

May too much change kill you?

Lessons from Organisation Studies

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Death – of whom or what?

Do organisations die?

Death of individuals and the withering away of the soul

The amazing world of organisational change:

Environmental change

Goal change and strategic change

Change in organisational architecture

Change in the structuring of processes

Change in technical tools and bureaucratic instruments

Change in recruitment, training, careers

Change in coordination instruments:

- **direct order or supervision**
- **standard formalised rules, operating procedures**
- **standardisation of skills/knowledge**
- **mutual adjustment**
- **cultural control**

Central organisational problems:

- **achieving a fit between organisational tools, architectures, process structuring, coordination instruments and human resources on the one hand – and the environment on the other**
- **giving individual contributors a meaningful place in the organisation**

Two different notions of change:

- **change in strategy = going for a different set of brands and market segments, clients, organisational tools etc.**
- **changing products/services, organisational methods etc. on a continuous basis**

What change is bad for organisational survival?

Repeated and inconsistent strategic change does kill organisations!

And strategic inertia is good for organisations.

Why is that so?

Internally, inconsistency is the worst enemy of success, by causing disorientation, lack of motivation and the departure of well-performing contributors.

Externally, lack of legitimacy is a main cause of declining demand for products and services

But what about organisations that cannot die?

- **early departure or retirement of people for health reasons**
- **demotivation**
- **lack of cooperation in the organisation**

Reasons:

Inconsistency or bad choice of coordination mechanisms

Continuously onerous or stressful work patterns

Bad human resource management

AND: inconsistent or ill-adapted use of coordination mechanisms

Coordination mechanisms:

- **direct order or supervision**
- **standard formalised rules, operating procedures**
- **standardisation of skills/knowledge**
- **mutual adjustment**
- **cultural control**

Lessons:

Do not change coordination mechanisms or tools too frequently!

Only go for change that can be explained and accepted by contributors!

Do not go for schematic change but adapted change!

In a professional organisation, do not go against proven routines and do not work against mutual adjustment and cultural control!