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Can the staff recognition ensure planned process of organizational change?

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Abstract

Purpose – Employee recognition is presented in the literature as a mean to achieve change according to a schedule already established by the management of the enterprise (planning process). Such an approach overlooks the fact that organizational change can be explained by other processes such as the political process, the interpretive process, the incremental process and the complex process. Each of these processes offers specific characteristics of change. Through this research, the author tries to answer the following question, while driving an organizational change project does employee recognition favour a change according to the planned process? The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – To answer the research question, a qualitative research case study is conducted within Basic Bank, a banking leader institution on the Tunisian market. The author analysed a proposed change induced by the implementation of a Global Banking System.

Findings – The results show that monetary recognition helps develop employee motivation to change, thus, ensuring a planned change. However, its variability has encouraged the emergence of conflicts between the actors resulting in an increase of change according to the political process.

Originality/value – Found results enrich the previous work on the role of the staff recognition in the change process. Its originality lies in the study of the relationship between employee recognition and explanatory process of change in a dynamic perspective which enables having an overall view on the evolution of this relationship throughout the implementation of the change.

Keywords Qualitative research, Organizational change, Employee recognition, Explanatory processes of change

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

According to Lawler and Worley (2006), in most cases, organizational change projects do not meet the expectations of leaders because of lack of motivation to change among employees. These authors assert that the development of motivation to change among staff is the key to the success of any organizational change. Indeed, employee recognition efforts permit to align their behaviour to desired objectives by management (O'Reilly, 1989; Kerr and Slocum, 2005; Bushardt *et al.*, 2007). It encourages staff to support the desired change (Gilley *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the organization needs the establishment of a system that rewards employees that put effort into the achievement of the company's strategy (Lawler and Worley, 2006; Brata and Juliana, 2014). Lawler and Worley (2006) assert that employees are proactive, future oriented and motivated to change if the latter will lead to valuable rewards. Therefore, it is possible to postulate that staff recognition allows making a change according to the schedule set by the company management (planning process). This approach overlooks the fact that organizational change can be explained by other processes such as the political process, the interpretive process, the incremental process and the complex process (Vas and Ingham, 2002; Vas and Jaspert, 2010; Pichault, 2013).

Each of these processes offers particular characteristics of change. According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), they represent theoretical models developed to



understand how organizations change. In an attempt to understand the progression of change, some authors (Vas and Jaspert, 2010; Pichault, 2013) showed the coexistence and complementarity of these processes. The observed change was marked by the different characteristics falling within the various explanatory processes of change. Previous works offer staff recognition mechanisms as a means to influence the behaviour of employees without explaining the nature of this influence. Recently Khanifar *et al.* (2014) have tried to answer the question: how organizational rewards and incentives affect employees?

The originality of this research lies in the study of the influence of staff recognition on change. Specifically, we try to answer the question: while driving organizational change, does the recognition of staff efforts favour a change according to the planned process? The selected field is that of a project to establish a Global Banking System (GBS) within a banking leader institution on the Tunisian market Basic Bank. We studied the relationship between employee recognition and explanatory process of change during the implementation of a new information system.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research has been organized into two sections. In the first, we define the concept of recognition of staff. The second is devoted to the presentation of the different explanatory processes of change.

2.1 *Employee recognition*

The reward system defines the relationship between the organization and employees stating the terms of trade (Kerr and Slocum, 2005). In fact, it specifies the expected contributions of employees and expresses the values and standards which the organization must comply (Kerr and Slocum, 2005). It is a series of interrelated elements describing the types of rewards available in an organization, the conditions for their acquisition by the staff and the means by which the rewards and the criteria for their allocation are fixed (Von Glinow, 1985). To recognize the efforts of employees, staff evaluation can be based on the result (achievement of objectives) or on organizational behaviour (how the results are obtained in terms of quality, skill, perfection, etc.) (Henderson, 1989). Rewards include salary increases, promotions, indirect perks and bonuses (Kerr and Slocum, 2005). According to Resnick (2007), they also include bonuses for achieving individual goals, team rewards related to the completion of specific projects and annual bonuses based on the achievement of specific performance targets. Despite the interest in financially recognizing the adaptation and contribution efforts of actors in organizational change, several authors (Keller, 1999; Paré *et al.*, 2001; Ramezani and Heidarzadeh, 2014) stress the importance of non-monetary recognition. The latter can take the form of shopping vouchers, saying thank you, praise, dinner, trophies, opportunities, appreciating their ideas and respect where it is deserved (Nolan, 2012). According to Gilley *et al.* (2009), attendance at conferences or workshops, gift certificates and special privileges (paid parking or attending a prestigious project) are some forms of non-monetary recognition. Non-monetary recognition efforts are perceived by employees as marks of consideration and organizational support (Paré *et al.*, 2001). In particular, the recognition of the direct superordinate is the most appreciated given its non-binding character (Nelson, 1994; Allen and Helms, 2002). According to O'Reilly (1989), recognition by the senior or colleagues may be more powerful than a premium on the

shaping of employee behaviour. The author adds that the intrinsic aspects of reward system such as approval, the sense of belonging to the organization and enhancement are very important to encourage positive behaviour change. A literature review (Grusky, 1966; Lawler and Worley, 2006; Kluyers and Tippet, 2009) may help detect some reward advantages. The synthesis of these advantages allows essentially to identify the strengthening of the organizational commitment of employees and to stress staff motivation to change. The awards also permit increased preparedness capacity to change and employee performance as well as the creation of a collegial atmosphere. Employees pay great attention to the adjustments in the reward system especially if the goal of the amendment is to promote particular behaviours necessary for change (Resnick, 2007). Employee recognition and reward for their effort make it possible to ensure a change according to the schedule planned by the company management (Kotter, 1995; Causon, 2004; Resnick, 2007).

However, previous research has shown that very often change deviates from its planned process revealing other features that fall outside of this process such as conflicts of interest, unexpected results, etc. (Vas and Ingham, 2002; Vas and Jaspart, 2010; Pichault, 2013).

2.2 *The explanatory process of change*

Five explanatory processes are defined from the literature: the planned process, the political process, the interpretive process, the incremental process and the complex process:

- (1) The planned process is based on the idea that change requires a voluntary action of actors materialized through the use of planning for change (Kotter, 1995). Planned change is defined as “the way in which internal and external experts can help the organization cope with difficulties and plan and implement changes” (Levy, 1986). Battilana *et al.* (2010, p. 424) identify three key activities involved in planned organizational change: communication, mobilization and evaluation:
 - communication refers to activities that leaders undertake to make the environment for change, to share their vision of the need for change with followers;
 - mobilization refers to actions that leaders undertake to gain co-workers’ support for, and acceptance of, the enactment of new work routines; and
 - evaluation refers to measures that leaders employ to monitor and assess the impact of implementation efforts and institutionalize changes.
- (2) The perspective of the political process considers that the organizational change can induce a loss of benefit as well as a restriction of the power field for some actors (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). These “can be expected to resist changes that decrease their ability to obtain responses in, and rewards for, their work groups” (Goltz and Hietapelto, 2014, p. 4). The change process is, thus, characterized by the appearance of conflicts, tensions and conflicts (Kanter *et al.*, 1992). The change can be broken in a conflictual process between divergent interests (Vas and Jaspart, 2010). The progression of change is characterized by power struggles and continuous negotiation between the interests of different stakeholders that goes in part beyond the leaders (Harrison, 1985).
- (3) The interpretive process refers to change as a process of meaning creation in which the evolution of individual thought patterns ensures reaching a shared

understanding of the need for change. The meaning creation process determines therefore the progression of change (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006). The players are trying to make sense to the change through their interactions (Weick, 1996). The interpretive process takes into account the perceptions of stakeholders and emphasizes the importance of the management of symbols in the change process (Vas and Jaspert, 2010).

- (4) According to the incremental process, change is a dynamic process whose progress depends on the history and past experiences of the organization (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2001). This author recommends conceiving the changes as an ongoing process influenced by the history of the organization. The incremental process is characterized by a proliferation of trial and error, emerging project modification along the way, etc. (Pichault, 2013). This author refers to two fundamental characteristics in this process:
 - dependence on previously developed choices; and
 - the existence of several projects conducted in parallel within the organization: the incremental process helps explain the changes taking into account the impact of the conduct of several projects in parallel in terms of resource allocation.
- (5) The change is considered from the perspective of the complex process as dynamic and non-linear (Arena, 2009). Morin (2008) says that the action very often escapes the intentions of the actors. It can cause drifts accordingly, bifurcations and transformations that can lead to irreparable differences (Pichault, 2013) and that explain the occurrence of unexpected events and unpredictable results of a planned change. The main features of the complex process are unexpected and unpredictable consequences and random results (Vas and Jaspert, 2010).

The review of some empirical results shows that the observed change is marked by the different characteristics under the various explanatory processes of change (Vas and Jaspert, 2010; Pichault, 2013). Thus, we can note that the explanatory process of theoretical change can be considered as “processes at work within the organization”. The coexistence of these processes on the ground can be explained by the existence of the factors that influenced the change. For this study, we seek to understand the progression of change in relation to the recognition of staff that is presented in the literature as a major factor for the realization of a planned change.

3. Research methodology

The study of the influence of employee recognition on the explanatory process of change requires the analysis of a particular proposed change within an organization. To this end, we have integrated Basic Bank, bank leader in the Tunisian market, in the conduct of the redesign project of its information system (IS). In this section, we present, respectively, the research methodology, data collection methods, the coding device, the research context in Basic Bank and the proposed change (recast IS).

3.1 Search method with a single case study

Yin (2003) advocates the single case method if the study focuses on understanding a process in its real context and for which the boundaries between the studied

phenomenon and its context are not obvious. The selection of case is dictated by the research question that recommends that preferably the company be currently conducting a change project. Basic Bank, bank leader on the Tunisian market, meets this criterion. We integrated Basic Bank while working on the project to overhaul its information system.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection is performed by a non-participating observation, semi-structured interviews retrospective conducted with 18 members of the project team and a literature review.

We seek to understand the relationship between employee recognition and the explanatory process of change in the information system overhaul project. Thus, we chose to interview project team members since they are better informed. This team is composed of a business pillar and technical pillar. The job coordinator and technical coordinator ensure project management. It is organized into 21 functional domains (technical and business) with two transverse fields (change management and target organization). Each functional area is formed of one or two leader(s) and contributors. Interviews are conducted with the general direction (strategic client), project management (business coordinator and technical coordinator) and 15 leaders of domains. They lasted between one and two hours and were immediately recorded and transcribed.

The observed facts, remarks, comments and interpretations resulting from the interaction with the staff as well as informal discussions are systematically recorded in a research paper. The collected data were subjected to content analysis (Bardin, 1993).

3.3 Data coding

As advocated by Miles *et al.* (2013), the condensation of data was carried out by thematic coding. We have established a code starting list before any access to the field from a literature review (Allen and Kilmann, 2001; McGuinness *et al.*, 2002; Kerr and Slocum, 2005; Lawler and Worley, 2006; Resnick, 2007). The chosen unit of analysis is a sentence extract or even a paragraph of the transcript.

Concerning the explanatory process of change, we have chosen more inferential coding in order to identify trends (patterns) that can be accredited to any proposed theoretical processes (Vas and Ingham, 2002). The descriptive inference, a methodological approach inspired both from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and techniques for analysing qualitative data (Miles *et al.*, 2013) assumes an interactive relationship between description and explanation (Vas and Ingham, 2002). The author adds that descriptive inference also highlights the important role of interpretation that allows a better understanding of the studied phenomenon. We have mobilized the indicators proposed by Pichault (2013) that allowed classifying maintenance extracted according to the five explanatory processes of change derived from the literature. We have also opted for a multiple coding when a text segment seemed to simultaneously represent several categories to avoid "forcing" the data to a particular category (Vas and Ingham, 2002).

Two coding types have been performed (Miles *et al.*, 2013):

- (1) A multiple coding performed by the researcher to ensure the internal consistency of coding. All interviews were subject to a second coding a month after the first one. The confrontation between the first coding and the second one has defined a reliability coefficient of 90 percent.

- (2) A multiple coding performed by a second researcher to check the reliability of coding: extracts randomly taken from interviews are coded by a second researcher in management science. The reliability coefficient calculated between encoders is 82 percent.

The coefficients found are above 80 percent. They provide good reliability of the results (Miles *et al.*, 2013).

3.4 Case overview Basic Bank and the information system redesign project

Founded in 1976, Basic Bank is one of the leading bank establishments in the Tunisian market and one of the largest financial institutions in North Africa. It offers its customers (individuals, SMEs and big companies) a comprehensive and innovative range of products for its activities in Tunisia and abroad. It often acts as a pioneer in the introduction of new banking goods and services in the Tunisian market (e.g. credit cards, remote banking products and bank assurance products). Basic Bank employs 2,454 persons and is based among other things on a network of more than 1,000 correspondents worldwide. It has owned since numerous years, one of the first information systems that has been customarily designed to meet their needs and specificities by its teams. Today, this system does no more allow the bank to grow serenely and with greater efficiency. To support its growth and development, Basic Bank chose to implement an integrated solution. The product that will be set up is GBS, that is to say, an integrated information system specifically adapted to banking and covering most requested features (customer and accounts management, agency operations, etc.) as well as regulatory aspects (accounting). The solution that Basic Bank has chosen at the end of a selection process that has several solutions recognized on the banking market is the "P24[1]" solution publisher "Package[2]" is open and integrated software that offers a wide and rich functional coverage. It is implemented in more than 600 banks in the world.

We present the results of research related to the study of the impact of employee recognition on explanatory process of change during the period of implementation of a GBS in Basic Bank within the next section.

4. Search result

The implantation period of the GBS aims to implement in two years, the chosen P24 solution by adapting it to the needs of Basic Bank (including regulatory aspects) and by deploying it to all entities of the bank (network and central services). To achieve this goal, the project management organized work around several functional areas. For each, he named one or two leaders and contributors. The project team is structured in two pillars: business and technical. The business pillar includes 11 business functional areas and relies on two areas critical to the adoption of the tool in the bank that is "target organization" and "change management".

The technical pillar includes seven areas from the Information Systems Department. The bank made use of internal and external recruitments in order to ensure the implementation of the new system. During this period, we distinguish between:

- P24 jobs that refer to employees who work on the project; and
- external business lines which designate employees who provide operating activities.

The general direction of Basic Bank decided to grant specific remunerations to the members of the project team (P24 jobs): fixed monthly premiums and flexible premiums. Questioning interviewees on the allocation of the variable remuneration, we have found that premiums are granted depending upon the individual effort, his/her role (leader 1, 2 or contributors) and the appreciation of the project leadership. This recognition of staff has influenced the progression of change by promoting the emergence of both planned and political process.

4.1 Recognition of staff and planned process

The 18 interviewees stressed that the recognition of the project team members is a source of motivation for them to succeed in their task and meet the schedule:

The general direction we devote a specific bonus to speed the process and to comply in the best way with our planning (leader of technical infrastructures and environments).

The technical coordinator stresses the importance of the monetary recognition in performing quality work:

The monthly and annual financial incentive strengthens the motivation of the participants to present quality work (technical coordinator).

However, 14 interviewees emphasized that the variable monetary recognition has led to conflicts between participants there by favouring the emergence of the political process.

4.2 Recognition of personal and political processes

The allocation of variable cash compensation to project team members pave the floor to coalitions:

The time of allocation of variable compensation has always been a concern, a source of tensions and questionings (job coordinator).

The data allow distinguishing two levels of analysis: the variability of monetary recognition between leaders and contributors and that between P24 and external business lines:

- (1) Variability of monetary compensation between leaders and contributors.

Eight interviewees stressed that the variability in the allocation of earnings has led to conflicts between participants:

People always know the amounts after allocation. Variable compensation generates susceptibilities among participants (Leader of International domain).

For eight interviewees this variability in earnings does not affect the work of teams. "Variable compensation created susceptibilities among the members of the project team. But internally, we did not even have time to talk" (Leader Development Centre):

- (2) Variability of monetary compensation between-P 24 and the external business lines.

Eight interviewees stressed the existence of conflicts between the project team jobs and external business lines because of the variability of earnings. They claim that the external business lines have borne the burden of the work of business experts who joined the project team. Thus, the workload of the persons of external business

increased without them benefiting from premiums like the jobs of the project team. "The difference in pay creates conflicts with external trades" (Leader 1 in test Coordination).

The allocation of a variable monetary compensation resulted in conflicts between involved actors thereby fostering the emergence of the political process.

5. Discussion of results

During the implementation of the change induced by the implantation of a GBS, employee recognition represents a source of motivation urging the members of the project team to perform quality work. In particular, monetary recognition is a source of encouragement that ensures the progression of change depending on the desired schedule. This result confirms the findings of O'Reilly (1989), Kerr and Slocum (2005), Lawler and Worley (2006) and Bushardt *et al.* (2007) which specify that employee recognition allows them to act in favour of the desired change objectives by leaders. Our observations also confirm the recommendations of Kotter (1995), Causon (2004) and Resnick (2007) who state that the recognition of the staff efforts ensures a change according to the planned process.

However, during that period, the project team members have received varying premiums. This variability caused conflicts between members of the project team on the one hand, and between the project team and external business lines on the other, resulting in the formation of coalitions. This result sustains that of Folkes and Weiner (1977) and Morris *et al.* (1987) who have shown that the awards have an effect on the formation of coalitions and interpersonal conflict.

Monetary recognition (premiums) and non-monetary (accountability) is important for the motivation of participants to undertake a change according to the elaborate planning. Particular attention should be paid to the variability in the allocation of bonuses whatsoever between the project participants or in comparison with the rest of the bank to reduce potential conflicts.

6. Conclusion

This research focuses on the study of the influence of employee recognition on explanatory process of change during the implantation of a GBS. The results showed that the recognition of staff promotes the appearance of two processes of planning and political change.

During the implementation of GBS, employee recognition fosters a change according to the planned and the political processes. This result enhances previous work on the role of the recognition of staff in the change process. Its originality lies in the study of the relationship between employee recognition and explanatory process of change in a dynamic perspective allowing to have a global outlook on the evolution of this relationship over time (throughout the implementation of change).

Monetary recognition helps develop employee motivation to renew ensuring a planned change. On the other side, its variability has encouraged the emergence of conflicts of interest between stakeholders resulting in an increase of change according to the political process. Monetary recognition mechanisms are surely likely to motivate and involve more staff to achieve change and to comply with the elaborate planning, and therefore to complete the project on time and according to its quality requirements. However, leaders should pay particular attention to the variability of monetary reward to reduce conflicts between participants. It is therefore recommended to practitioners to consider a monetary recognition only in the period of change set in the initial schedule.

Delays in its implementation could therefore lead to a negative conditional recognition. Certainly the material recognition is important, but it is not enough. It is, therefore, recommended to introduce measures to symbolic recognition so that the work would be meaningful for the employees. In addition to these contributions, this study has some limitations. We have not observed the GBS implantation process in real time, which explains the appeal to use retrospective interviews and document analysis to reconstruct the change during this period. The reconstruction of the events retrospectively could be at the origin of the importance given by the actors to material acknowledgement over the symbolic one. We could, in future research, investigate simultaneously the influence of monetary recognition and the symbolic one on the explanatory process of change to check if they do influence in the same way.

Notes

1. The software name is fictional with respect to confidentiality rules.
2. The publisher's name is fictional with respect to confidentiality rules.

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