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Unternehmenskrisen und ihre Bewältigung im 20. Jahrhundert/ Company Crisis and Crisis Management in the 20th Century

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Abstracts

I. Abhandlungen und Studien

Florian Triebel und Manfred Grunert: Krisenerfahrung bei der BMW AG. Zur Typologie des Phänomens Unternehmenskrise

Abstract

Traditional theory of business management offers a narrow understanding for enterprises crisis: A crisis of strategy is followed by a crisis of liquidity and a crisis of return. Focused on the management of the turn-around after a crisis this theory neglects a variety of possible enterprises crisis. This contribution presents five examples of enterprise crisis out of BMW's company history. These examples show that not all critical phenomenon in a corporation follow that classical theory and that a typology for crisis of enterprise should also integrate culturalistic types of enterprise crisis as independent phenomenon.

Stefanie van de Kerkhof: Krieg als Unternehmenskrise? Wahrnehmung und Verhalten schwerindustrieller Unternehmer und Manager im Ersten Weltkrieg und in der Nachkriegszeit

Abstract

Perception of crisis by heavy industry entrepreneurs and managers during World War I points to the strong impact of culturalistic phenomena on the causes of company crises. This essay is based upon the most recent theses by brain and cognition research that assume perception and behaviour to be constructivist processes. As it is considered data-based fiction, perception is, accordingly, seen as being culturally shaped. Due to their cultural imprint, entrepreneurs and managers of the Krupp AG were late in perceiving the latent crisis of their company during World War I. Instead, they were focused on demand pull and the steady expansion of the company. Being the most important German armament manufacturer, the company had to contend with more severe conversion problems than companies from other sectors at the end of the war. As a strategy for the post-war period was missing, Krupp, thus, experienced a serious, hardly controllable company crisis. In contrast to Swiss companies of the same sector and despite particularly favourable tax laws and regulations, Krupp did not take advantage of the war as a crisis of demand. This did not only originate in the market structure of the armaments industry after the Versailles Peace Treaty, but also stemmed from the distorted perception of the heavy industry protagonists. They stayed fixed on the competition from Germany's enemies until the end of the war and, therefore, hardly perceived other market developments.

Alfred Reckendrees und Kim Priemel: Politik als produktive Kraft? Die "Gelsenberg-Affäre" und die Krise des Flick-Konzerns (1931/32)

Abstract

The "Gelsenberg-Affair" is one of the most famous German business scandals. In May 1932, Friedrich Flick and the German Government settled a secret contract by which Flick sold the majority of the second largest steel company of the world, the so-called German Steeltrust, to the German Government. The single purpose of this deal was the survival of Flick's insolvent holding-company Charlottenhütte. Hence, it was correctly interpreted as an 'impermissible transaction for the benefit of a person in need of rehabilitation' (M. v. Schinckel). This article analyses the strategically contaminated force field that Flick established since the beginning of the 1920s in order to safeguard several of his high risk investments. A crucial part of his strategy was based on the enforcement of a (secret) financial participation of the German Government. This strategic relationship was played successfully by Friedrich Flick; the political sphere advanced to a hidden, but open-handed market for new financial funds and for the security of high risk investments. Flick was literally able to mobilise politics as a

"factor of production". This successful strategy was the precondition for the deal with the German Government in 1932 and for the salvation of his insolvent holding-company

Silke Fengler: "Den Markt klar im Sucher!?" Krise und Niedergang des Amateurragereschäfts der Agfa-Gevaert AG in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren

Abstract

With the Japanese camera producers' blitz on the world market in the late 1950's, the West German camera industry lost the leading position in international competition which it had held until then. Our contribution inquires into the causes which led to this severe crisis, studying the example of the Agfa-Gevaert corporation. Some factors which contributed to the fall of Agfa's amateur camera business can also be found to have affected other enterprises in the West German photo industry. Yet Agfa presents an anomalous case in this branch. The West German camera industry admittedly fell prey to an almost universal underestimation of the dangers of the new Japanese competition. The difference, though, becomes apparent when one considers the management's reaction to this critical change. It took its cues mostly from the market behaviour of the US competitor, Eastman Kodak. At last, the fall of Agfa's amateur camera business also marked the end of a business strategy which had its roots in the 1930's. By holding on stubbornly to this strategy, the management maneuvered its own camera business into a dead end, which was one of the main reasons for the final closing of the Munich Agfa camera factory in 1982.

Stefanie Lechner: Die Macht der Tropen: Wie Narrative die Wahrnehmung eines Unternehmens steuern. Das Beispiel der "Suhrkamp-Krise"

Abstract

This paper on Siegfried Unseld, the late head of Suhrkamp publishing house in Frankfurt am Main and a prominent figure in Germany's publishing trade, brings into focus a subject which is notably absent from management and organisational history alike: the function of the narrative. Whereas the linguistic turn has made quite an impact on the humanities, current business history has yet to take into account that language organises and structures our view of the world. Communication shapes reality. Entrepreneurs and firms are, in essence, semantic constructions involving complex interplay between public self-representation and media. In the following, Hayden White's tropology is tested as a novel approach to business history. White's ideas on the power of tropes proved helpful in understanding the deep structures of the discourse on the so-called "Suhrkamp-crisis" during the 1990's. Strategies such as emplotment, the use of specific metaphors and an inherent sequence of tropes shaped the corporate image of Suhrkamp Verlag and built Siegfried Unseld's reputation as a "publisher of the century". Tropology's potential for historical analysis is substantial. Used as a tool in discourse analysis, it helps to identify as well as, to a certain degree, to understand shifts in mentality. Therefore, it should be adopted as a complement to conventional approaches to management and organisational history.

II. Diskussion

Karsten Linne, Afrika als "wirtschaftlicher Ergänzungsraum": Kurt Weigelt und die kolonialwirtschaftlichen Planungen im "Dritten Reich"

Abstract

The colonial plans concerning Africa in National Socialist Germany considered Africa as the natural economic "supplementary space" (Ergänzungsraum) of Europe. The driving force of this planning was the so-called "Group of German Colonial-Economic Enterprises" (Gruppe Deutscher Kolonialwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen), an association of German colonial companies, behind them the Deutsche Bank. Under their head Kurt Weigelt, the group actively developed plans and designed detailed programs, especially an "emergency

program" (Sofortprogramm) for East Africa. This primarily aimed at intensifying the economic power and increasing the exports of this region. Weigelt, a leading member of staff of the Deutsche Bank and a 'multi-functionary', was at the same time head of the economic department of the Colonial Office of the NSDAP (Abteilung Wirtschaft des Kolonialpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP). Hence, the plans he pushed ahead with were motivated by both state and commercial interests that joined inseparably. But in the end, these drafts corresponded neither with the economic, political and military development nor with the internal changes in the Deutsche Bank itself: The trade with Africa never reached a large scale, the National Socialist regime focused on an expansion to the East, the dominance of the British sea power prevented the establishment of a new German colonial empire in Africa, and, last but not least, Weigelt's position inside the Deutsche Bank was undermined by the appointment of Hermann Josef Abs as head of the foreign department.

In den nationalsozialistischen Kolonialplanungen wurde Afrika als naturgegebener wirtschaftlicher "Ergänzungsraum" Europas betrachtet. Treibende Kraft dieser Planungen war die Gruppe Deutscher Kolonialwirtschaftlicher Unternehmungen, ein Zusammenschluß der deutschen Kolonialfirmen, hinter der die Deutsche Bank stand. Unter ihrem Leiter Kurt Weigelt entfaltete die Gruppe rege planerische Aktivitäten und entwarf detaillierte Programme, speziell ein "Sofortprogramm" für Ostafrika. Dieses sah vor allem eine Intensivierung der Wirtschaft und Steigerung der Exportkraft vor. Weigelt, ein führender Mitarbeiter der Deutschen Bank und Multifunktionär, war gleichzeitig Leiter der Abteilung Wirtschaft des Kolonialpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP. So flossen in den von ihm forcierten Planungen staatliche und privatwirtschaftliche Interessen untrennbar zusammen. Letztlich standen diese Entwürfe aber gegen die wirtschaftliche, politische, und militärische Entwicklung sowie gegen die innerbetrieblichen Veränderungen bei der Deutschen Bank selbst: Der Handel mit Afrika nahm nie großen Umfang an, das NS-Regime war auf eine Ostexpansion orientiert, die Vorherrschaft der Engländer auf den Weltmeeren verhinderte die Schaffung eines neuen deutschen Kolonialreiches in Afrika, und Weigelts Stellung innerhalb der Deutschen Bank wurde nicht zuletzt durch die Berufung von Hermann Josef Abs zum Verantwortlichen für die Auslandsabteilung untergraben

Jan P.A.M. Jacobs and Jan-Pieter Smits, Historical Time Series Analysis: An Introduction and Some Applications

Abstract

This article sketches some developments in historical time series analysis, i.e. the application of sophisticated statistical and econometric techniques to historical time series. After that, we present five applications on the economic development of the Netherlands over the last two centuries, and discuss implications for research in economic history.

III. Forschungs- und Literaturberichte

Rainer Fremdling: Die Wirtschaft der Niederlande im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert: Wachstum, Einschnitte und wirtschaftspolitische Weichenstellungen

Abstract

The Netherlands have never been the "small" economy as Dutch scholars keep claiming. From the 16th century onwards, in the long run, the country rather belonged to the most advanced and prosperous economies on earth. During the 19th century, however, Holland could no longer boast of the highest income per capita any more. It lost its former top position because it failed to adopt the coal-based steam technology of the Industrial Revolution on a large scale. These shortcomings, due to institutional rigidities, were overcome by the liberal reforms during the mid 19th century. On this basis, the Netherlands succeeded in widely applying the general purpose technology (GPT) of electricity which made the industry perform very well from the end of the 19th century onwards. The economy profited from the neutral position between the belligerent countries in the First World War. Although it was severely hit by the ensuing world economic crisis the Dutch industry

achieved a leading position in labour productivity. Due to deliveries to the German war economy, the Netherlands regained full employment of their work force and capital stock in the early German occupation. From 1942 on, however, the Dutch economy was more and more damaged by war devastation and occupational exploitation. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Netherlands stuck to governmental control of the labour market and expanded the welfare state enormously. So the turning point of the western economies at the beginning of the 1970's hit the Dutch economy particularly. The crisis called for a new technology regime and a reorientation towards ancestral liberal principles in economic policy. The welfare state was cut back drastically and the labour market was made highly flexible. Dismantling cooperative elements in Dutch institutions has been widely agreed upon (Polder Model). The transition to the new information and communication technology is still proceeding far from satisfactorily, though. So the Netherlands witness low unemployment and (moderate) growth rate on the one hand, but on the other a stagnating labour productivity.

Harold Kluge, Der Einfluss des Geschäfts der "Allianz" auf die Entwicklung der "Münchener Rückversicherungs-Gesellschaft" in deren ersten fünfzig Jahren (1880-1930)

Abstract

The most important founding principle of "Munich Re" had been independence from any direct insurer's interests. Nevertheless, after only ten years with high growth rates and overall satisfactory profits its founders felt, that with the reinsurance business offered in the market it might be difficult in the long run to achieve the envisaged profits. They therefore decided to abandon their founding principle and set up a direct insurance company of their own, the "Allianz": Thus they had an influence on the kind and volume of the risks to be reinsured. On the eve of the first World War, "Munich Re" with annual premiums of 204 million marks was world market leader. "Allianz", meanwhile the biggest German direct insurer, contributed 10% to its premiums and nearly 40% to its profits. Following the war, "Munich Re's" premium had shrunk to 65 million marks, whilst "Allianz", after a series of mergers, had doubled its income from 40 to 80 million marks. By 1930 "Munich Re" again was world market leader, with "Allianz", however, now contributing 40% to its premiums and 160% to its profits, i.e. by then all the business acquired by "Munich Re" in the market, was overall unprofitable.