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**Author**

MEISTER-SCHEYTT, Claudia

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**Abstract**

This paper relates to the implementation process of the Universitätsorganisationsgesetz 1993 (University Organisation Act of 1993) at an Austrian university. In accordance with the idea of a managed university, the Austrian government aimed this law at transferring a greater scope of responsibility for strategic decisions and management issues from the ministry to the universities. The empirical basis is derived from a 2-year, in-depth field study showing that the transformation to a 'simple' management orientation is in itself complex. We suggest therefore a frame of reference that is based on an understanding of universities as complex and self-referential organisations. This view explains changes in universities as nontrivial transformation and conceptualises the management of change in universities as a paradoxical intervention. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)