

Objectives of WP7

Summary of WP7.2 Results (Leadership), 2014

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Most accounts of organizational changes are geared towards generic recommendations raising the expectation that managers can follow a standard set of rules regardless of context. As our previous work in WP7.1 demonstrated, this is a problematic simplification of the complexity of employee reactions to organizational changes. In this previous study we identified crucial variations in participants' perceptions of the determinants of change success across countries. This variation was especially striking for the role and characteristics of more or less successful change leaders.

Our main interest in WP7.2 was therefore to explore the context-dependence of change management, i.e., the question, to what extent do cultural differences ask for adaptations in the type of leadership and management process before, during and after changes? More specifically we examined the role of leadership for the success of strategic, large-scale organizational changes as well as for the willingness of police officers to support future changes in their organization.

Methods

Findings in WP7.2 are based on a survey conducted in the 10 COMPOSITE countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, The Netherlands, Spain, Romania and the United Kingdom) between September and December 2013. The survey was largely standardized across countries (i.e., used the same sets of items for the measured concepts), although translated into the respective country language. The survey focused on two aspects: (1) factors influencing the general willingness of police officers to support organizational changes, (2) factors impacting the evaluation of a specific past change project. For this we assessed the role of current and past leader characteristics and features of the organizational environment in terms of roles and structures (leadership substitutes) and justice perceptions (procedural, informational and distributive justice). In total, 3704 police officers completed the survey across all ten countries.

Results

One of the main influences on positive or negative *evaluations of past change processes* was a change leader's expertise in change management, his or her decisiveness and the degree of staff involvement

during the change process. Yet, which of these leader characteristics were (the most) relevant differed across country groups. The main factor influencing the *willingness to support future changes* was positive or negative experiences with past change projects. Further, willingness to support future changes was impacted by the perception of leaders as transformational as well as organizational factors in the form of leadership substitutes and team trust. The importance of these variables varied across countries, indicating that influences on willingness to change depend on the national and/or organizational context. Still, we also found that perceptions of justice, especially in terms of fair distribution of change consequences (labelled distributive justice) and sufficient information during the process (labelled informational justice) were important across all countries.

Implications

Our findings in WP7.2 have a number of implications for the implementation of strategic large-scale changes in police organizations.

1. Firstly, they indicate that change leaders need to be aware that, even if they and their organizations 'do everything right', they also have a battle to fight which is beyond their influence, namely the past history of changes in the organization. If former change leaders did a good job, current change leaders will find it easier to convince followers. Our results thus stress that creating positive change experiences is vital, not only to increase commitment to the current change, but also to avoid negative effects for future changes.
2. We found indications for justice as a 'universal' factor which is important across contexts. This suggests that leaders should aim for consistent and transparent communication throughout the change process and across all levels of the organization (addressing informational justice). Further, organizational change leaders should aim for a fair distribution of the consequences of the change or at least make sure that the negative and positive results of the change remain balanced across employee groups.
3. We found strong indications that there are no generic rules for 'good' or 'bad' leadership during time of changes, which apply to all contexts in the same way. This suggests that the design and implementation of a change project, and here especially leader behaviours and styles, need to be adapted to the expectations of local staff. This requires high sensitivity in all ranks of police management to the local specifics of what constitutes a positive change process in their context. This is especially relevant for multi- or cross-national change projects, which often tend to rely on standardized procedures.
4. This context dependence may also be a challenge, if managers aim to lead change projects in unfamiliar (organizational and/or national) contexts. Leader education and training programs should therefore include country-specific elements that clarify and train for the local requirements of change leaders.