

**Organizational Democracy Is Dead,
Long Live Organizational Democracy!
Drivers for and Rationales of a Long-Living Idea**

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Varieties of Workplace Democracy: from specific models to a political economy

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ABSTRACT

Starting with industrialization and witnessing several waves of surge and decline, organizational democracy still seems simply not to be written off today. Based on both prior historical work on the decentralization of decision-making and on recent practitioner-based outlets, I identify eleven drivers for organizational democracy since the beginning of the 20th century, sorted by their apparition time and questioning what their underlying rationales are. While performing the analysis, the study detects a recent shift to individual-level rationales of democracy in organizations over the past two decades. The study describes organizational democracy as a reaction to outside pressures and adds knowledge to the historical perspective on organizational democracy.

Keywords: Organizational Democracy; Participation; Decentralization; Decision-Making; Historical Perspective



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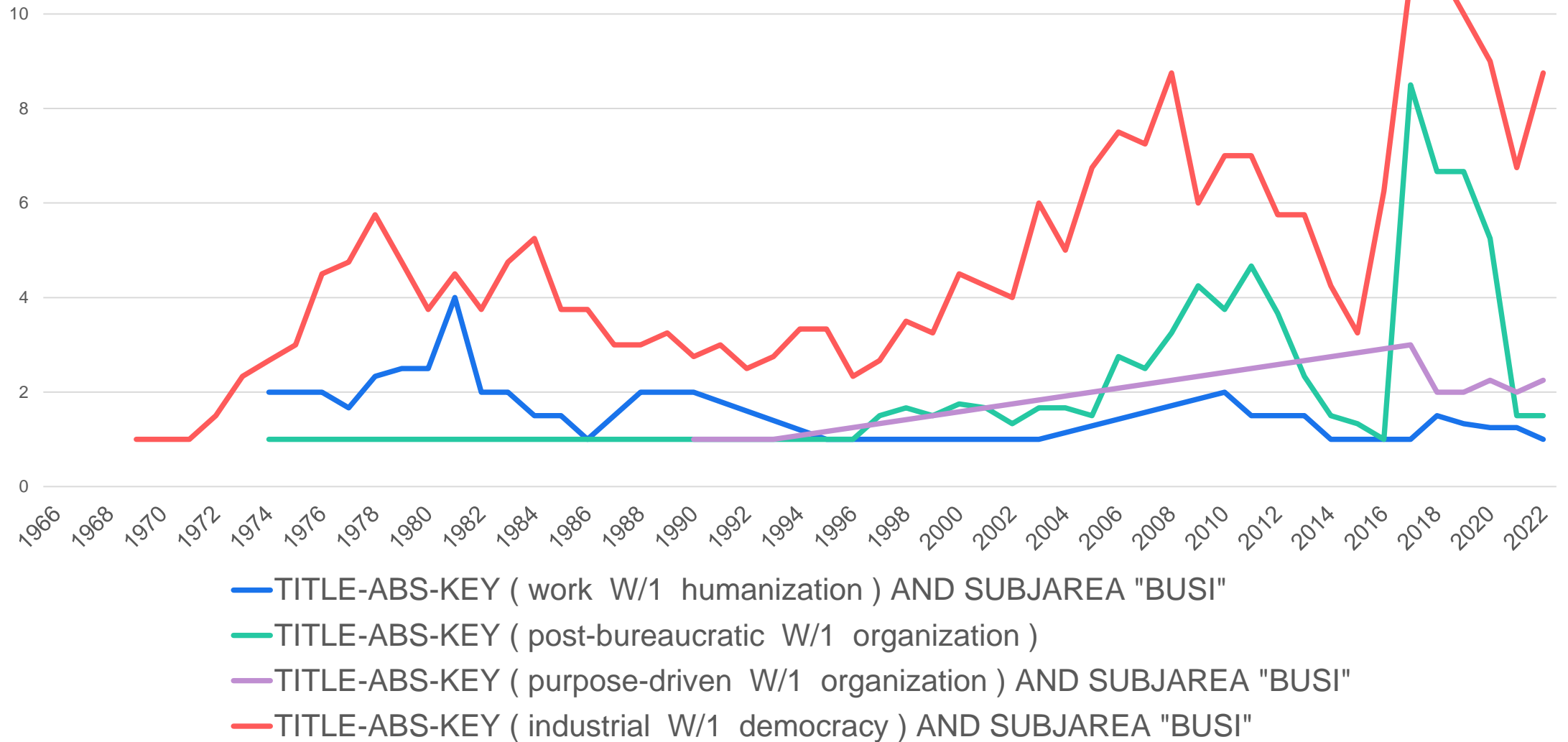
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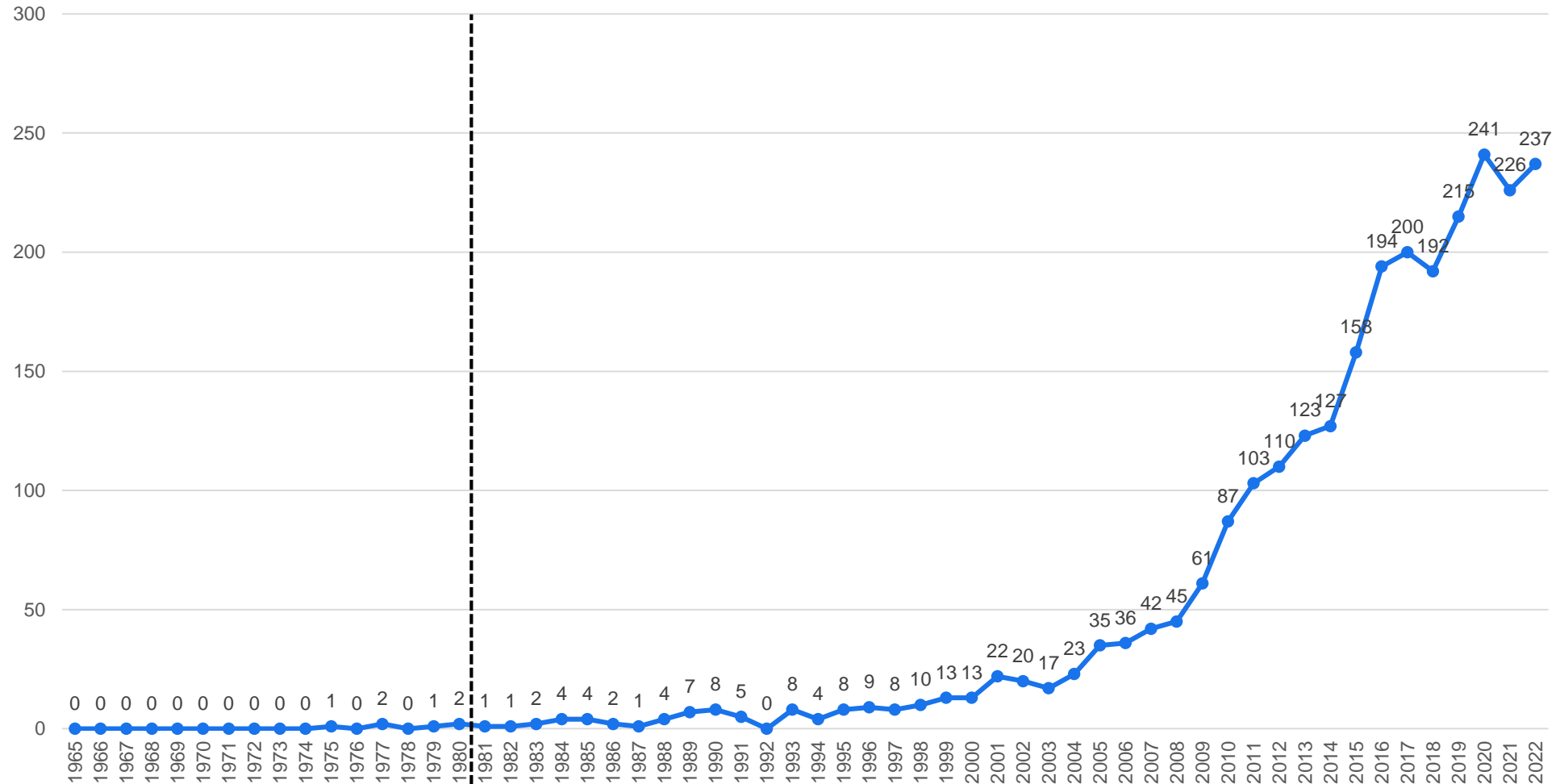
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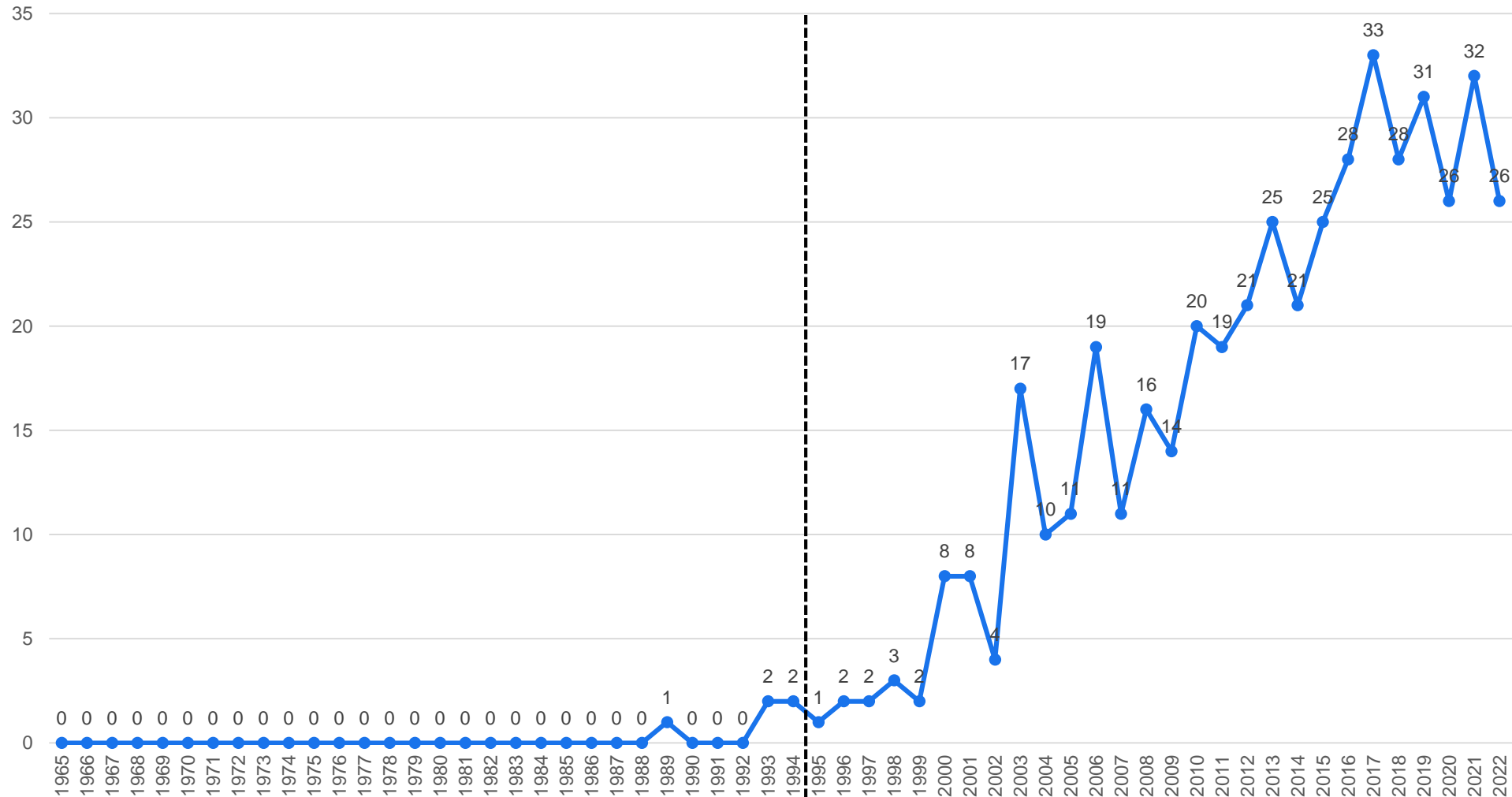
Concepts of Power Decentralization in Organizations Show Up in Cycles



Threshold for “Innovation” and “Participation” in the 1980s



Threshold for “Globalization” and “Participation” in the 1990s



Recent ... and not so Recent Concepts of Decentralization of Power in Organizations

- Purpose-driven organization (Rey et al. 2019)
- Less-hierarchical organizing (Lee and Edmondson 2017)
- Post-bureaucratic organization (Heckscher and Donnellon 1994)
- Industrial Democracy (Heller 1998)
- Humanization of Work (McGregor 1960)

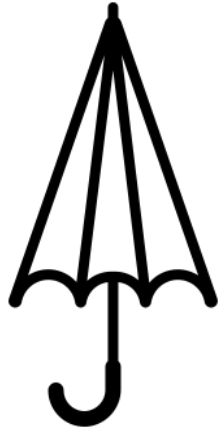
Research Gap: Few Recent Endeavors to Shed Light on the History of Organizational Democracy

- Workers' Participation at Plant Level (Berger et al. 2019)
- German Co-determination Act (Fetzer 2010)
- Industrial Democracy (Müller-Jentsch 2008)
- Worker participation research in the United States and international comparative perspective (Whyte 1983)
- Sociological perspective (Ramsay 1977)

Research Questions

- What are the drivers for organizational democracy over the past decades?
- What are the underlying rationales of these drivers?

Definition of Organizational Democracy



Organizational democracy

Definition of Organizational Democracy



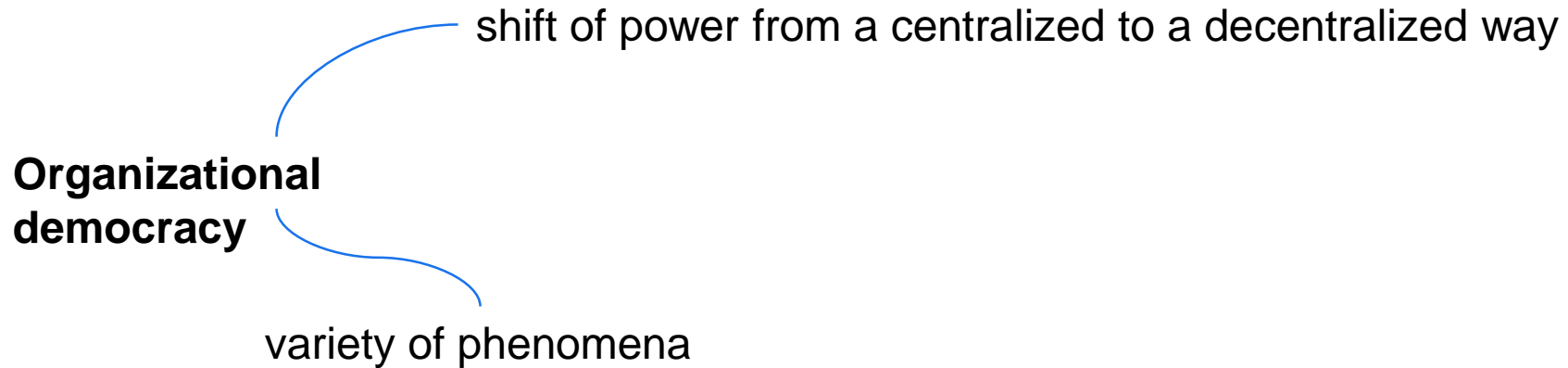
Organizational democracy



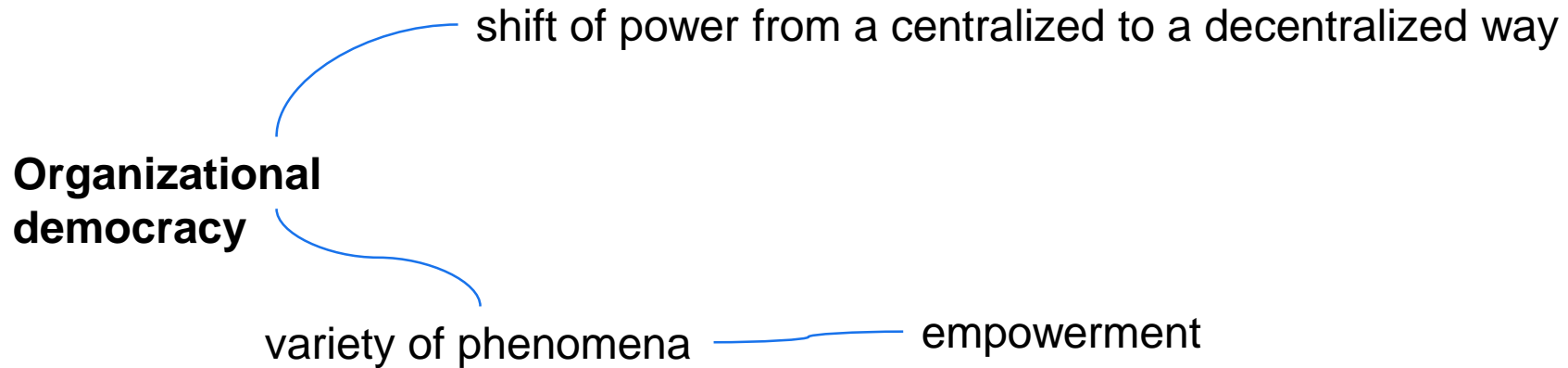
Definition of Organizational Democracy

Organizational democracy as a shift of power from a centralized to a decentralized way

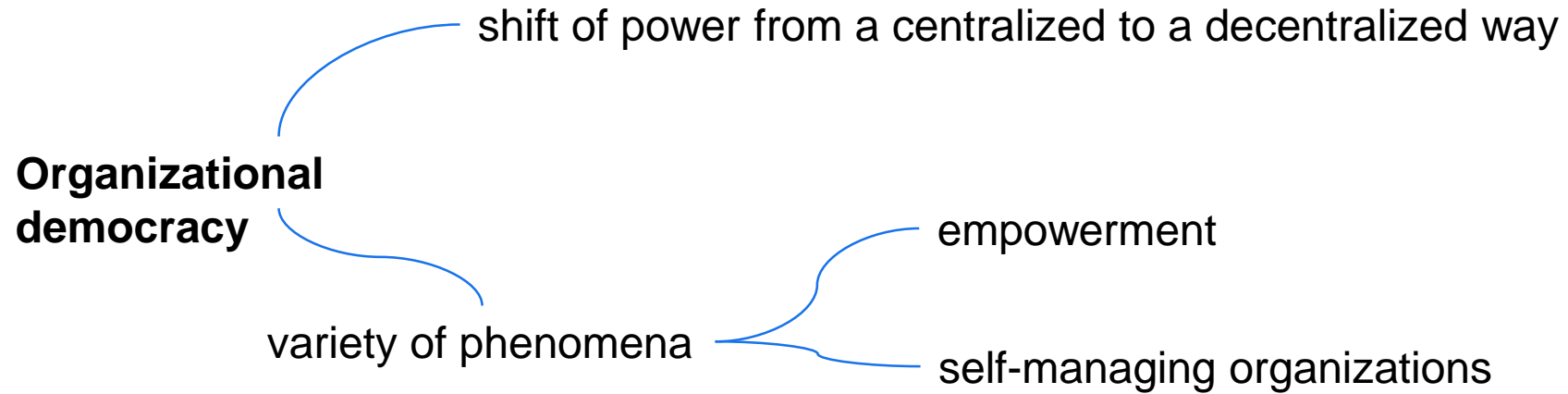
Definition of Organizational Democracy



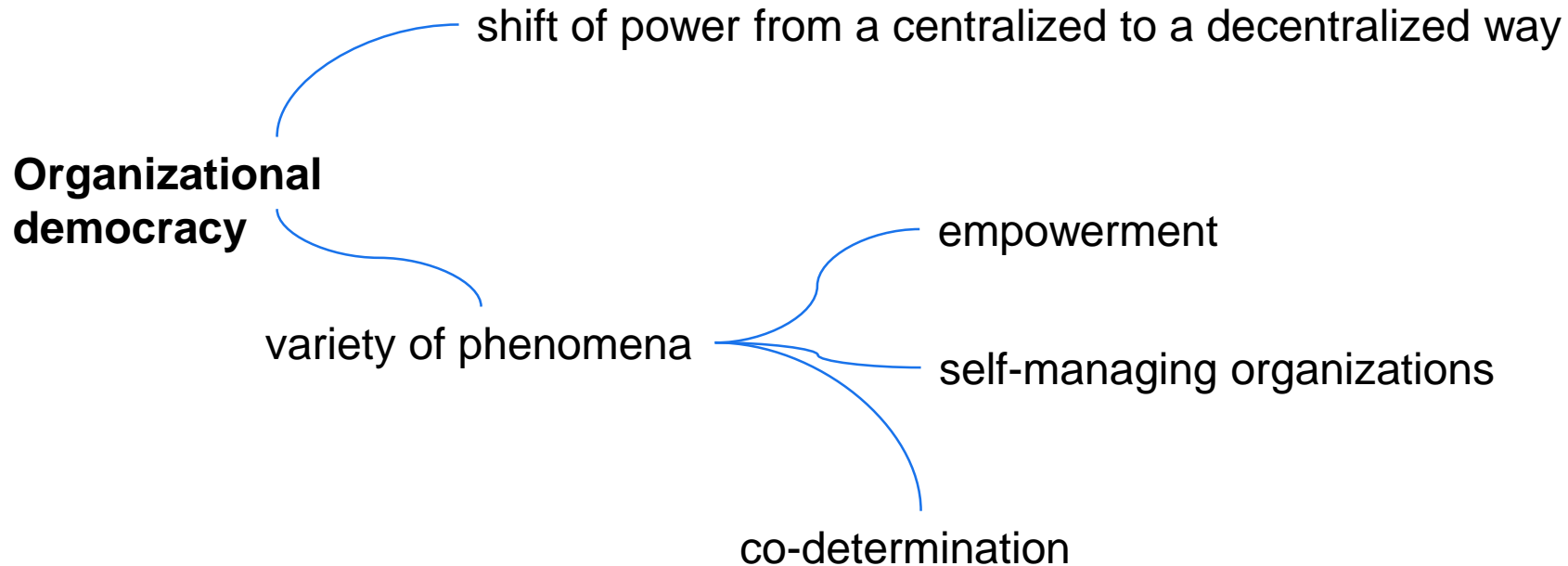
Definition of Organizational Democracy



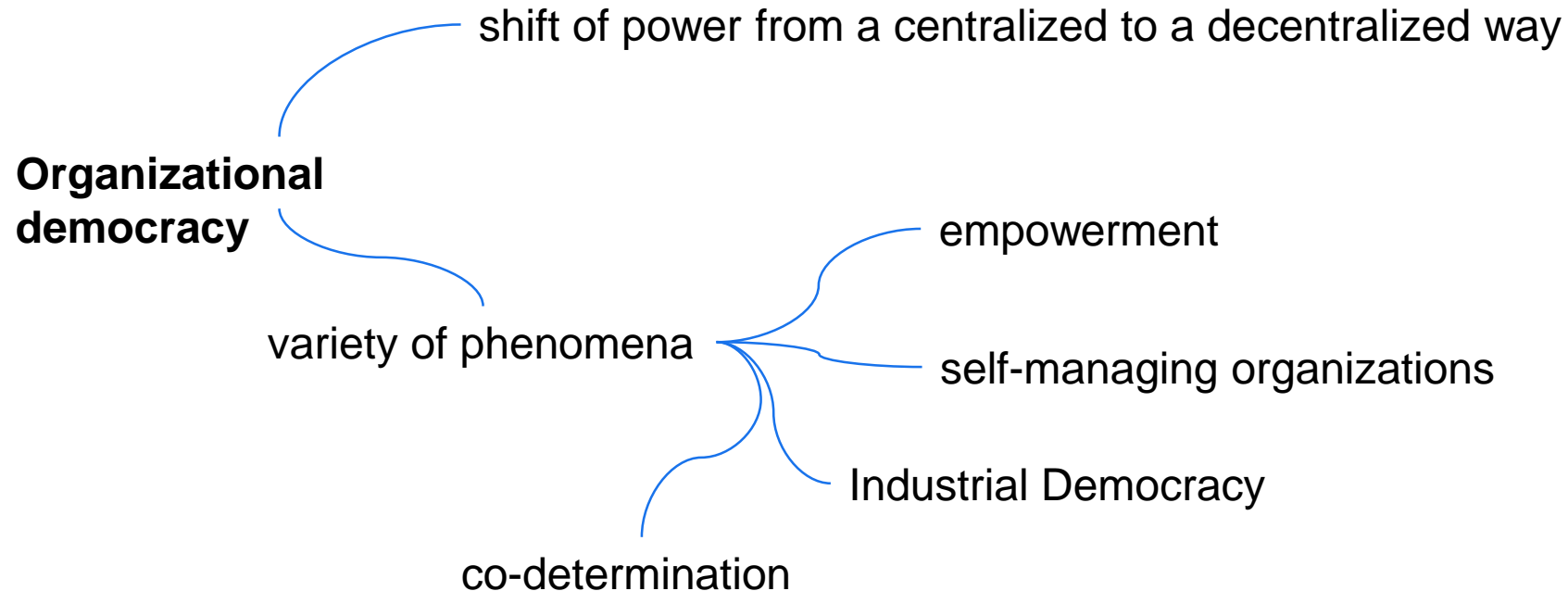
Definition of Organizational Democracy



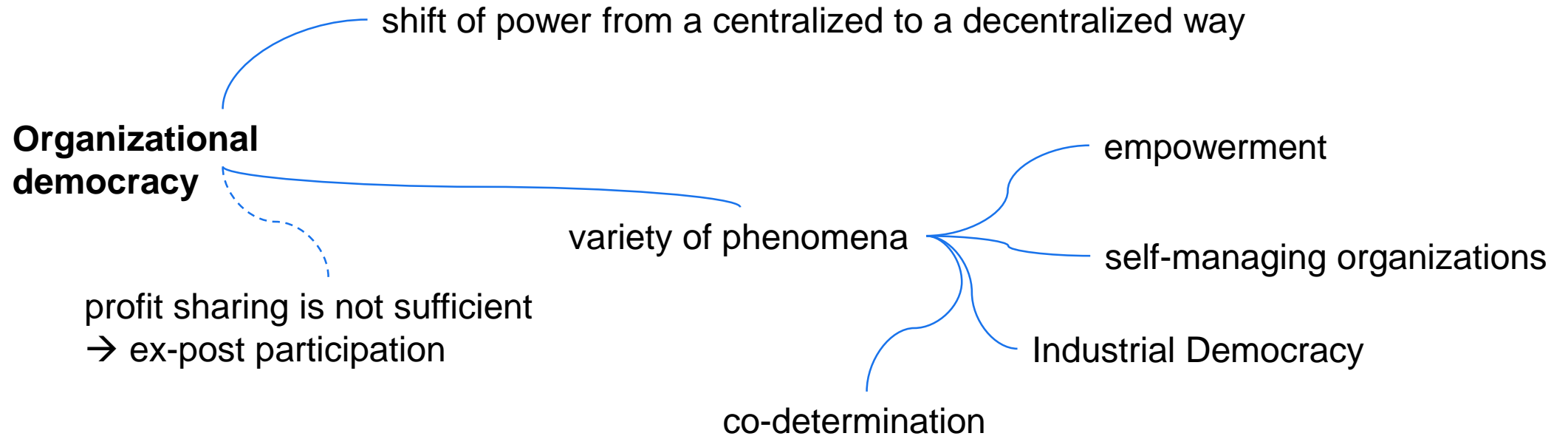
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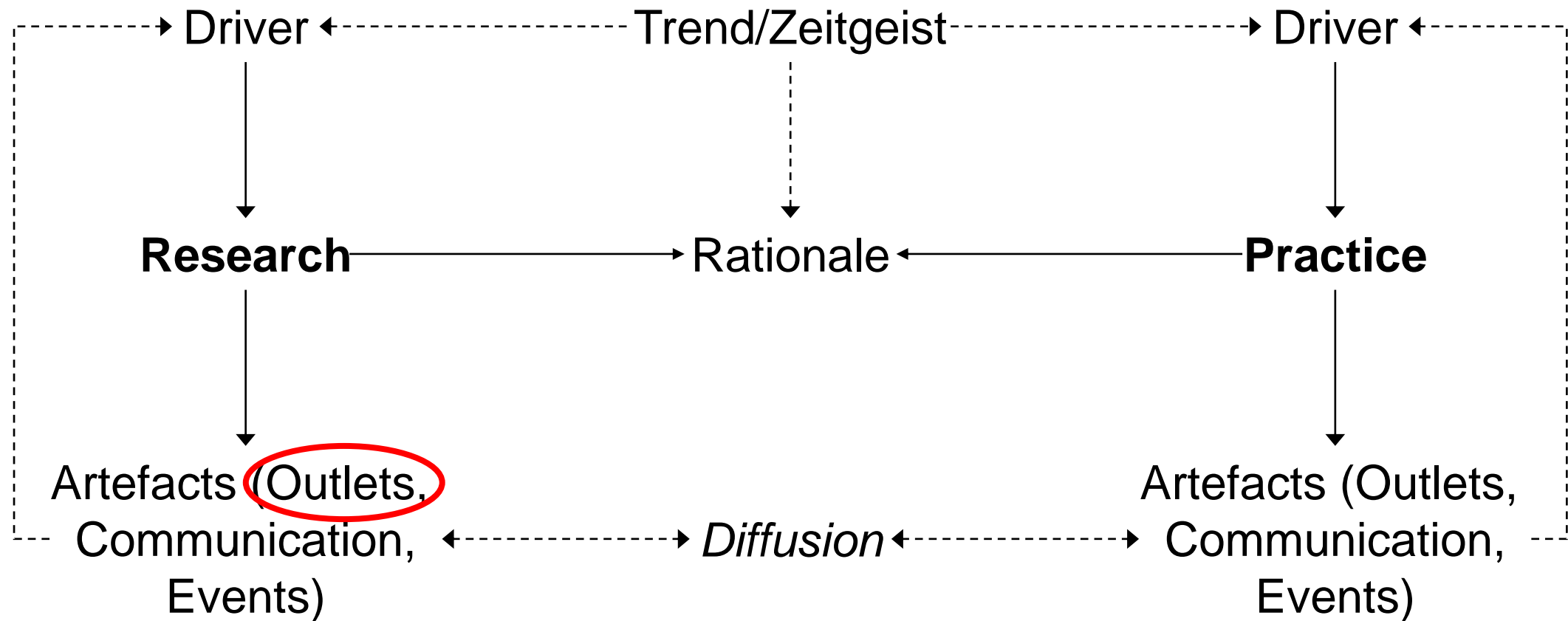
Definition of Organizational Democracy



Definition of Organizational Democracy



Framework and Method



Drivers Meandering between Rationales

Drivers/Rationales	Surge Time	Societal Level	Industry Level	Organizational Level	Individual Level
Legislation	1900	X			
Functional Drivers	1960			X	
Human Relations Movement	1970				X
Fads and Management Concepts	1980		X		
Technological Advancement		X			
Innovation				X	
Decentralization				X	
Globalization and Cooperation	1990	X			
Business Ethics		X			
Individualism	2000				X
Purpose and Work as Calling	2010				X

Organization Seen as Actor

Level	Organizations as actor	Drivers
Society	} Actor in system	Legislation (1900s), technological advancement (1980s), globalization and cooperation (1990s), business ethics (1990s)
Industry		
Organization	} Actor as such	Functional drivers (1960s), innovation (1980), decentralization (1980s)
Individual	} Actors of actor	Human Relations (1970s), individualism (2000s), purpose and work as calling (2010s)

Conclusion

- Widening the definition of organizational democracy allows for variety of concepts
- Eleven drivers, four rationales that are perpendicular to drivers
- Cycles of democratization – or at least attempts to democratize – follow each other in the academic rhetoric
- “Individualism” and “purpose and work as calling” relate to the individual-level rationale
- Organizations as actors: Which level should democratization be located?



Next Steps

- Substantiate the analysis by systematic literature research, e.g., on Scopus
- Shift the label “organizational democracy” to “employee participation”
- “Fads and management concepts” as a theoretical background, not a driver

Total Occurrences for “Participation” in the Scopus Subject Area “Business” – Next Step: Explaining Its Variance

