

Comprehensive change management concepts Development of a participatory approach

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Abstract

During the last years, many change projects in organizations did not have the planned success. Therefore at first, the causes for these failures and the success factors contributing to organizational change have to be discussed. To get better results, a comprehensive change management concept has been developed and tested in an ongoing research project. By using concepts for an integrated assessment and design of organizations, an approach for analyzing the current situation has been elaborated to identify “lack of integration” in the change initiatives of a company. To realize an integrated overall approach of modernization by harmonizing different methods and concepts, first, one has to prove their relationship to policy and strategy (vertical harmonization). The second step is to take into account the fact that there has to be a logical fit between the single concepts (horizontal harmonization). But even if all elements are logically coherent, that does not mean that the people working in the company also see this coherence. Therefore, in addition to the “logical fit”, one has to examine the “psychological fit”. In the end, a concept for analyzing the status quo in an organization as a result of “objective data” and “subjective data” originated.

Subsequently, instruments for harmonizing different modernizing concepts have been applied. As part of the comprehensive change management concept participatory ergonomic approaches have been used during the project. The present study shows this approach in the case of one company.

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1. Success factors contributing to organizational change

Looking at change initiatives in the last decades, one can see that in most cases they only focussed on single issues, such as cost reduction or process improvement, and only led to limited success. There are different causes for these failures, which can be found in the discussion of some critical factors for success:

- The deployment from long-term strategy of the company and the ability to make the necessary resources available (Westphal and Fredrickson, 2001; Whipp, 1991).
- An adequate participation of the individuals and groups affected by the changes—particularly the employees—instead of expert-driven approaches (Bouckennooghe and

Devos, 2007; Lines, 2004; Kuorinka and Forcier, 1995).

- Consideration of the impact of company’s or plant’s culture (Jones et al., 2005; Lines, 2004).
- Coherence between different change initiatives; managing them not in an isolated but in a holistic process (Cao and Mc Hugh, 2005).
- Emphasis on structures *and* behavior and considering the interdependencies between them (Cao and Mc Hugh, 2005; Koch and Stemann, 2005).
- Change initiatives seen as an evolutionary process but not as time-limited programs (Kuorinka and Forcier, 1995).

2. Characteristics of comprehensive change management concepts

At first glance, the critical success factors may seem to be very different, but on a more abstract level, every change

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initiative can be understood as a challenge of integration with an “objective” as well as a “subjective” dimension (Fig. 1).

In the objective (or logical) dimension, a strategic alignment of all change initiatives has to be realized within an integrated overall concept. Comprehensive production systems, which have been developed and implemented particularly in the automotive industries during the last decades—and usually modeled on the Toyota Production System (Liker, 2004)—may serve as a framework for linking various methods and different concepts while referring to only a few general principles (Feggeler and Neuhaus, 2002). But in most cases, these production systems solely focus on manufacturing and do not take into account other subsystems of the company’s overall strategy. Therefore, Business Models, e.g. those based on international Excellence Models, may provide a more suitable framework, which has to be filled according to the specific situation of a company. Examples are the Australian Business Excellence Framework (SAI, 2004), the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (NIST, 2006), and the EFQM Excellence Model (EFQM, 2003). These models include the idea of Policy Deployment, i.e. the deployment of all activities from policy and strategy, as well as the adjustment and interconnection of different activities. In either case, the specific organizational situation and business environment has to be considered in order to design a customized overall approach that really fits the company’s needs (Korge, 2003; Feggeler and Neuhaus, 2002).

In the “subjective” dimension, an understanding of the relationship between the company’s strategic goals and the planned change initiatives is a prerequisite for understanding and acceptance among the employees, which are expected to put the change into practice. In addition, the integration of single initiatives into an overall concept has to be illustrated to the employees. This helps to prevent “change weariness” that can result from too many changes seemingly unrelated to each other. In contrast to the “logical” dimension, this can be referred to as the “psychological” dimension of integration. In this context, participatory approaches of change management may improve the information flow and foster a better understanding of the “whole system” (Kutilainen et al., 1998)—besides other benefits, such as a better use of the employees’ knowledge and a greater commitment to the changes (e.g. Noro and Imada, 1991; Wilson and Haines, 1997).

Expert-driven approaches without an adequate participation of the employees are insufficient because they concentrate only on the logical dimension while neglecting the challenge of subjective integration from the employees’ perspective. A passive or even negative attitude against change initiatives may be the result. The same consequences may arise from consultant-driven standardized concepts or standardized change programs that are pushed by corporate headquarters without considering the specific culture of the respective company or plant. Such

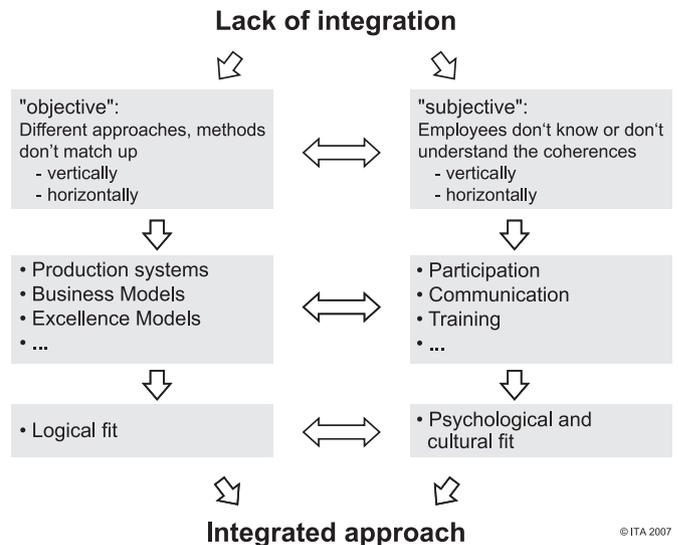


Fig. 1. Dimensions of integration.

approaches may also cause a lack of integration in the psychological dimension. In this sense, there is also a need for a leadership approach that focuses explicitly on the role of leaders as managers of change and on sustainable quality enhancing participation at *different* hierarchical levels (Lakshman, 2006).

An ongoing research project funded by the German Federal Government¹ deals with the question of how to design and implement an integrated change concept that assures logical as well as psychological coherence. A systematic analysis of the current state in the companies that participate in this project has been the starting point for the development and implementation of company-specific approaches. In order to identify objective as well as subjective “lack of integration”, a framework-based analysis of the current state has been combined with a participatory workshop approach.

3. Participatory analysis of the current state

The procedure for the analysis of the current state should lead to a description of the present situation, which can be accepted by all different groups in the organization. From this description, it should be possible to deploy a practical course of action and first steps for realizing a customized overall change concept. Because, some time ago, two of the companies within this research project had started to implement Toyota-style production systems, a special attention during the analysis has been turned to system elements that have already been implemented. Another focal point should be the question of how change initiatives have been put into practice in the past.

The “Integration Framework” described below is at the core of this approach, which aims at checking the

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