

On the road to culture change – Insights from a case study

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• Purpose

In order to survive in an increasingly competitive environment, many established organizations are faced with change including deep change requiring a change in their organizational culture. Based on a dynamic construct perspective of organizational culture (Sackmann, 1990), a dynamic theory of change (Tsoukas, H. & Chia, R., 2002) and action research (Coghlan, 2011), we conducted a longitudinal study with a German based multinational firm to better understand prerequisites for lasting organizational culture change.

• Design/Methodology

The action research process included 35 interviews with leaders and managers of the organization, 3 data-gathering workshops with a total of 45 people across divisions and functions. These data were complemented by on-site observations, informal conversations and the analysis of a wide range of documents. All data were content-analyzed and the results fed back to top management and all key positions including recommendations for next steps. The effects of implemented actions were observed over a two-year period.

• Results

The longitudinal research process revealed the importance of the philosophical stance of the top leader, timed action, role-modeling as well as leadership behavior and structural context.

• Limitations

The results are based on a single case which does not allow for generalizations.

• Research/Practical Implications

The insights from the study underline the importance of leadership behavior in achieving culture change including its process nature.

• Originality/Value

Few longitudinal studies exist of a culture change process revealing its complex dynamic nature.