

Change processes within an Organization



WE INTERVIEWED JOCHEN GROTENHÖFER, WHO HAS BEEN WORKING AS A CONSULTANT FOR DECADES, AND ASKED HIM HOW SUCH A CHANGE PROCESS STARTS, WHAT THE PITFALLS ARE AND HOW TO CREATE MORE AWARENESS ON THIS TOPIC.

So I am going to ask my questions in English, as we just discussed and thank you very much for your time to discuss your experiences in a little bit more detail for our Constructive Contribution Award because I really think that you have made a Constructive Contribution over the years and decades so thank so for being available for this.

„My pleasure.“

So as a consultant, how would you describe the added benefit that HS tools provide?

The most important part for me personally is the validity of the data. I can rely on data to be correct, meaningful and actually providing information that I can use. The second thing that I quite like is that the analysis that we do right from the data is constantly supported by Human Synergistics. I can always turn back to them and ask them for some guidance when I have a particular statistical problem with the profiles or when I am not quite sure what the meaning of an individual question might be. So, it really helps me to offer a broad spectrum of applied coaching and consulting.

„Yes, thank you very much for pointing this out again. I think HS really works hard on this and we are really glad that it is perceived by you in such a way.
It certainly is.“

And if you go into a client organization, what do you find most frustrating about (culture) change consulting or generally change consulting?

„Well, if frustrating is a word that I would use we certainly need to talk about the time that it takes to come to a result. When you do change or culture consulting, you are in it for the long run and sometimes when you experience a fallback to the old patterns of behavior it becomes frustrating and you basically have to admonish yourself to go back to the idea that we're in it for the long haul and it takes time, people make mistakes and it's not something that shows effects quickly.“

Yes, but you do perceive in a way like client organizations expect this to not take very long?

Well, not necessarily the organization but some people within the organization will expect this to happen quickly. And sometimes you just don't have the funds and the time to work with the client for years and years of constant development. They would like to see a quick fix or a quick analysis and if they don't like the results they will sometimes just go back and say, ok, we are not going to follow through on this because it takes too long to implement.

Yes, particularly in a culture, across organization where you would expect people on a particular level to change jobs every couple of years or have new people come into management positions every couple of years. I see that this is becoming very difficult. But what are your top three tips for creating awareness with a client regarding the importance of (culture) development?

„One of the strongest pointers, one of the best catalysts for discussions around culture are performance defects. Very often I get in contact with people who say we have a problem with such and such... I don't get along with my people, the sales department is not doing what they are supposed to do. People know that it's not a mechanical defect or a systems defect, it's a people thing but they can't pinpoint it, they can't nail it to the floor and say "this is it". They only see performance defects so when I do acquisitions with prospective clients I don't talk about culture and the nice things that we could do to each other, I tend to ask for what's going wrong, where are performance defects what is it that bugs you. I'm looking for the pain points. A second thing is, I'm not necessarily relating change issues to culture. I'm not using the word culture, I'm using the word changes and eventually people realize that the organizational behavior and leadership is actually having an impact on the probability of a change coming through or not. Particularly in a German environment I would not use, or personally am not using culture as a sales buzz word. Unless the client does it himself. And the third thing that makes me get through the door with clients is individual leadership problems. Very often or increasingly more I find that top management doesn't have a sparring partner. They are in desperate need for somebody they can discuss their individual business problems with. And I'm using Human Synergistics materials here to position their thinking and then take it from there. And that's also driving business because people, particularly leaders in a slightly elevated position realize that they still have to learn that there still are ways to improve, that they are not completely effective in the way that they lead. But that is not something that they would be able to discuss within their peer group, so they are looking for outside help.“

Yes, I think that is very valuable feedback that you give leaders in that respect.

„Well, I hope.“

But generally, do you find that the clients you work with are aware of their (culture) challenges, or is making them aware of (culture) a common starting point for understanding? Or would you say that in the German-speaking market you would probably start elsewhere?

The clients generally have an understanding of culture as the underlying factor. They might not call it culture, as I said before they might call it "we have a leadership problem" or "we have problems motivating people". So the word culture is not necessarily used but they understand in our terms it's a problem of communication and leadership and an ability to communicate by and large. I very seldomly have to missionize them. Sometimes we have discussions that start off with an organizational problem and quite obviously I would try and dig into the cultural issues around that. And sometimes I detect that being the core issue and then people realize "that's it" and they follow along. But normally people come to me with a clear indication of "tell us something about how this term operates" within.

„So, in your experience there is a common understanding amongst clients that there is such a thing as culture in their organization, but is there a common misconception about culture in organizations today would you say?

Well I'm not sure if it's common, but what I find now and then is a perception that, particularly with organization who are looking for a quick fix, culture is a tool like IT and I can apply it anywhere to fix a problem. That to me is the biggest misconception. I need to tell them "It doesn't go quick, and we don't know what the results will be. First of all you will have to change and this is not something about the others because you can't work with them". Eventually it will be a leadership problem. These are the biggest misconceptions that I'm trying to address right in the first meeting to make sure that this is not going into the wrong direction.“

So, how would you then describe the importance of culture/behavior measurement to a CEO who you would commonly address the leadership problems to?

The way we do it will provide the CEO with a cockpit, with a cause and effect measurement tool that will tell him what the inner reasoning for behavior is. What is that and what effect does it have on the organization. Over and beyond culture itself what does it do to our organization, what does it do to our performance? And that is really important to CEOs that realize that they are short of something of that kind in their leadership tool kit. Usually

they work with financial data, they do have an HR department, they have a strategy department, but when it comes to leadership in itself and the impact that they have as an individual on the organization that they lead they are short of something that gives them a working tool to relate to.“

They probably know what is wrong with the results but they don't really know how to change them. Exactly, as I said, my clients usually come to me with a feeling that something is wrong in the way that we work but they can't pinpoint it. And culture measurement or the tools that we have with Human Synergistics actually provide us with some insight as to why something happens and what it does.

„Yes, I have a current case that I have been looking after for 2 years now and I'm getting the feedback that people are actually starts to embrace the model, how to understand and use it and to the point, that they were pointing out aggressive/defensive behavior to each other in a constructive way. And the CEO is coming back to me saying that his level of quarrel or disruption alignment has actually gone down by a substantial amount of my time. People understand what the model does and how it works and they have learned to apply it in the most effective way. If I didn't see that if I didn't have the impression that it actually makes a difference, I think I would have ceased to use it a long time ago.“

It's great to get your feedback on this because we usually have trouble seeing the end result of our data that comes out of our reports being implemented in client organizations. So it's very valuable also for us. Did you use any specific methods that you used to get the Constructive message across to leaders and members of that organization?

„There are different ways of applying that and what I like to do is to employ what I call experiential learning to make people experience how it feels like to be yelled at or to come into a situation where while I'm trying to be constructive the opposite party is not willing to budge or give me any information. Whether it be in an aggressive or defensive way. So I'm using simulations in the way that people behave in these simulations in a way that I mirror back their behavior which is quite impactful, I'm using role plays, I'm starting to use corporate actors in a training environment around Leadership Impact (L/I ®)so I will put them in front of a professional actor and ask that actor to bring these people to their brink. So they have an impression of what it's like to have people that don't behave constructively or how they would react if they were led in a constructive way. Another thing that we are using is the Circumplex mat and I'm basically providing people with statements, behaviors, observations that reflect one of the 12 styles and people have discussions. It's not about me teaching something but them exchanging their experiences and their views around this particular behavior.“