thinkable, operable and necessary at a particular time and space. The use of the BSC by consultants can be understood as the reassembling existing ‘facts’, and linking and distributing activities and resources. The BSC is re-defined, talked about, modified, re-constructed and implemented in a client organization throughout a translation process. The role of technology is crucial in constructing the networks through the use of texts, software and graphic tools that reinforce what consultants say and do in the workplace. This paper contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of the social interactive process in building the network of support whereby translation occurs throughout. It challenges the artificial division between designers and users suggested by extant innovation diffusion literature, which fails to recognize the active and mobile roles of these actors, their actions, and the changing nature of the ‘innovation’ being diffused over time.

Note: Please do not reference material without providing credit to the author. Comments are welcome!

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