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Individual Identity and Cultural Unlocking –

Consequences of Changing Performance Management in Organizations

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to examine new performance management patterns in regard to their consequences for the individual identity of organizational members. In modern societies values and norms of individual performance and success play a crucial role for the constitution of individual identity. Related to the German context the paper shows that the present tendency of the "finalization" of performance criteria and their simultaneously increasing "fluid" or "dynamic" character question conventional notions about "good" performance and "justified" social and material success. Therefore, these tendencies indicate an unlocking process in organizations which affects the individual identity of organizational members in a fundamental way. In line with this reasoning the paper presents a framework to describe possible effects on identity, the resulting performance acting and the consequences for the organization in general.

Introduction

The cultural consciousness of "modern societies" is substantially shaped by values and norms of individual performance and success (McClelland 1966; Neckel 2002). In Germany, recent developments seem to indicate that these values and norms are subject to an unlocking process. For instance, the "scandals" of the "new market" (Hartz/Steger 2004) or the huge compensations paid in the case of Mannesmann (Neckel 2004) aroused intense public debates about the "real" characteristics of managerial performance and the effectiveness of the "achievement principle" (Offe 1970).

On the organizational level changing patterns of performance management are indicators for such an unlocking process as well (Bahnmüller 2001; Neckel 2002; Neckel/Dröge 2002). First, there is a tendency referred to as "finalization" of performance management. That means the measurement of individual performance focuses on its results rather than on its processes. Second, the indicators of individual performance become increasingly "fluid" or "dynamic". For instance, "good" performance depends more and more on market driven factors. These developments question conventional legitimate notions about "good" individual performance,

"justified" financial and social success, and therefore the achievement principle in general.

Deriving from this the main purpose of the paper is to analyse the new performance management patterns on their consequences for the identity building processes of organizational members.

Two main assumptions underlie this analysis:

(1) The positive or negative recognition of the own performance by the organization has a substantial influence on the constitution of individual identity (Luckmann/Berger 1964; Holtgrewe 2002; Collinson 2003).

(2) Till now the achievement principle gives a normative frame for this interchange and has therefore a stabilizing function for both the organization and the identity of the individual (Schettgen 1996, pp. 181).

In the first part of the paper George Herbert Mead's (1973) framework of socialization, as process of "taking the role of the other", is used to explain the identity building process. Emphasis will be placed on the idea of "reciprocal recognition" and its substantial importance for individual identity.

As already stated, it is the social recognition of an individual's performance which plays a crucial role for the constitution of identity in modern societies. Hence, this connection and the corresponding assumptions about the norms and values of performance, success and the achievement principle are described in the second part. Karl Mannheim's (1964) "success sociology" is of relevance here, as well as more recent contributions in this field (Miller 1999; Neckel 2002; Neckel/Dröge 2002).

The third part starts with explaining the changing performance management patterns and their unlocking effects on conventional corresponding notions of performance-related recognition and identity. It can be shown that these new patterns make it more difficult for individuals to experience the desired organizational recognition of performance. Hence, the identity building process in particular and the interrelated constitution of individual and organization in general are affected. The paper concludes with theoretical based suppositions about the consequences of these developments.

Part I: Identity and Identity Building Process

The following chapter gives an overview of the theoretical conception of identity used in the paper. The first part briefly defines the term "individual identity" and explains

general corresponding facets. The second part shows the main aspects of the identity building process in line of Mead's (1973) framework.

Individual Identity – Definition and General Facets

"Individual identity" describes the perception of the own identity by a single person. Hence, "individual identity" means the picture, which a person develops about his or her self. Often the term "personal identity" is used as synonym for this perspective on identity (Luckmann/Berger 1964).

Fundamental facets of this framework of "individual identity" are 1) the necessary conditions of self-reflection and social interaction 2) the characteristics of coherence and continuity and 3) the socio-historic dimension of identity.

1) Self-Reflection and social interaction are the core conditions for the constitution of individual identity. Self-reflection as "capacity to think about oneself" (Leary/Tangney 2003, p. 4) is necessary to develop self-consciousness, to understand oneself as individual and to build a picture about the self (Geulen 1989; Frey/Haußer 1987; Daniels 1981). In turn, the development of self-reflection, self-consciousness and identity is necessarily bound to social interaction. That means a single person gains experiences about his or her self exclusively in social interaction (Keupp et al 2002; Habermas 1968).

2) It is further to state that the constitution of identity implies the synthesis of experiences about oneself which were made a) in different social contexts and b) over the whole life time (Habermas 1988; Daniels 1981). In the course of this the assumption is widely shared that the constitution of identity is "successful" when all these experiences get synthesized in a picture that makes sense to the person (Keupp et al. 2002; Krappmann 2000; Baumeister 1986). Therefore, the main characteristics of individual identity are its subjectively felt coherence and continuity (Daniel 1981).

3) A last point which results from the previous explanations is the socio-historic dimension of identity (Baumeister 1986; Tatschmurat 1980). It expresses the social dependence of identity building processes and points to the aspect that the characteristics of the social context have to be taken into account examining individual identity - "homo sapiens is always homo socius too" (Berger/Luckmann 1969, p. 54).

Identity Building Process – Theoretical Base

The general interrelation between individual identity and social context was fundamentally shown by the work of Mead (1973). He binds the constitution of identity to the process of symbolic interaction and to the mechanism of "taking the role of the other" between the interaction partners. These procedures determine the development of the two identity components "I" and "Me". Going out from this Mead assumes the "reciprocal recognition" between the interaction partners as necessary to create a subjectively satisfying identity. The following passage describes these aspects in detail.

Symbolic Interaction and Taking the Role of the Other

Mead considers symbolic interaction as constitutive to the development of self-consciousness and identity. He emphasizes that only the process of interaction confronts a person with response to the own actions. Hence, exclusively in social interaction a human being experiences his or her self as somebody who acts and whose actions have a certain influence on others. Herein, Mead sees the elementary mechanism to develop self-consciousness.

He argues that successful interaction, e.g. a cooperative working process, is bound to the shared knowledge about the meaning of individual actions. That is because knowing what the own action means to the other, helps to estimate the other's reaction. Thus, it is possible to influence the actions of the other purposefully by the own actions and therefore to control the interaction to a certain degree. To sum up - the interaction partners have to share the same symbols to interact in a successful manner. (Mead 1973; Habermas 1988; Honneth 1994; Joas 2000)

Against this backdrop Mead's idea about the process of "taking the role of the other" emerges (Honneth 1994; Joas 2000). As outlined, a successful interaction depends on the knowledge of the intersubjective meaning of certain actions, enabling a person to estimate probable responses to own actions. This implies that the interaction partners have to judge or to interpret their intended actions through the eye of the other interaction partners. Hence, a person has to put his or her self in the position of the interaction partners to influence them in a purposeful manner. Mead calls this "taking the role of the other" and argues that this is the core mechanism to create individual identity. A person learns step by step to interpret the own intentions and

actions via social responses to the own behaviour. These experiences about oneself get synthesized, incorporated into the self and constitute individual identity. Mead describes this as socialiation process. In this process a person learns to take the role of an increasing number of interaction partners (e.g. interaction in the family, than in school, working life, etc). In doing so the person experiences how the entire social group - Mead uses the term "generalized other" - responds to him or her (Mead 1973, p. 196). Thereby, the "generalized other" represents the generalized social values and norms of the prevailing social group (Habermas 1988, p. 219). Thus "taking the role of the other" entails that one gets to know oneself as a certain kind of person, particularly as somebody who behaves to social expectations in a certain way.

The Identity Components "I" and "Me" and Reciprocal Recognition

"Taking the role of the other" induces the development of the two identity components "I" and "Me". The "Me" is progressively constituted out of the experiences made in the socialisation process. Hence, the "Me" represents the knowledge about the social values and norms, the resulting interpretation of oneself and is therefore the subjective conceivable component of the own identity. The "I" is the unpredictable, dynamic component of individual identity. It stands for the creativity and spontaneity of behaviour and actions, ideas, wishes and feelings (Mead 1973; Joas 2000; Habermas 1999; Honneth 1994). In this way the "I" shapes the thoughts, the behaviour and the actions of a single person. The social responses to these attitudes get then - as experience about oneself - incorporated into the identity component "Me".

Mead assumes that a positive reference to the own identity resp. to the "Me" is of elementary importance for a single person. He uses the term "self respect" to describe this relation (Mead 1973, p. 248). Thereby, the process of "taking the role of the other" implies that judging oneself is exclusively possible on the basis of social response to the own attitudes. That means in turn that a positive reference to oneself depends on the positive social response from at least one significant area of interaction. That implicates the necessity to accept and adapt the norms and values of this interaction group or at least not to challenge its notions in a fundamental way. To sum up, a single person has to recognize the norms and values of a social group to be recognized by this group and to develop "self-respect". This "reciprocal recognition" determines the development of a subjectively satisfying identity (Mead

1973; Taylor 1993; Honneth 1994; Holtgrewe et al. 2000). Hence, it is clear that the unlocking of norms regulating the reciprocal recognition between individual and social group resp. organization has a certain impact on the individual identity of the organizational members.

Part II: Performance, Success and Identity

The second part describes the framework to analyse the connection of human performance, success and individual identity. It is structured into two main passages. The first gives an overview of important aspects of the term performance. The second passage shows the connection between performance, success and identity.

Performance - Basic Aspects and General Components

The term "performance" has multiple meanings. The meaning varies in history and sciences, like physics or economy, as well as across different social contexts, like working or family life (Becker 2003; Hondrich et al. 1988). The focus of the paper is on individual human performance and means the action of carrying out a working activity in organizations. In this way it refers to the social context of paid work.

This understanding of performance and the corresponding values and norms play a crucial role in modern western societies and are deeply anchored in their cultural self-consciousness (McClelland 1966; Braun 1977; Bolte 1979; Neckel 2002; Neckel/Dröge 2002). This can be traced back to the development of modern societies. The beginning of their constitution is mostly seen in the early 16th century (e.g. Bohn/Hahn 1999). Here, different factors, for instance innovations in science or changing religious orientations, cause an increasing functional differentiation of social structure and lead to the erosion of comprehensive systems of beliefs and traditional worldviews (Weber 1988; Habermas 1988; Schimank 1996). Conventional normative integration systems and corresponding distribution principles, e.g. integration into the social system and distribution of social positions by status of birth, loose their function and legitimacy. In turn, the development of the economic sphere and the developing capitalistic manner of production lead to the increasing importance of individual performance in emerging organizations and its establishment as social value and norm for the majority of people in the society (Marx 1962; Braun 1977; Weber 1988).

In this way individual performance gets step by step a core normative medium of social integration and distribution.

When people start working in an organization they have mostly already internalized certain normative notions about "good" performance (Türk 1981). In modern societies and in the context of paid work performance is normatively defined as something beneficial to the wider social context (Miller 1999). For instance, reaching an organizational objective, e.g. a certain financial contribution of the own department, by manipulation of the balance sheet or the exclusive use of micro political tactics and damage of other departments is mostly felt not acceptable (Neckel 2002; Neckel/Dröge 2002). Thus, performance as social value and norm shows some core characteristics which have to be taken into account when managing performance.

Performance - as action of carrying out a working activity - consists of the following constitutive components or dimensions (Schlie 1988; Becker 2003):

1) Objective of performing

Performance is always a purposeful activity. That implies the setting of a certain objective of performance.

2) Process of performing

Performance involves always a certain effort (requirement of work and time). Reaching an objective exclusively by accident or luck is no performance.

3) Result of performing

The process of performing has always a certain result. Hence, the objective of the performance is reached or not reached.

In the frame of the given normative context the specific objectives of performance and the ways and means of reaching them are set by the prevailing social group resp. organization.

Performance, Success and Identity

In modern societies individual human performance is a core normative medium of social integration and distribution. This connection is described by the "achievement principle" (Offe 1970; Braun 1977; Bolte 1979). This principle bears the idea of social justice by establishing a normative frame for the distribution of social positions by individual performance. It guarantees that individual performance which fits the general social criteria is rewarded by material and social success. This notion of reciprocity is the core characteristic of the principle (Miller 1999). In this way, the

normative effectiveness of the achievement principle supports the individual motivation to perform, legitimates social inequalities between people and fulfils therefore various stabilizing and integrative functions in society and organizations (Offe 1970, pp. 45; Schettgen 1996, p. 119). Hence, organizations as important places of paid resp. recognized individual performance translate the normative requirements of the principle by establishing and using performance measurement and reward systems (Schettgen 1996).

The effectiveness of the achievement principle is important for the individual identity of the organization members. This can be shown clearly by analysing the meaning of "success". As explained, the achievement principle distributes "success" according to individual performance. What does "success" mean to the individual in modern societies? Mannheim (1964) as important representative of the German success sociologists (Becker 2003; Neckel 2002) developed a differentiated framework about performance and success. In the following his approach is used to answer the question posed above.

Mannheim defines performance as the "fulfilment" in a certain functional area, like any kind of occupation or trade, whereas "success" means the "fulfilment" in the social context. That means success is a synonym for any kind of positive social recognition. Further, Mannheim differentiates between "objective" and "subjective" success (Mannheim 1964, p. 635). Objective success means the social recognition of the performance itself, e.g. an innovative product gets widely used. Subjective success refers to the social recognition of the creator of the performance. That means the creator acquires things like reputation, a high social position and/or individual power. In this way Mannheim points to the possibility that a performance is being socially recognized without the effective social recognition of the performance creator. Obviously this is the case of many innovators or artists. In turn, it is clear that subjective success without objective success is - according to the achievement principle - normatively not acceptable. Hence, Mannheim calls "subjective success" without a previous performance rather "undeservedly luck" than success (Mannheim 1964, p. 634).

Against this background it becomes obvious that the effectiveness of the achievement principle is important for individual identity. That is because it gives the normative frame for acquiring social recognition resp. subjective success. The crucial importance of these factors for the building of a subjective satisfying identity (Luckmann/Berger 1964; Collinson 2003) is theoretically supported by Mead's idea of

reciprocal recognition and the previous explanations about performance and success as fundamental values and norms in modern societies.

To give a brief summary: The idea of reciprocal recognition implies that a person constitutes a subjective satisfying identity by recognizing the fundamental values and norms of the prevailing social group. Only in this way a person is able to feel recognized and to develop the necessary notion of being socially integrated into the group. The previous explanations showed further that individual performance, especially in the organizational sphere of paid work, is a core medium of social integration. Acquiring social recognition resp. subjective success for the own performance plays a crucial role for the constitution of a subjective satisfying identity. The achievement principle gives a normative frame for this interchange of individual performance and subjective success. Therefore the normative effectiveness of the principle and the corresponding values and norms of performance with their consequences for individual performance have to be taken into account managing performance in organizations.

Part III: Changing Performance Management Patterns - Potential Consequences for Individual and Organization

This part gives an overview of the changing performance management patterns in organizations. Thereby, it refers especially to observations in German organizations. Further, it shows that these tendencies potentially question the normative effectiveness of the achievement principle thereby leading particularly to the erosion of norms giving a conventional frame for building individual identity. The part concludes with theoretical based suppositions about potential identity related reactions of organization members and possible consequences for the organization in general. These arguments will be based on Merton´s (1975) approach of anomie.

New Patterns of Performance Management

Presently two main corresponding tendencies of performance management can be observed in German organizations. These general tendencies refer to the sphere of production as well as to the administrative level and are related to different hierarchical levels in organizations. The changes are mostly embedded in the

development and management of new, more flexible, decentralized organizational structures (Moldaschl 1994; Faust et al. 1995; Schmierl 1995; Senghaas et al. 1997; Bender 1997; Faust et al. 2002). General trends in the performance management are a) the increasing differentiation and corresponding explicit formulation of performance criteria and b) the increasing dynamic character of performance management. According to different organizational levels both tendencies are translated into different shapes as briefly shown in the following.

a) On the one hand performance criteria become more and more differentiated and thus explicitly formulated. Thereby, the performance criteria refer either to the results of performance or to the process of performance. An increasing concentration on the process can be observed in the sphere of production and qualitative customer service. Examples of performance criteria are the extent of cooperation within a working group, the number of used machines in the production process (Moldaschl 1994; Schmierl 1995) or the friendliness of employees consulting customers on the phone (Holtgrewe 2002). In contrary, the formulation of criteria for the performance process is dropping in favour of the increasing emphasis on reaching certain performance results resp. objectives on the level of management positions (Bahnmüller 2001; Faust et al. 2002). Here, individual performance gets increasingly measured by financial criteria referring to financial contributions of the own department to the whole organizational profit (Conrad/Manke 2002). In this way the judgement of performance is more and more defined by the end of the company value chain and influenced by market driven factors (Moldaschl/Sauer 2000). Bahnmüller (2001) calls this tendency "finalization" of performance management.

b) "Finalization" points to the tendency of the growing dynamic character of performance management. The increasing use of market-related performance indicators binds the judgement of individual performance to the changes of the market. In this way the judgement and reward of individual performance changes accordingly to market conditions and is therefore previously difficult to estimate for the organizational member. A second reason for the growing dynamic character of performance judgement and reward is the increasing necessity to interpret the performance criteria and the extent to which they were reached by the individual (Blutner et al. 2002). These criteria have a "soft" or "qualitative" character and are increasingly used when managing the process of performance. Criteria like "friendliness" or "cooperation" were mentioned already. Hence, interpretations of the extent of "friendliness" can be very different. In this way the judgement of individual

performance depends obviously more and more on the subjective interpretation of the organizational member in charge and is potentially dynamic.

New Performance Management and Unlocking Effects

The new performance management implicates an unlocking effect upon the normative effectiveness of the achievement principle in organizations. That is because the new criteria of judgement and the new organizational definition of good individual performance put the norms conventionally guaranteeing the legitimate distribution of subjective success into question (Bahnmüller 2001; Voswinkel 2000; Neckel/Dröge 2002; Neckel 2002). This argument is explained more deeply in the following.

Unlocking effects are assumed in accordance with the following main observations:

The tendency of "finalisation" leads to a decreasing emphasize, formulation and explicit recognition of the process of performance. This is particularly critical if conventional ways and means of individual performance don't fit into new, decentralized working contexts and the organizational member has to find new ways of performing on its own (Hales 1999; Faust et al. 2002). Hence, the individual has solely to develop and prove new norms for acquiring subjective success. Over and above this the increasing dynamic character of indicators measuring the result of performance implicates that organizational recognition for the individual effort gets more difficult. Hence, when performance results are measured by market driven criteria the distribution of organizational recognition for the own performance can be less influenced by the organizational member and gets an accidental character (Lehner 2003).

Unlocking effects are to observe even when organizations formulate criteria referring the process of individual performance. This is the case because these new formulated criteria are often contradictory to each other (Moldaschl 1994) and partially contradictory to the organizationally set objective of the performance process (Holtgrewe 2002). That means certain criteria are not to fulfil without neglecting other criteria. The individual is confronted with contradictory organizational expectations which complicate the acquisition of subjective success. Further, often the criteria referring to the process of performance have a qualitative character. This leads to potentially different and dynamic judgements of individual performance (Blutner et al.

2002). Therefore, the organizational distribution of subjective success gets potentially uncertain and unpredictable to the organizational member.

Against this background, it is to summarize that conventional organizational norms of performance and distribution of success are questioned by the new performance management patterns. Thereby it seems particularly critical that new organizational norms of individual performing don't get formulated clearly and that the results of individual performance are judged increasingly by dynamic indicators. In this way the achievement principle resp. the norms of reciprocal recognition between individual and organization are subject to an unlocking process.

Potential Consequences for Individual and Organization

From the previous explanations it is to assume that the new performance management patterns effect the identity building processes of organizational members. That is because fundamental norms of reciprocity between individual and organization are changing. This passage shows possible consequences of this unlocking process on individual as well as on organizational level. Thereby, the assumptions are based on the core ideas of Merton's anomie theory (Merton 1975). This theory gives an appropriate framework for analysing normative unlocking and describes corresponding types of individual action. In the line with the paper, these types can be differentiated by the extent to which new, organizationally set objectives of performance and the ways and means of reaching them are accepted. Merton makes a distinction between five types: the "conformist", the "rebellious", the "innovative", the "ritualistic" type and the type of "retreat". On the basis of the empirical material the types of "innovative" and "ritualistic" reactions as well as the type of "retreat" are of special interest in this paper. "Innovative" behaviour implies the acceptance of the performance objects by using new, alternative means of reaching them. The "ritualistic" type describes the acceptance of the conventional means of performance without the acceptance or awareness of new performance objectives. "Retreat" means the rejection of both, whereby this rejection results from the disappointment about the missing of achievement by using the "legitimate" means. As mentioned above, the new performance management implicates changing norms of reciprocity between individual and organization. This could lead to the situation that individual experiences about conventionally recognized facets of the self and therefore the own identity get questioned. Hence, analysing to what extent

organizational members are willing to abandon the organizational recognition of certain facets of their identity would help to assume possible individual reactions. For instance, aspects like the individual insistence on professional performance orientations play a crucial role (Kadritzke 1997; Faust et al. 2000; Dooling 2002; Henkel 2001; Mieg/Pfadenhauer 2003). So, the tendency of "finalization" points to a decreasing attention to the professional standards of the performance process. Further it is likely that the new objectives of performance contradict professional standards of performing (Kadritzke 1997; Kotthoff 1998). Nevertheless, it is to assume that professional oriented organizational members try to keep these conventional standards and demand the organizational recognition for this. If these people miss this kind of recognition it is to fear that they lose their intrinsic motivation to perform in the long term (Baethge et al. 1995; Kotthoff 1997). Hence, it is to argue that the "ritualistic" type of behaviour as well as the type of "retreat" will be observed. However, it can be argued too that organizational members are quite willing to change their performance acting resp. show "innovative" actions according to new organizational expectations (Faust et al. 2000). This is to explain by the identity related need for organizational recognition referring to the own performance. Hereby the organizational establishment of new norms giving a clear and "fair" frame for the distribution of recognition resp. subjective success is of great importance as well as the establishment of the necessary conditions (e.g. budget) to perform in the expected way. If such a frame is missing it is to fear that organizational members either give up resp. "retreat" their efforts or resort to "innovative" means and ways of performing which can cause damage to the organization (LaNuez/Jermier 1994; Scarbrough/Burrell 1996).

Against the background of this the fundamental interrelation between individual and identity gets obvious again. Thus, new performance management patterns concern the identity building processes of organizational members as well as the organization in general. Putting the normative frame of the achievement principle into question implicates a potential destabilizing of individual identity as well as a destabilizing of the present normative integration of organizations (Voswinkel 2000). That means that the new performance management potentially leads to anomic situations in organizations.

Concluding Notes

The paper presents a framework which can help to examine new performance management patterns in regard to their consequences for the individual identity of organizational members. Thereby, core ideas of Mead´s (1973) theory about the identity building process, Mannheim´s (1964) success sociology and Merton´s (1975) approach of anomie were used.

Generally, it can be stated that the tendencies of the new performance management describe an unlocking of the normative effectiveness of the achievement principle conventionally regulating the reciprocity between individual and organization. Hence, it was shown that the tendency of the "finalization" of performance management and its increasing dynamic character lead to the unlocking of norms conventionally guaranteeing the distribution of subjective success in organizations. Arguing that in modern society subjective success is of crucial importance for the building of a subjectively satisfying identity the new performance management is potentially problematic to the individual. According to this it is to assume - and partially already to observe - that specific identity related reactions contradict the organizationally intended effectiveness of the new performance management and rather lead to a normative destabilizing resp. anomic state of the organization.

Of course, certain further aspects and limitations to these assumptions have to be considered. At first, it is to point out that the presented tendencies of performance management are mainly based on observations and surveys referring to German organizations. Thereby it is to assume that these tendencies are particularly critical in the German context. Here, the effort-oriented achievement principle plays traditionally a very important role (Bahnmüller 2001; Faust et al. 2000). Furthermore, the majority of the middle managers still have a strong professional orientation in German organizations (Walgenbach 1994). Because of this, the presented tendencies of performance management have problematic consequences for German organizations in particular. Against this background, it would be of interest to compare these observations with present developments in other countries. Secondly, apart from the present developments it is of course to state that the entire normative and real effectiveness of the achievement principle is not given (Offe 1970; Schettgen 1996). For instance, recent surveys show that German managers doubt its real effectiveness (Baethge et al. 1995; Faust et al. 2000; Bahnmüller 2001). Nevertheless, the achievement principle represents the desired, actually legitimate

normative frame for distributing success and is therefore relevant for individual performance acting (Neckel 2002; Neckel/Dröge 2002). Because of this, the present, obvious and organizationally caused disturbance of these norms is problematic. Finally, more empirical research is needed to support the presented framework and the assumptions. Only in this way it is possible to get an in-depth view information about the possible consequences of this unlocking process.

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