Managing continuity and change in organizations

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DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL REFLEXIVITY

Organizational change is a crucial feature of organizational life and has become subject to intense organizational planning: internal units dedicated to change management and innovation management are typical installments in modern organizations and there are plenty of approaches and numerous models to foster innovation and organizational change. However, it is argued that change has become a permanent condition of organizational reality and that innovation occur in ever shorter cycles. In order to deal with this situation, organizations need the ability to manage change as a constant condition in all organizational areas. This comprises the ability to identify where and when what kind of change might be appropriate and which approaches and strategies might be helpful in specific situations. It also comprises the ability to find a balance between stability and change to avoid an overestimation of change. Moreover, organizations must be able to question standard procedures regularly and proactively. Lastly, organizations need a repertoire that allows them to create internal spaces to think and act in novel ways.

> How can organizations develop the ability to change constantly, reflexively, and from within?

This organizational ability to constantly question standard procedures and develop productive and creative ways of exploration is called institutional reflexivity. It refers to an organization's ability to systematically question its routines, create interventions, and use the resulting ruptures in a productive way (see Moldaschl, 2007). The goal of institutional reflexivity is to enable organizational change and innovation; consequently, successful institutional reflexivity results in systematic change.

How can organizations apply institutional reflexivity in practice? In order to explore this question, we have studied various organizational answers and efforts to deal with the challenge of constant change in different companies. In our research, we identified different forms of institutional reflexivity that vary in multiple dimensions. All these forms are means to manage both continuity and change. Here, we present two concrete approaches of institutional reflexivity.

CASE STUDY 1:
EXPERIMENTAL SPACES

Experimental spaces seek to coordinate the collective exploration of new forms of organizing as part of everyday organizational life. Experimental spaces offer a structure, methods, and tools that allow organization members to innovate and test new approaches. Experimental spaces are not limited to specific matters and can be used in various areas as, for instance, for alternative procedures for product development or the exploration of new ways of working. As long-term projects that explicitly open up a protected space for experimentation, they aim at fostering the creative and incremental development of new ideas. Such an experimental space was set up in a project at a Digital Service Provider in Germany. The goal of the project was to learn about flexible ways of working: how do employees organize their working days? How can this be put in line with formal regulations? How can digital tools help to coordinate and distribute work? For a period of 12 months, groups from different divisions of the company were invited to develop new ideas, discuss new standards and develop a new software tool. This project was not limited to a specific place. Rather, teams collaborated virtually across organizational boundaries. Crucial to this project was the idea of an open exploration and the integration into the regular organizational practice. During and after the testing period, a team responsible for the supervision compared and evaluated the different approaches and made suggestions for company-wide regulations.

CASE STUDY 2:
INDUSTRIAL MAKERSPACES

Industrial Makerspaces are fixed spaces in organizations which are decoupled from production and do not interfere with day-to-day routines. They are permanent spaces in which novel technologies can be applied and tested, while knowledge is supposed to be acquired in an experimental and playful way. Then, proven tools and newly developed knowledge can be transferred to day-to-day work routines. The example of a medium-sized engineering and construction company demonstrates that such spaces can serve as a meeting point for exchange among external and internal stakeholders. Furthermore, technologies can be explored and tested before eventually using them at workplaces and in day-to-day production. This enables the company to experiment with new approaches decoupled from crucial work routines and reflect on the advantages and challenges resulting from these new approaches. Therefore, this fixed space brings institutionalized reflexivity into practice as it enables different actors within the company to constantly monitor and reflect on the implications coming with new approaches.

CONCLUSION

These two case studies are examples for the development of institutional reflexivity. Other forms of institutional reflexivity we identified include makeathons, work-integrated learning approaches and prototyping in day-to-day work routines. These forms can serve as a basis and inspiration in order to enable constant change and the reflexive management of innovation cycles. For a more comprehensive list visit the use case on knowledge management on http://innovations.sfb768.de/.

ADVANCED LITERATURE

[1]   Gammel, Josef H.; Koltun, Gennadiy; Buchholz, Johan; Drewlani, Tobias; Wissel, Juliane; Hollauer, Christoph; Kugler, Katharina G.; Zaggl, Michael and Birgit Vogel-Heuser (2019 - forthcoming): A Framework Integrating Technical, Social, and Managerial Aspects of Effective Knowledge Management. In: Proceedings ECKM 2019.

[2]   Moldaschl, Manfred (2007): Institutional Reflexivity. An institutional approach to measure innovativeness of firms. In: Papers and Preprints of the Department of Innovation Research and Sustainable Resource Management (BWL IX), Chemnitz University of Technology, 2.