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REFRAMING IN ORGANISATIONAL RENEWAL PROCESSES

Summary: The main purpose of this article is to describe the reframing concept in the process of organisational renewal. The article first sets out to present general assumptions in reframing and then goes on to characterise the three stages in the reframing process: reaching mobilisation, defining a vision of changes, and building a system of strategic goals, actions and indicators.

Keywords: strategic renewal of organisations, reframing, process of renewal.

1. Introductory remarks

The reframing process concerns necessary reconstruction of current norms and standards and elimination of resistance to change following from a changed perception of organisational activities. The term “reframing” has its origins in neurolinguistic programming theory and designates assignment of a new meaning to a specific behaviour. Reframing is about re-adjustment.

The underlying assumption in reframing is that senior managers’ determination to bring about change and their clear vision of a renewal process are not the only factors to affect the success or otherwise of organisational renewal. For a success in renewal efforts, current norms need to be departed from and replaced with new patterns of action. Bringing about a change requires overcoming resistance that results from doubts about the way the process is handled and about the target model itself [Bolman and Deal 2003]. By assuming that soft dimensions to the organisation’s management system are essential, we may explain the reasons for a large number of failed processes of change implementation.

The reframing process captures the value of employees’ commitment to change within the organisation and treats differently the sources of motivation and criteria for assessment of activities that are undertaken. The reframing process sets out to bring about a change in views of organisation members in such a way that they are willing to accept and adopt a new system of activity patterns. This involves the approach that departs from the loyalty concept with its attachment to existing patterns of operation. The key problem in reframing is the need to convince personnel

of the benefits of a radical organisational renewal. The difficulty lies in the fact that only a small percentage of organisation members demonstrate a creative, inquisitive mindset. Those who are ready to take the risk of changing existing frameworks for a better but uncertain future are even fewer and far between. Because satisfaction levels of organisation members depend on benefits that they receive in exchange for what they do for the organisation, employees are inclined to keep their current *status quo*. Familiarity with the *status quo* allows organisation members to control the pace of change and adjust it to serve their current needs. This conservative approach to organisational norms is also influenced by members' personal lives – workers analyse what might happen or whether they should fail to cope with new challenges. They know perfectly well that organisational change entails necessary commitment on their part, more hours spent at work, frequent business trips, no days off, and new duties [Hampden-Turner 1992].

Change leaders in renewal processes are often people from outside the organisation. Their first “job” within the organisation is to convince employees that they need to change. For employees, the meaning of this message is that they have not done their jobs properly and their work has failed to comply with generally accepted standards. There crops up a question about employees trusting the people whose actions make them feel uncomfortable.

The assumption underlying the reframing concept is that a change process can be pursued more properly if logical arguments are put forward to show that certain actions either have or lack purpose. Rather than launching into negative arguments to prove that the change being implemented is unreasonable, or explain why the existing *status quo* should be maintained and how to avoid comparisons between current organisational activities and how they should be – one needs to focus on positive aspects of any proposed measures.

Reframing could be seen as a declaration of responsibility for the organisation's operational existence and development; an act whose intended purpose is to release the will to change the organisation. Defined like this, reframing is a voluntary acceptance of departure from the organisation's prevailing views (ways of thinking, perception of surrounding environment and existing paradigms) and creation of a new system of organisational norms, patterns and values.

Actions which are taken as part of reframing can be divided into three stages (see Figure 1).

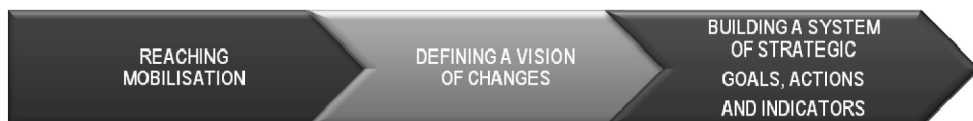


Fig. 1. Reframing process stages

Source: Authors' own study.

On the first stage, the objective is to ensure employees' commitment (mobilisation) to the change process so that organisational renewal is possible in the long term. On this stage, both managers and employees responsible take measures to overcome resistance to change.

The focus of the second stage is to develop a coherent vision of organisational renewal and ensure that there is a conviction that objectives to be adopted are reasonable. With the organisational renewal vision, it will be possible to give a more tangible form to the expected directions of change. On the other hand, the sense that a set of objectives to be achieved is reasonable will ensure a long-term support for a new motivation system.

The third stage concerns building a system of strategic objectives, actions and indicators. Encouraging active participation through motivational stimuli is only sensible when motivated staff knows the direction of organisational activities, may see for themselves both positive and negative effects of activities, and feel their consequences. With clearly defined action evaluation criteria, any results achieved can be verified after the process completes; when processes are in progress, such criteria give rational grounds to confirm that the organisation's objectives are in fact achievable.

2. Reaching mobilisation

How the renewal process goes is defined by a manager responsible for the process. However, for changes to be implemented correctly, their underlying assumptions must be accepted by employees. The renewal process may therefore be seen as a result of choice, an act of will, first by a single person, then by a selected group of participants, and ultimately by a critical mass of people that is necessary for radical transformations to be carried out. Mobilisation efforts help control a mental energy gathering process needed to feed the renewal momentum. The process of mustering mental energy ensures a wider extent of acceptance of changes, starting from a single employee through to team and organisation-wide levels [Morgan 1993]. The mobilization process has four logically following stages of action:

1. Shaping leadership attitudes. Managers with responsibility for organisational renewal processes exert significant influence on how those processes are executed. For this reason, selection of change leaders and establishment of appointment mechanisms for future leaders to some extent predetermines directions of organisational development. A corporate executive board defines models of leadership roles and encourages higher-ranking managers to take similar actions. Higher-ranking managers on their part maintain essential attributes of transformation leadership at lower management levels. A similar process is executed up to the lowest level of organisational management, allowing for a delegation of responsibilities and building an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

2. Creating an interactive communication system. After change leaders are selected, a renewal programme is presented to all organisation members. The executive board may use regular employee meetings to take up the role of the change leader to show its personal their involvement in programme execution. Change agents have a key role in communication processes at lower management levels. Change agents are employees who are extensively involved in a change process and who have been partially released from their current duties.

3. Encouraging creation of natural work teams. Higher mobilisation is reached through activities of relatively large numbers of natural work teams and their involvement in solving specific organisational problems. Natural work teams have their own developmental dynamics and require efficient management by change agents. Change agents ensure their horizontal and vertical integration that leads to the integration of individual team efforts with general objectives of the organisation.

Ensuring correct work team memberships is a key success factor in the renewal process. Work teams should have inter-functional representation to encourage a better understanding of issues related to a holistic and multi-dimensional organisational diagnosis. The assumption that work team efforts are concentrated on specialised organisational areas in which teams have adequate expertise means that senior management roles on this stage are primarily to support and stimulate leadership attributes in change agents.

4. Preparing organisation members for a cycle of renewal. Given that organisational renewal relates to specific employees and their actions and that such actions must be properly understood and interpreted by them, it is essential that attention be focused on individual organisation members who must be made aware of the meaning of changes and given support to adjust to new operating conditions. Before renewal is achieved, sufficient numbers of organisation members must have gone through a cycle of emotional renewal. Managers are assigned a key role in these processes – they should provide their support for the change process and exemplify an effective cycle of internal renewal.

3. Defining a vision of change

Before any changes are made within the organisation, it is useful to determine a vision of changes and create a feeling that the set of objectives being sought is justified. Whereas the mobilisation stage builds a potential for change, the vision-shaping process sets up a system that will give form to the future organisation.

Management should strive to achieve the following three tasks in its vision-defining process:

1. Determine a strategic intention. A strategic intention is a conceptualised visualisation of the organisation's future, the one that helps identify the intention with mission and vision. It is therefore a pursuit that symbolises integration of analytical, emotional and political dimensions in organisational thinking. The analytical dimension relates to objective assessment of the organisation's competitive position;

emotional and political dimensions, on the other hand, reflect the organisation's prevailing ideas that underlie employees' efforts.

2. Establish priorities for goals and stakeholder expectations. Organisational development that is in line with the strategic intention requires that a balance be maintained in the area of stakeholder expectations concerning their goals. A precise identification of benefits for stakeholders will facilitate their commitment to the change process.

3. Determine a value system. Values reflect unquestioned behavioural patterns which are accepted by all organisation members and which define how people act both within the organisation and outside it. Values underlie organisational culture and make it possible for organisation members to function under conditions of risk and uncertainty. Values ensure continued organisational stability and, by enhancing the organisation's flexibility, affect the essential attributes of its operational existence.

From the perspective of top management, defining a vision of change properly is of critical importance to organisational renewal processes. A basic problem in defining a vision is that it is not clear how the actions that we described earlier are linked to one another. Defining a strategic intention is not a one-off effort – the strategic intention crystallises gradually in an iterative manner. There is a kind of a game going on between stakeholders during individual iterations that has its purpose of ensuring organisational balance [Gouillart and Kelly 2000]. With this approach to the task of defining a vision of change, striving for a high degree of precision in formulating intentions may have negative consequences. Precision will be needed on a later stage when specific strategic initiatives are developed.

4. Building a system of strategic goals, actions and indicators

Whereas significant discrepancies between declarations and actions are a reflection of hypocrisy for an individual, a gap between declarations and actions is rarely a result of some hidden intent for organisations. Most often, organisations lack mechanisms to translate their visions into actions facilitating organisational transformation processes.

Translating the change vision into concrete activities is done via a system of strategic goals, actions and indicators. Building this system is what constitutes the third state in the reframing process. Stage 3 comprises four actions: developing strategic goals and indicators; defining cause-and-effect relationships for strategic goals; identifying initiatives facilitating achievement of strategic goals; and integrating a system of actions within the organisation.

4.1. Developing strategic goals and indicators

A system of organisational indicators is built on standards of desirable performance from the perspective of different business models. The system of performance

indicators can be developed using the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), which provides a way of translating organisational vision into strategic goals. On subsequent stages, those goals form the standards for activities within the organisation. The Balanced Scorecard concept provides a comprehensive analysis of the organisation in a manner that helps us answer the following question: How should the organisation be structured in terms of the requirements of its customers, shareholders, internal operations, innovation processes and learning?. A set of strategic goals and related performance indicators are determined for each of those areas.

Given that strategic goals are integrated with a system of balanced performance indicators, a set of “strategic vectors” ensures the management has a necessary “management space” for assessment of organisation-wide activities. By relying on cause-and-effect relationships among individual goals, it is possible to determine impacts that even apparently insignificant activities related to individual objectives of organisation members might have on strategic goals.

4.2. Defining cause-and-effect relationships for strategic goals

When formulated, strategic goals will remain abstract constructs unless appropriate activities are undertaken within the organisation that facilitate their achievement. By defining cause-and-effect relationships for strategic goals, a proper sequence can be defined for undertaking those goals [Campbell 2003]. Undertaking learning and innovation-related goals will form the basis for the achievement of excellence in organisational processes. Excellence in processes translates into customers’ satisfaction which, in turn, brings expected financial results for the owners. The logic in which “soft” elements of the organisation are transformed into “hard” observable financial results is one of the ways towards sustainable organisational development. By this way, management system architecture is built, which is necessary to define a hierarchy of causality conditions, both in a vertical dimension and with respect to the organisation as a whole. By establishing logical relationships among strategic goals, senior management builds foundations for a lasting organisational success. From the senior management’s perspective, apart from the benefits described earlier, defining causality relationships among strategic goals is a valuable experience in mobilization building. Through this activity, all members of management can present their vision of the organisation’s business model as well as familiarize with other managers’ views and expectations.

4.3. Identifying initiatives facilitating the achievement of strategic goals

Strategic goals and performance indicators are developed at the highest management levels with active participation of change agents. Parallel to those activities, work teams should be set up at lower management levels to focus on finding opportunities for improvement of current operations and defining potential benefits in this area. This way, a bottom-up support is ensured for the organisational renewal process.

Initiative development includes formulation of a bottom-up set of project activities which do not need any performance indicators to support them. The initiative development process accentuates enthusiasm building among employees and search for resources in support of the renewal programme rather than reconciliation of proposed initiatives with strategic goals. Integration of goals and project activities is done on the next stage.

Formulating initiatives inspires employees who recommend concrete solutions to any identified problems and also indicate measurable effects of their ideas. Employees who are allowed to have their say in deciding about their organisation's future believe that their proposed measures will indeed be taken into account.

4.4. Integrating a system of actions within the organisation

The last element in the process of building a performance indicator system is to integrate initiatives of an operational nature with strategic goals marking general directions of organisational development. The process involves working meetings to chart relationships between what is suggested as feasible by individual organisational units and the activities which the management came out with on the BSC building stage. The meetings are attended by a moderator.

The chart is created through identification of cause-and-effect relationships between lower-ranked and overreaching goals and, ultimately, within the BSC component elements. As a result, an integrated "tree" or hierarchy of indicators is created which combines initiatives and activities at all the levels of the organisation with the BSC.

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REFRAMING W PROCESIE ODNOWY ORGANIZACJI

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie istoty koncepcji reframingu w procesie przekształcenia organizacji. Punktem wyjścia w artykule uczyniono zaprezentowanie ogólnych założeń reframingu, co w dalszej części pozwoliło na charakterystykę trzech etapów procesu reframingu: osiągnięcia mobilizacji, definiowania wizji zmiany i budowy systemu celów strategicznych, działań i wskaźników.