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The balanced change card: A framework for designing and assessing organizational change processes

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ABSTRACT: The Balanced Change Card (BCC) is a multi-perspective and dynamic framework for change management. In our view, change management encompasses both the design of the total change process cycle and the assessment of the effectiveness of this design. The BCC draws on the works of Parsons (1959) and Quinn (1983; 1996). They identified respectively four system functions and four effectiveness models, i.e. the adaptive function/open system perspective, the maintenance function/human-relations perspective, the goal-attainment function/rational goal perspective, and the integrative/internal processes perspective. Translated into a model for balanced change management, four central issues emerge: the domain of change, the staffing of change, the planning of change, and the governance of change. The multiple perspectives of the BCC help to create a comprehensive understanding of the complex, pluralistic change management phenomenon by integrating the often partial and one-sided viewpoints of stakeholders in the change process. Each perspective sheds light on specific conditions for success, on actions needed to attain this success, and on effectiveness criteria used to determine the degree to which the critical success conditions have actually been attained. It is argued that the relevance of actions and criteria shifts along the perspectives during the life cycle of the change process. By using the BCC model as a source of reflection and learning, change managers will be assisted in choosing a well considered course of action and set of evaluation criteria, and will be safeguarded against unbalanced activity and assessment.

'Our favoured ways of seeing are based on images or metaphors that provide partial and one-sided viewpoints, but a comprehensive understanding of any situation always rests in an ability to 'see' from multiple perspectives' (Quinn & Cameron, 1988: 238).

The process of change in organizations is a supremely risky undertaking, which makes an unusually heavy demand on the organizational abilities of the change manager (Beer, Eisenstatt & Spector, 1992; Kotter, 1995). The change manager is responsible for shaping and assessing the change process. Organization and management literature however, offers but few empirically substantiated guidelines for the management of complex change processes. The opinion is generally shared that the success of change processes is determined by the degree to which consistency or balance is established between the respective aspects (Miles & Snow, 1994; Van de Ven & Drazin, 1985; Bouman et al., 1995; Huizing, Koster & Bouman, 1997; Boonstra, 1991), amongst others. Nevertheless, there is little mention of practical 'hand holds' which would assist one in achieving a balanced blend of change actions and change evaluation criteria.

One primary reason for the lack of collective change management knowledge, is the general lack of structured evaluations of change processes (Grover, Jeong & Teng, 1998; Winch, 1997). Implicit hypotheses regarding effective change approaches are seldom made explicit and tested (Quinn et al., 1996; Pinto & Kharbanda, 1996). Change managers often make their choices intuitively, and base their directives on the basis of ‘gut feeling’. In practice, change management processes can all too often be characterized as 'black boxes', and insight into the conditions that lead to the success or failure of change initiatives tends to remain limited (De Leeuw, 1994).

Without overestimating the programmability of complex organizational change, we subscribe to the view of Cozijnsen & Vrakking (1992: 240) that “managing complex change trajectories must not be characterized by intuitive pragmatism or by 'do it yourself' approaches which stem wholly from a form of change enthusiasm”. Scientific substantiation must form the basis for recommendations regarding the management of complex change processes. To that end, more energy will have to be devoted to the development of a reliable and valid set of instruments with which to shape and assess change processes in a balanced fashion (Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Van Aken, 1994).

This article presents one such instrument - the Balanced Change Card - which can offer support to change managers. The Balanced Change Card is an integral, dynamic framework for managing change processes in a balanced fashion. On the one hand, the Balanced Change Card affords insight into the design of the change process, by analyzing change actions taken. On the other hand, the Balanced Change Card offers an overview of the course of the change process, based on a number of essential evaluation criteria. Since the Balanced Change Card regards change management actions and their eventual results as two sides of the same coin and explicitly couples the two, by using this instrument, the knowledge regarding successful change approaches can be systematically increased.

The Balanced Change Card is a conceptual framework, and can serve as a theoretical foundation for empirical research. We will illustrate the practical application possibilities of the Balanced Change Card by way of a 'mini-case'.

This article is built-up as follows. In paragraph 1, we begin with the theoretical substantiation of the concept of change management. Paragraph 2 pinpoints how change managers can attain a balanced blend of change management actions, based on Parsons' system-function model (Parsons, 1959). In paragraph 3, Quinn & Rohrbaugh's four perspectives on effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) form the point of departure in the compilation of a cohesive set of change management evaluation criteria. As both models are based on the same logic and therefore can be seamlessly joined, we present a framework in which the design and the evaluation of change process form a coherent whole. Given that change management is a dynamic and continuous issue, paragraph 4 will illustrate the shift in importance of specific design parameters and evaluation criteria, based on the Quinn & Cameron life cycle model (Quinn & Cameron, 1983), during the different change-process phases. The article closes with a summary and a number of conclusions.

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1. Change Management

The management of change processes encompasses the specification of the change content as well as the specification of the change process (Bedeian, 1983). This is also referred to as the design and implementation issue, in which the quality of the new organization design and the quality of the resulting design implementation together determine the ultimate success of the change process (De Leeuw, 1994; Bouman et al., 1995; Cozijnsen & Vrakking, 1992).

The change management discipline is responsible for the organization of the design process, the organization of the implementation process, the mutual attunement of these two, and for the coordination with the 'regular' organization and its environment (Van Aken, 1994). The change management function must ensure that the regular organization takes on the desired form within a given time span, under specific environmental conditions. To this end, specific organizational provisions must be in place, which are aligned to the nature of the change process and to the context in which this process takes place. The establishment of a project organization is a frequently occurring example of such a provision, but another interpretation of change management is to choose to conduct change within the extant organization.

Thus, the change management function comprises the integration of people, expedients and methods, working as one towards the realization of one or more change objectives, according to a structure and set of rules.

1.1 A systems perspective

We choose a system approach for the change management phenomenon. The system approach is a common and validated perspective on the functioning of organizations, and offers insight and 'grip' when designing and evaluating the change management system. Using this perspective, it becomes possible to apply general organizational principles to the change management function. According to De Leeuw (1994), design theory is also largely serviceable when designing the change organization.

The change management system can be regarded as a sub-system of the extant organization. The extant organization thus forms the environment in which the change-organization operates. The products that the change-organization delivers are the actual changes themselves (e.g. changes in strategy, structure, management and information systems, technology, and culture). The primary process of the change organization - the change process itself - is principally temporary (although increasingly continual) in nature, and forms a dynamic link between the present and the future.

The system approach makes it possible to view the change management system explicitly from different perspectives, and spotlights relevant causal links (De Leeuw, 1994). Each perspective on reality leads to a

different interpretation of the phenomena that occur. Depending on their 'Weltanschauung' (Checkland, 1981), managers

1. differ in the problems that they anticipate (for example, exceeding the targeted time span versus the origination of conflict situations),
2. place value on different results (for example, budget disciplines versus uncomplicated collaboration), and consequently,
3. opt for different actions (for example, stricter financial planning versus more group meetings).

The perspective utilized reflects two important underlying choices in regard to the design and evaluation of the change-process (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983):

1. Does the manager place emphasis on control or flexibility?;
2. Does the manager focus attention on internal or external aspects?

In order to create balance, it is incumbent on the manager to achieve a positive exchange between both dimensions. "To remain viable, organizations have to keep several dimensions in balance: each of these dimensions is anchored by opposing concepts, such as consensus and dissension, or planning and opportunism. So keeping them in balance requires multiple processes that contest with one another" (Miles & Snow, 1988: 68). Thus, change managers must develop a change management system that is sufficiently controllable without becoming rigid, as well as having sufficient thought to spare for internal aspects, without disregarding the external environment.

2. Designing change management systems in a balanced fashion

There is no 'one best way' to shape complex change trajectories, no standard recipe for success (Bertsch & Williams, 1994; Carnall, 1995; De Leeuw, 1994). The design of the change management system must be determined dependant on contingencies, hence, on the conditions in which it must function. What is more, it is not a given that only one optimal design is viable under specific conditions. There is more than one road that leads to Rome. As a rule, these different roads comprise a pattern or blend of decisions and actions, which together determine the design of the change process. Since the effectiveness of an organization is presumably most strongly determined by the entire configuration, rather than by any individual component, it is only possible to understand the influence of individual components by examining the entire pattern (Khandwalla, 1977).

Parsons' system-function model (Parsons, 1959) offers handholds when designing the change-organization. His theory dictates that each organizational system must meet up to four prerequisites in order to be able to

function. Consequently, it is also incumbent on the change management system to meet up to the following four prerequisites (see Figure 1), namely, to introduce mechanisms:

a. to realize the timely adaptation to change requirements and to meet the priorities of concerned parties (adaptive function). We refer to this as change definition;

b. to guarantee goal and results-oriented change endeavors (goal-realization function). We refer to this as change design;

c. to bring groups of people together in change-teams and to transform them into harmonious units (pattern maintenance and tension-management function). We refer to this as change staffing;

d. to safeguard the management of the change process through the application of rules (integrative function). We refer to this as change governance.

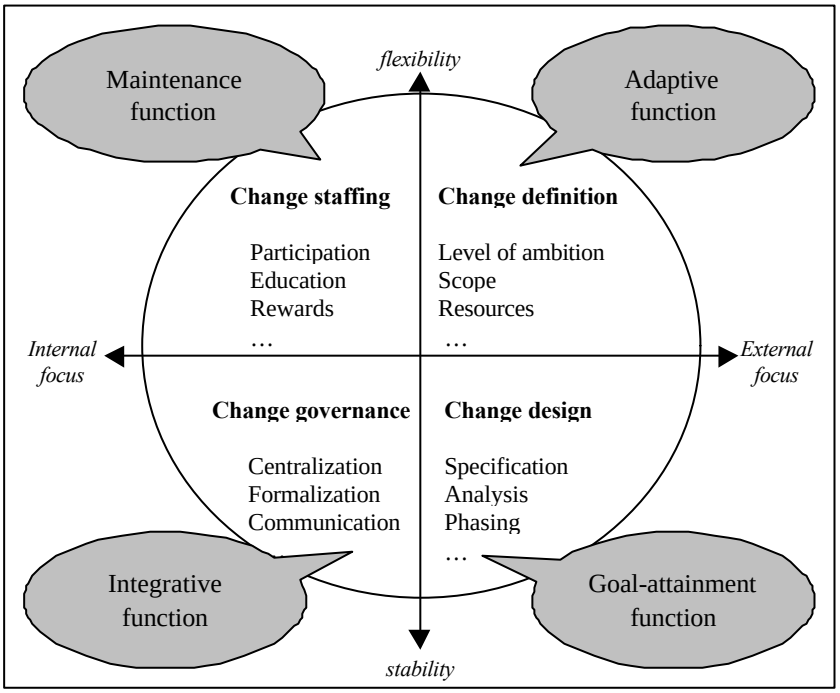

Figure 1 Shaping the change management system: four basic functions

These prerequisites or system-functions can be regarded as the critical success conditions for the change management system. The four functions are outlined below.

2.1 Adaptive function: the change manager as a mediator

The change management system must be designed in such a way, that changes both intended and realized are respectively legitimized and accepted. In order to stimulate involvement and to create the availability of workable expedients, certain measures must be instituted, such as collective diagnoses, scenario planning, political lobbying and information conferences (Bertsch & Williams, 1994). Cited critical success factors are

'strong urgency', 'clear and shared vision', 'powerful coalition' and 'strong top-management involvement'. Here, the manager assumes the role of negotiator and mediator (Quinn et al., 1996).

2.2 Goal-realization function: the change manager as a producer

The change management system must be designed in such a way as to attain an optimum result with a minimum of resources. In order to promote achievement and results-oriented behavior, measures must be instituted, such as the specification and quantification of change objectives and results, the phasing of change activities, the establishment of milestones and the conducting of rational analyses (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1996; Arnold et al., 1994). In literature, these measures crop up under critical success factors such as 'well defined projects', 'clear project plans' and 'plans for short-term results'. The manager now assumes the role of producer (Quinn et al., 1996).

2.3 Maintenance function: the change manager as a teambuilder

The change management system must be designed in such a way as to promote the origination of solid change-teams. To promote openness, co-operation, loyalty and motivation, the application of measures in the areas of selection and participation, training and education, teambuilding and conflict solving, is a priority. The mentioned critical success factors such as 'presentable representation of work-floor personnel', 'exempt project participants' and 'leadership in the hands of line management', are also indicative of this. The manager hereby assumes the role of team-builder, mentor, coach and stimulator (Quinn et al., 1996).

2.4 Integrative function: the change manager as a controller

The change management system must be designed in such a way as to create stability. A sense of stability and control can be attained through measures such as the definition of roles and responsibilities, the formalization and standardization of the communications and decision-making process, and the documentation of the change process's development (Bultsma, 1989). And thus, oft mentioned critical success factors are 'continuous progress-monitoring' and 'timely feedback'. The manager now assumes the role of coordinator and controller (Quinn et al., 1996).

By using the Balanced Change Card-model as a source of reflection, managers will be assisted in choosing a well considered set of change measures, and will be safeguarded against unbalanced activity. One speaks of unbalanced change management when it demonstrates a high degree of blank spots (measures which are missing) or black holes (measures which consume an unreasonable amount of energy). The following example serves as an illustration.

An example from practice of unbalanced design:

In a Dutch insurance company that had initiated a very ambitious and complex change process, actions were taken which were mainly focused on controlling the change process, hence, on the goal-realization and integration functions. Countless project plans were developed, requiring months of work, which were then described in substantial reports. A complex matrix project structure was also erected, with countless internal deliberation organs, resulting mainly in a gigantic expansion of the conference circuit. The measures which promote flexibility and which serve to create involvement and close co-operation remained relatively under-exposed. Little thought was bestowed on the participation of work-floor personnel and line managers, on co-operation between project teams, or on the need for education and training. Co-workers were summarily informed about the necessity, nature and results of the change process via mass information meetings and bulletins. Out of this chosen blend of measures arose a rigid, non-motivational change management system, which ultimately became strangled in its own need to exercise control.

The compilation of a balanced blend of measures for designing the change process is the first side of the Balanced Change Card 'coin'. But it must also be determined whether the measures introduced deliver the desired results. To this end, the following paragraph sheds light on the flip side of the Balanced Change Card coin: the evaluation criteria.

3. Balanced evaluation of change management systems

Effective management of change processes is impossible, if one is not able at least to judge if the change process is heading in the right direction. As complex change processes seldom have a programmable character, and are largely heuristic by nature, constant adjustment will be required during the change process (Pendlebury et al., 1998). Periodical, systematic evaluation of the change process development is absolutely necessary, as such intervallic evaluation delivers important input for the renewal of the change management system (Cozijnsen & Vrakking, 1992). Evaluation is necessary not only to safeguard directives and adjustments (first order learning), but also to draw lessons from experience gained (second order learning). The creation of learning moments during and after the change process can offer the insight needed to boost the success of future change initiatives. Thus, evaluation is not a one-time only management task, but rather, a continual task.

In practice however, it is apparent that the evaluation of change management methods is an often neglected or sloppily performed task (Arnold et al., 1994). Systematic evaluation of change management practices regularly remains in omission, as a result of a lack of expertise, time and money, fear of reprisal and unspecific success criteria (Bedeian, 1983). Methodological problems (such as the variability and measurement of objectives and critical success conditions), impede the evaluation and heighten the risk of remaining stuck in untested preconceptions regarding the efficacy of introduced measures (Van der Bij & Kempen, 1990; De Leeuw, 1994). The evaluation of the (intervallic) change-process results, while not taking into consideration how these were attained, makes it impossible for the organization members to learn which activities lead to either failure

or success (Bertsch & Williams, 1994). However, if the objectives were not attained, that is not necessarily to say that the change management system was not workable. And if the objectives were attained, the question is if this came about thanks to or despite the change management approach (De Leeuw, 1994).

The Quinn & Rohrbaugh model (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) offers a practical framework for the identification of criteria used to measure the effectiveness of the change management system. Based on four perspectives, they give a categorization of the effectiveness criteria used for the evaluation of organizations. By making use of various criteria, the evaluation assumes a more reliable character than when using only one criterion (Price, 1972), since "to ignore criteria in any of the models is to have only a partial view of performance" (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983: 375).
The four perspectives each paint a different schematic picture of reality. These perspectives - the Open System -, the Rational Goals -, the Human Relations -, and the Internal-Processes perspectives - bear close relation to the aforementioned system functions, respectively, 'Adaptation', 'Goal-Realization', 'Pattern Maintenance and Conflict Management' and 'Integration', and will be explained below (also refer to figure 2).

3.1 open-system perspective

'Are the changes supported and (ultimately) accepted?' and 'What amount of personnel, financial and emotional room is generated in order to enable the start of (new) change activities?' These points of consideration are relevant in the open-system perspective. The criteria are, amongst others, the degree of support for and acceptance of the changes, and the degree to which the change-organization acquires (extra) resources from the environment or regular organization for future trajectories.

3.2 rational-goals perspective

The directedness and objectives-realization are foremost in the rational-goal perspective. Core issues are, for example: 'Does the quality of the realized changes actually meet up to what was targeted?' and 'Were the changes also realized within budgets and deadlines?' Criteria that fall under this perspective are to be found in abundance in project-management literature (Pinto & Slevin, 1988; Groote, Hugenholtz-Sasse & Slikker, 1990).

3.3 Human relations perspective

Cohesion and development are foremost in the human-relation perspective. Here, the important issues are 'Is there evidence of close co-operation within and between teams?' and 'Do the participants display flexibility, creativity and satisfaction?' Criteria that fall under this perspective are, amongst others, team spirit, non-attendance and development indicators, mobility and work satisfaction. The socio-technical system approach

explicitly places these types of effectiveness-criteria in the foreground (Mumford, 1996; De Sitter, 1994; Van Amelsvoort & Scholtes, 1993, amongst other).

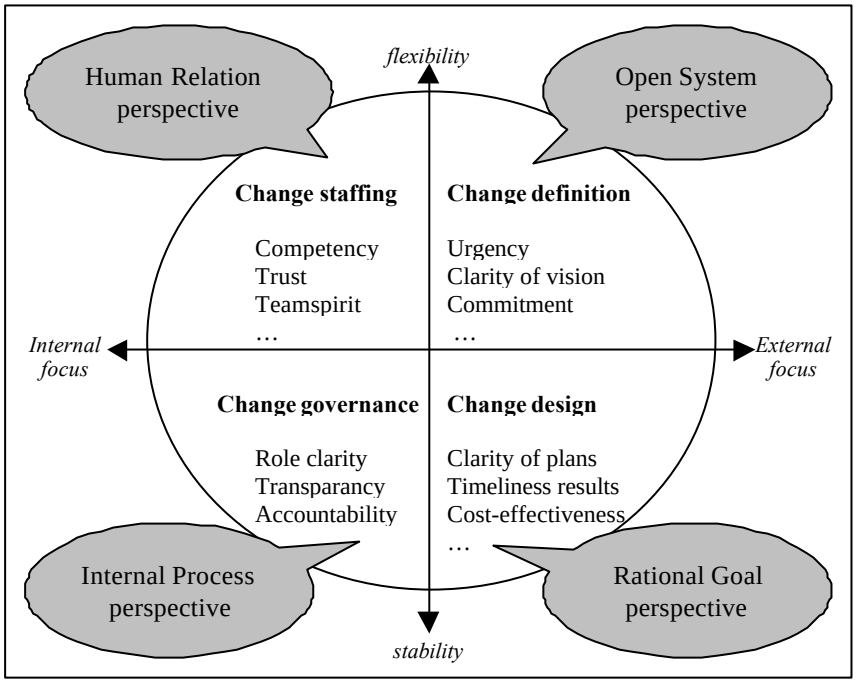

Figure 2 Assessing the change management system: four effectiveness perspectives

3.4 Internal-processes perspective

Lastly, the primary criteria in the internal-processes perspective consist of control and stability. The core questions here (Bultsma, 1989) are, 'Is there evidence of transparent communication and decision-making processes?', 'Do these processes take place in a timely fashion?', and 'Can people be held accountable for results attained?'.

By reflecting on the Balanced Change Card-model, change managers are able to compile a cohesive set of evaluation criteria, and can ensure the creation of a balanced and educational picture of how the change-management system functions. By paying attention to all of the effectiveness perspectives, a one-sided orientation on specific criteria will be prevented, and consequently, one-sided behavior will be avoided (for example, chasing after results at the cost of team spirit). Furthermore, it becomes possible to determine whether the introduced measures also produce the desired effects, and which direction to take with corrective measures. In this way, the Balanced Change Card acts as a 'dashboard' for change managers. To illustrate this, we will further examine the above-mentioned insurance company.

An example from practice of unbalanced evaluation:

The evaluation of the change process and change management system of the above mentioned insurance company was also characterized by a strong desire for control. Progress was monitored only on the basis of traditional project-management criteria, which are also to be found in the rational-goals perspective: duration, budget and at times, quality. An explicit, systematic evaluation based on criteria from the remaining perspectives did not take place, namely, criteria such as involvement and enthusiasm of participants, or availability of people and expedients, and room to maneuver herein. The result of this one-sided evaluation was that corrective measures were introduced too late, and were often limited to more of the usual: new project proposals, more conference situations and so forth.

We postulate that managers who use both sides of the Balanced Change Card-coin as a touchstone when designing and evaluating the change management system, will sooner attain a state of balance and success. Of course, balance is not a static concept in the sense that not all measures and criteria will retain equal importance or relevance during the course of change-trajectories. A dynamic life-cycle perspective can clarify this. This takes a central place in the last paragraph.

4. Dynamic use of the balanced change card

We have demonstrated how the Balanced Change Card can be utilized as a generic framework in shaping and assessing change management systems. On the one hand, the Balanced Change Card sheds light on the essential change management functions that must be carried out and on the types of change measures that must be instituted to this end. On the other hand, the Balanced Change Card takes account of the different perspectives on effectiveness which are deemed to be critical to the success of organizational change. However, the design and evaluation of the change management system must be patterned to fit the specific situation. This paragraph will make use of a generic life-cycle model for fine-tuning the Balanced Change Card to different phases in the change process.

Just as organizations pass through a certain life cycle, so too does the change organization have its own phases of development. Generally, the organization of the change process begins on a small scale with a few pioneers, continues by growing into a full-fledged change management system, and is eventually de-installed or then otherwise re-installed.

A relation seems to exist between the life-cycle phase, and the importance of specific effectiveness criteria (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Specific effectiveness criteria are dominant, depending on the life-cycle phase. When the perspective is one of guidance, then the measures that concur with this perspective will necessarily be of added importance. By adapting the Balanced Change Card to the lifecycle, it becomes possible to provide a better management-information facility, and hence, to provide better management. 'To assess effectiveness without using outdated or inappropriate criteria (i.e., criteria that do not match the stage of the organization's development) produces inaccurate information about the true level of organizational effectiveness and the major criteria guiding organizational action' (Quinn & Cameron, 1983: 41). Therefore, a

dynamic approach when designing and evaluating the organization of the change is a must. This means that change managers must make explicit those factors that are of the greatest consequence, and determine which consequence-factors apply to which effectiveness-criteria. An indication for the shifting of consequence during the change management system's life cycle is outlined in figure 3 and discussed below.

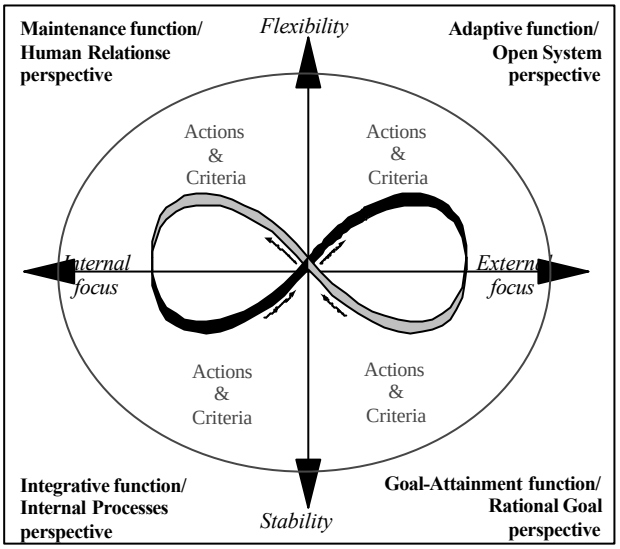

Figure 3 A Dynamic View of the BCC: shifting importance of actions and criteria

4.1 Phase 1: starting up

The first phase of the change process is characterized by the kick off of the change organization. Measures that are critical in this phase, such as determining the urgency and direction of the change, and obtaining support and resources for the change, are focused namely on the adaptive function. Essential evaluation criteria arise from the open-system perspective, and concern the degree to which external support is obtained. The change management approach can be deemed to be effective when sufficient 'critical change mass' has formed, and when the primary stakeholders have developed a shared and solid vision.

4.2 Phase 2: Fitting out and building up

In the second phase, the change-organization is outfitted and built up. In this situation, success appears to be largely determined by the degree to which ambitions are clearly specified and translated into concrete actions, by the degree to which representative participation, training and problem solving take place, and by the degree to which co-ordination and progress monitoring take place. The goal-realization, pattern-maintenance and integrative functions are now central. In this phase, the attention is focused on the effectiveness criteria from the rational-goals, human relations and internal-processes perspectives. The change-organization is effective when it develops itself in a results-oriented way, is swift to make decisions, and when strong leadership and co-operation prevail.

4.3 Phase 3: terminating or re-starting

The last phase is typified by the institutionalization and deconstruction of the change-organization, eventually followed by its reconstruction. Testing the attained results against the rational-goals perspective (the ex-post evaluation), returns the center of gravity to the open-system perspective, where adjustments to objectives and priorities are made, or where commitment must be re-cultivated for new change initiatives. The change-organization is effective when the primary stakeholders pass a (hopefully positive) collective judgement on the process and its results. Depending on this judgement, the (new) change manager prepares for a new change process.

5. Summary and conclusions

Large-scale, long-term organizational change processes require well considered management. Managers of complex change trajectories must not only be responsible for a cohesive design of the changes as regards content. They must also organize the change process itself and make balanced choices regarding the application of people, expedients and methods.

The Balanced Change Card offers a positive outcome both in the design of the change management system, as well as in its evaluation. The Balanced Change Card offers a multi-perspective on the change management system. Each perspective sheds light on specific conditions for success, on actions needed to attain this success, and on effectiveness criteria used to determine the degree to which the critical success conditions have actually been attained. With the assistance of the Balanced Change Card, change managers are able to test their chosen blend of actions for balance. Consequently, ‘blank spots’ and ‘black holes’ in the design of the change management system can be avoided. By applying measures in all four system-functions, it becomes possible to meet up to the critical success conditions of the change-organization. Furthermore, by using the Balanced Change Card, it becomes possible to compile a set of evaluation criteria to offer balanced insight into the functioning of the change management system. Testing against the four different effectiveness perspectives guarantees the exposure of each aspect to close scrutiny.

The design and evaluation of the change management system is a dynamic issue. During the development of the change process, certain actions and effectiveness criteria can come to carry greater weight. A 'grip' is offered with our life-cycle model, for the fine-tuning of the change-organization through time. It is commendable for managers to stress different types of change actions and effectiveness-criteria during each different change-process phase, but they must also maintain awareness of all perspectives in order to apply the appropriate measures in a timely fashion.

The added value of the Balanced Change Card as a management tool can be summarized as:

1. offering a frame of reference for the functioning of the change management system;
2. functioning as a communication vehicle when giving direction to the change process;
3. offering a foundation for an change management information system;
4. creating a learning-instrument through the comparison of approaches to change;
5. offering a foundation for an evaluation and reward-instrument for project teams.

The ‘well weighed’ Balanced Change Card can act as a powerful management tool during the entire change process, as it places managers in a position to localize problems, evaluate situations and to choose appropriate directions and actions. As a vehicle for discussion, the framework enables different parties (such as top management, line management and work floor-personnel) to systematically participate in the evaluation of the change (management) process. With consistent use of the Balanced Change Card, it becomes possible to test - often implicit – prevailing assumptions regarding the successful design of change-organizations, and to create far-reaching insight into the importance of different actions and evaluation criteria. Accordingly, the Balanced Change Card becomes an instrument for learning that enables change managers to broaden their knowledge regarding the effective management of change processes.

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