

## STABILISING CHANGE

Strategic team development as a management task to stabilise organisational  
development processes,

or

how to remain stable during processes involving change

## 1 The balance between change and stabilisation in organisational development processes

The demands facing teams undergoing development have changed radically over the last 10 years: the era of the illusionary positive drive of the "group" applies less today than it did in the 70s, for example. At the same time there is an increased requirement for cooperation. The problems within organisations have become more complex, so that the problem solving capacity of individuals working alone is completely insufficient. Cooperation and team compatibility are rated as decisive competitive elements in the key competence of the company.

For me, the attraction of researching the effectiveness of team development, especially taking account of the transfer performance (stabilisation and generalisation of behaviour), lies in clients' increasing demand for effectiveness and efficiency. The teams should generate innovation, offer a base, increase capacity, increase scope and increase control: the tendency for increase is enormous.

In specialist literature there is very little information on controlling the stabilisation phase or on which role an applied method (such as team development workshops) can play.

That is why the following questions interest me in the practice of team development:

- What kind of support can the organisational development process provide so that both change and stabilisation are effective?
- Do these consultation services actually promote innovation, or could they have a retarding effect?
- How do managers visualise the control of change in order to achieve successful stabilisation?

The opportunity arose to assess what happens in practice and, taking several levels into account, investigate the effectiveness of team development in the stabilisation phase.

## **2 Putting change and stabilisation into practice**

### **Setting priorities for change and stabilisation**

Taking a look at organisational development in practice, there are not only differences in the instruments used in each case, but also in the logic behind the change in each organisation.

Due to their affiliation to a branch and therefore specific systems and environments, organisations form inevitable priorities in self and remote observation. The priorities selected provide the structure for dominant criteria of self observation, self description and the resulting actions relating to status quo, change and stabilisation (Wimmer 2004, p. 71).

This has the effect in organisational development practice that you need to clearly define the understanding of the management of an organisation, precisely what is meant by change and stabilisation (including the need for change and stabilisation), in order to establish the starting point of the self description.

### **Company structure to promote integration as core objective of change**

As far as Wimmer is concerned, the maintenance of a company culture to promote integration is the greatest challenge for future change dynamics. Wimmer observes that specialisation within the company continues to increase due to strengthened customer orientation. The subsystems that occur as a result need to be able to be integrated again. "Indirect forms of control are required here that are based on the accepted features of the company's culture, which imply continuous work on the identity of the company involving a synergy-based communication between various units within the organisation and, as a result, select and maintain the necessary form of communication. This involves securing permanent involvement in questions relating to the future with the objective of anchoring awareness as widely as possible in the organisation so that our route leads through an uncertain, risk-laden and yet worthwhile future; worthwhile both for individuals from their personal perspective as well as for the company as a whole. Both levels of involvement must be continuously maintained so that the interpretation that has become indispensable today continues to be ensured" (Wimmer 2004, p 99).

### **Enabling organisational stability through identity formation**

In order to ensure the stability of the organisation during a simultaneous high level of change, the formation of consistent integration, purpose and communication structures is necessary. This offers members of the organisation a stable relationship structure for identity, from which new energy for change can be obtained.

Organisational identity is a construction that mirrors the social dimension of an organisation, especially the image it has of itself. "The durability of organisational identity needs to be critically assessed regarding the increasing dynamics of organisational development wherever it relates to purely identity content. What follows is therefore not based on a static perception of consistent content, but on a durability in the sense of an ability to integrate new central identity elements into the existing structure" (Schumacher 2003, p 49). What is durable (or stable) is answered and assessed from the point of view of the members of the organisation. According to Reger (Schumacher 2003, p 50), the key dimensions of organisational identity are:

- (1) Homogeneity: degree to which members of an organisation accept a shared set of beliefs relating to the organisation.
- (2) Intensity: the strength of the beliefs and degree of their positive effects
- (3) Complexity: quantity of beliefs and number of possible identities
- (4) Abstractness: extent to which the identity is formulated in abstract language
- (5) Content: what the identity contains
- (6) Context: the internal and external contest and the evolution history

## **Steering the process of change**

Change is successful if it rapidly establishes sustainable relationship- and communications processes to develop further improvement potential. This is providing that there is a chance for a collective identity to develop. From a practical point of view both time and space are required here (for example using a set of team exercises, tuned to support a communication network across the vertical and horizontal hierarchies), to allow the people involved to digest the development emotionally as well. And experience has shown that precisely the planning of these accompanying measures is often overlooked by everybody involved.

Psychoanalysis rates forgetfulness as a slip-up having a high impact on further development. There are assumptions taken from observations in practice for this kind of "forgetfulness": change scenarios are accompanied by decisions, emotions relating to loss and the disappearance of other opportunities. If insufficient attention is paid to emotions then the organisation becomes depersonalised, which comes at a cost. Groups as well as organisations undergo phases of development. Steps towards the development of a group take place when the group manages to take joint decisions in a conflict-fraught environment. This implies that conflicts are a requirement for development. (Schenk 1995, p 4) For the ability to work, i.e. the ability to work objectively and with process-orientation, it is especially important that conflicts – between dependency and independence - are processed psychodynamically. Each decision taken from outside demands the understanding and independent action of the people, group or organisation that make it possible to live

in dependence. It is therefore not advisable to establish a situation where dependence and independence are seen as either/or consequences; it is better to experience the interplay of both extremes. It then follows that the quality of the change is heavily influenced by the process, the HOW, and not that a decision has been taken (Schumacher 2003, p 368ff). Since the change can be regarded as a process-oriented event involving the implementation of selections and decisions, it is necessary to adapt the decisions to the conditions. Decisions make sense in the context in which they are taken. Experience and observations indicate that decisions taken purely based on external conditions lead to a substantial loss of possible resources for successful transition.

Any change is only as good as its implementation. Change requires intentional stabilisation of the accompanying psychodynamic phenomena and acknowledgement of the prevailing barriers and forces to ensure that workability remains effective.

### Emotions accompany change processes

A "Map of emotions during the change process" by Chapman and Jupp 1992 (in Fatzer et al 2002, p 14), shows important and typical phases for people, teams and overall systems.

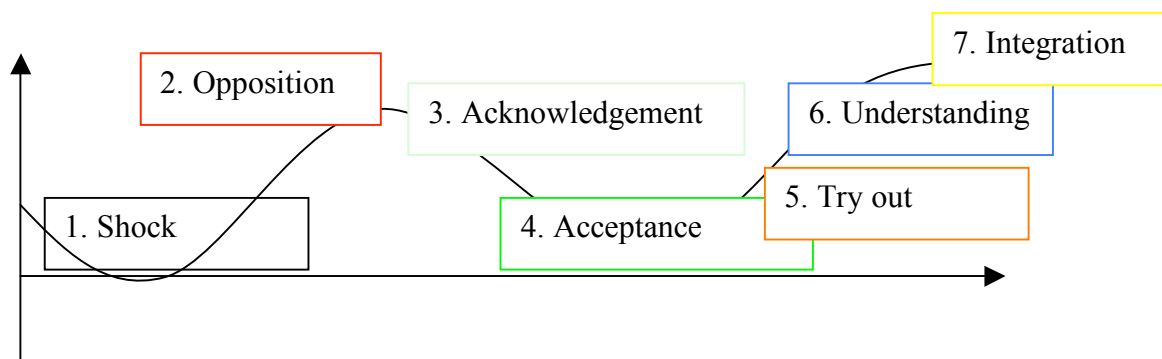


Fig. 1: Emotional phases of a change process according to Chapman & Jupp (Fatzer et al 2002, p 14)

### Change and stabilisation as a balancing act of contradictions

Steering groups and teams can be described as dilemma management (Neuberger 2002, p 337ff).

The dilemma consists of starkly contrasting thought patterns (Gebert 2004, p 147ff):

- (1) Stability and predictability versus hope and flexibility
- (2) Harmony, confirmation and confidence versus plurality and creative tension
- (3) Differentiation and elitism versus equal opportunities and levelling

- (4) External security, reliability versus individuality, autonomy
- (5) Clarity and certainty versus tolerance and learning capacity

### 3 Assessing managers' perception of stability in organisational development processes

#### 3.1.1 Managers' perception of stability

"Ongoing checks to make sure that what we are doing is to do with the actual tasks of the organisation, or if we have lost sight of our objectives." (TB1/116, 117,118, 119)

"Not always the same people should be involved. A certain trust in the fundamentals is needed to create stability." (TB1/129)

#### 3.1.2 Perception of organisational development processes

Managers perceive the pressure and fear associated with initiating organisational development using systematic methods as stressful. "People are laughed at if they are unable to respond immediately to the change." (TB2/19) "Younger people welcome organisational changes. They are also laughed at if they are unable to keep pace. (TB2/17)

All interviewees mentioned the simultaneousness of controlling stability and instability during organisational development processes. "Instability on its own is not good, but serves as a vehicle to regain the stability needed to meet the required demands." (TB 2/229) From this statement it is clear that aim of instability in organisational development processes is to meet altered requirements.

#### 3.1.3 Management teams

From the statements it is clear that all managers interviewed agree that team-based work is a stabilising resource, especially for managers. "What helps incredibly in instable situations is "the group". That a strong, a very strong commitment is established, which is called upon again and again by the other colleagues, very firmly, and is made quite clear, to stand up, take responsibility for instability, but only when the others are really behind you. Really stand behind you." (TB3/224)

The significance of stable management teams (in the sense of confidence) for change processes is mentioned throughout. "Stability means to me that you can work in a group, really work together, cushioning and yet really achieving. If I weren't part of this team I would stop doing this job. Under this pressure, what for?" (TB 3/ 475)

At the same time minimising the competition between managers plays a significant role, which is connected to resources issues: "We went through different phases of how we could divide up the team. And then we found a solution that the team also thought was great, but we noticed that there was a total imbalance at team leader

level, and that doesn't work. That causes more competition amongst the managers and that's no good. That simply doesn't work." (TB 3/45)

### **3.1.4 Management style**

The text blocks on management style relate to communication issues with employees and within the management teams. "Understanding" and "making clear" are attributed great significance regarding stable management.

"Employees have always been able to come to management with issues and we were always there for them and also invited them to get involved in discussions." (TB 5/417)

### **3.1.5 Socio-communicative aspects of stabilisation**

Confidence is mentioned as highly significant for stability. "Successes, confidence has to be built up, then stability is possible." (TB 6/123) "And there we had to admit that, yes, we as management have made a mistake. (pause) And it was really good that we did that." (TB 6/429) This statement makes clear the importance of management transparency, which cannot be regarded separately from emotions.

### **3.1.6 Personal requirements of managers**

What is surprising is the high proportion of personal statements regarding energy, age and the ability to handle stress. This opens up a whole area that so far has not received much attention. (TB 7/131, 132, 463, 472, 470)

"Stability is also influenced by my personal goals and my development as a manager, that also take my age into account. I don't want to be rated as stupid just because I'm not always in favour of change." (TB7/472)

The statements in this block are weighted with great awareness of responsibility and personal perceptions of controlling processes.

### **3.1.7 Effectiveness of team development workshops**

The effectiveness of team development workshops for sustainable learning is rated very positively on several levels. *"We will find out what needs to be reinforced as the team develops - it's an ongoing process."* (TB 8/456) The solidification and generalisation of structures is mentioned explicitly. "We went on adjusting and modifying but basically we are still working with the structure that was established at the start of the team development." (TB8/112)

### **3.1.8 Meaning, values and types of people in organisations**

"I get my stability as a manager in aligning what I do here with my own personal values." (TB 10/ 221)



The statements from interviews in this block verify the significance of communicated values and the types of people involved for the identity of the organisation. "We can only establish the meaning of the organisation through discussion." (TB10/322)

#### 4. Conclusions for putting into practice:

**Organisational development processes generate a change in behaviour,**

**This requires an above average capability to adapt from managers and is emotionally extremely stressful.**

The fears described, having to tolerate employees' reactions, all these factors indicate that managers must carefully maintain their psychic stability and functional role. Managers as people, and their management skills, are taken to the limit during the emotional evolution of a change process. This gives cause to consider which behaviour a team leader should adopt in such a situation, and which set of skills are required. It is not a good idea to respond with wisdom gleaned from an organisational development textbook. However, it does make sense to work consistently on developing management roles - in the form of Balint groups applying **group supervision methods/coaching for managers** for example. Being given an opportunity to escape from immediate trap situations and gain a critical distance to team culture and the organisation provides insight on what steps to take next.

**Critical scrutiny and feedback at regular stages during the process promotes stability and ongoing team development.**

The scientifically-proven statement by Diether Gebert (compare with section 3.5.2) is frequently confirmed in the interviews.

**Confidence building is the decisive factor.** Confidence is based on continuously analysing one's own activities. Following Deutsch (1976), confidence is present if a person (or a group) becomes open, i.e. vulnerable, to another person (or group).

**The stabilisation phase of the organisational development process works to the extent that managers are prepared to consistently devote themselves to their functional role.**

Relationships between members of an organisation are primarily role relationships. They support the **negotiation of affective participation in management.**