Abstracts of Research Projects

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1 Projects Research Area A/D - Flexibility of Work and Life/Interculturalism – Supervisor Michael Schottmayer

1.1. Work(ing) out of control? A case study of experiencing work in modern corporate structures

By Kim Wolf & Nathalie Kühl

The present work deals with the subjective experience of employees who are working in companies with modern structures. This is a highly relevant topic due to the appearing social changes. As a result of trends like globalization, digitalization and especially the changing values of the “Generation Y” many organizations become aware of the requirement to be innovative, flexible and adaptable. Therefore companies often rely on principles such as autonomy, transparency, democracy and multidimensional interconnectedness. In addition to current quantitative research and expert surveys in this work the subjective experience of employees is investigated, so that a further perspective can be pointed out. Qualitative research, which is based on the interpretive paradigm, grants a thorough understanding of the subjective experiences by inductively gained knowledge. This research is implemented by conducting four guideline-based, problem-centred interviews with employees at a media agency that leave the respondents the freedom to describe their personal experiences in a non-restricted way. Subsequently the results are analysed by building key phrases, which facilitates that the complexity and the regard to the context remains unchanged. The quality criteria are, apart from a few limitations, considered. Although there are interindividual differences in experiencing modern corporate structures, several patterns can be identified as a result of the data analysis. The results show that most of the employees are motivated by an extended scope of action which leads to experiencing a higher degree of responsibility for the own work. The results also indicate very high performance requirements and a strong sense of togetherness which is linked to giving the colleagues feedback regularly. This leads to the assumption that with the decreasing importance of hierarchical structures social controls, which include transparency and feedback, play a major role and lead to higher performance requirements at once.
1.2. The Career entry of nursery school teachers

By Elisabeth Pohl

In 2013 the public focus for the topic childcare increased due to a governmental decision that every child from the age of one has a claim for a place in childcare. The interest was also increased by the difficult negotiations on pay for nursery school teachers and social workers. Through the public focus the quantitative and qualitative deficits in public childcare became obvious.

Since the skilled employees have the biggest and most immediate influence on the work in childcare this project was focused on them. The specific focus was to interview the skilled employees about the discrepancies between their motivation to start the education, the preparation during the education and the daily routine as a skilled employee in childcare. Using the problem centered interview method, three nursery school teachers were interviewed. Analyzing the interviews with the key sentence method the goal is to find correlations between personal attitudes, perceptions and methods of action. Hopefully the results will enable us to illustrate ways to improve the transition of nursery school teachers from their education to their daily routine. The long term goal is to improve the situation and motivation of nursery school teachers and therefore reduce the deficits in childcare.
1.3. Non-territorial offices- future of workplace? A study due to the employees experience regarding the work within the non-territorial concept

By Jenny Dähn, Sophie Zeitz & Martina Raab

„Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.“ (Bertold Brecht, n. d., quoted from Burke & Kehde, 1976, p. 224). Already Bertold Brecht spoke 50 years ago about changing things. The world of work has changed and is furthermore changing. The increasing flexibility demands the companies to align themselves to their changing environment. The ways of corporation and identifying solutions have changed, as well. Therefore, knowledge sharing has become more and more important to us. Due to these adjustments, employers are experiencing new office-concepts like non-territorial work places (Martin, 2007, p. 2 et seq.). The present study questioned employees from a company’s communications department regarding their subjective feelings towards the non-territorial concept, since they are working with it for over a year. The research group started with two expert interviews questioning the worker’s council and head of department followed by one group discussion with six members of the communications department. Participation was on voluntary basis. Data of the group discussion, which took place in the company’s premises, have been analysed with the Key Sentence. As a result, the researchers could figure out 18 categories of experience which led to the following key results: due to the implementation of non-territorial work places, the employees got the feeling of losing their territory and personal space, which gave- in part- rise to insecurity and a bad mood within the department. In addition, the research team discovered that rule- making and adhering to them as well as methodical expertise are essential for a successful working within the Open-Space concept. An interesting aspect regards the observation, that most employees experienced the paper-free desk enriching, which contradicts with typical mechanisms of space appropriation of men. The results have been interpreted using selected literature to Kurt Lewin’s field theory, the approach of Roger Barker’s behavior-setting, the concepts of territory and personal space as well as the occupation of spaces, working territories and compliance with rules.
1.4. Experiences of expatriates abroad - preparation and return

By Lara Pehling, Janina Belilowski & Nikolka Ronja Hain

The aim of this research project is to highlight the experience of expatriates in terms of international staffing and the relevance of intercultural communication, with a special focus on preparation and return. In terms of content, the most important concepts from the specialist literature (Beck 2007, Thomas 1995, etc.) are explained, analyzed and described in a research proposal regarding the relevance of the topic. The main focus is placed on intercultural communication and the life influences at home and abroad. In addition, factors such as reintegration and readaptation are characterized and explained. This research was conducted qualitatively. The most suitable methods for collecting data for this specific project are the problem-centered interview and the expert interview. First, the corporate human resources manager of the company Rosen Group was interviewed as an expert in order to gain valuable insights into the company’s perspective of sending employees abroad. This includes measures that the company takes to prepare the expatriates, as well as support them during their time abroad and during the reintegration in their home countries. Following up, three former expatriates were interviewed, again with particular focus being on the preparation, the stay abroad and the reintegration. For the evaluation, the method of the formation of core sentences according to LEITHÄUSER and VOLMERG (1986) will be used. The aim of this research project is to help develop measures that this specific firm as well as other companies can implement to further support their expatriates abroad and in their home countries. Additionally, the research topic is particularly interesting for students and teachers in the field of psychology and / or business psychology with a focus on interculturality and the growing flexibility of workplaces. Furthermore, the international deployment of personnel and intercultural communication is an industry-independent measure that is used in many areas of the professional world.
1.5. The subjective perception of Burnout patients at work – Returning to work after obtaining their self-knowledge

By Laura Lindholm

Every single person is affected by stress and it is proven that a certain amount of stress can lead to a higher brain activity and attention. However, once the stress increases in its intensity and duration, it can endanger our physical and mental health. More and more often it leads to a reaction called Burnout-Syndrome, which eventually causes an inability to work. Once the Burnout affected person returns to his/her place of work, he/she can be supported by the organization’s reintegration management. However, without proper changes in the style of work or the environmental circumstances, there is a chance of going back to the same old patterns, leading to a repeating reaction. This qualitative research evaluates the reintegration management in German organizations based on the subjective experience of people affected by Burnout. State of the art research has shown that there is still a lack of reintegration management regarding mental health problems in the working world. As the project was conducted in the field of research Individual, Decisions and Organization, it is embedded in the context of delimitation of work and possible implemented risks for the individual.

The three interviewees in this research are people who have been affected by Burnout and, by the time of the interview, have already returned to their jobs. One of them was generated through one of the author’s contacts and works for an insurance company (male, 46), the other two responded to an inquiry the authors sent to a Burnout Café in Neuss, Germany (female, 52, computer specialist and coach; male, advertising engineer). The interviews conducted for this research were problem-centered interviews, making it possible to grasp the interviewees’ individual experiences, perceptions and reflections. The interviews were evaluated with the help of key sentences, a method by Thomas Leithäuser and Birgit Volmerg where central experiences, action orientation and points of views are compressed to striking terms without losing their complexity and contextual reference.

After evaluating the key sentences, there have been lined out seven thematic areas in connection to the interviewees’ return to work. These are: factors that contributed to Burnout, Realization of their own Burnout, Coaching/Therapy during Burnout, Perceptions during the healing process, Acceptance, returning to work and occurring problems. At this time of the research process, these thematic areas are being evaluated and connected to the theories and models used in the research proposal. The authors aim to derive recommendations of actions for a reintegration management for people affected by Burnout.
2 Projects Research Area B - Sustainability – Supervisor Georg Müller-Christ

2.1. Complexity, contradicting goals, trade off, and how two non-profit organizations deal with it

By Johannes Stark

Rising complexity is seen by many as one of the main challenges for today’s organizations. Individuals and institutions are faced with contradicting goals. Efficiency vs. effectiveness, short-term profitability vs. the common good, costs vs. quality, controlled standards vs. flexible processes are some of the most common areas of conflict. As the need for economically, ecologically and socially acceptable approaches becomes more and more apparent, our study exemplifies some ways of how these contradictions can be dealt with.

After extensive literature research, non-profit organisations (NPOs) were identified as the ideal research field as they are inherently bound to the contradicting needs of being profitable enough to stay in business and being beneficial to the public for funding as well as staying true to their stated values to maintain their legal status.

Based on a systemic qualitative research design, two focus group interviews were conducted in two NPOs working in the field of health care. One focus group consisted of the male head of finance of one organisation and a female deputy manager of a subsidiary. The other group consisted of the male manager of the second organisation and five employees (3 f, 2 m) with varying positions. Ages differed between 30 and 63. All participants were chosen because of their interest in discussing the topic of complexity.

Currently, the interview transcripts are being analysed with the key-phrase method by Leithäuser and Volmerg (1988). First results indicate that (1) openly discussing trade-offs of possible decisions, (2) explaining and teaching employees the organisations values and visions while giving them freedom to decide about situational details, (3) a culture of mutual appreciation, continuous collective learning and “helping each other out”, as well as (4) the legal non-profit status itself could be key factors of dealing with complexity and contradicting goals in both organisations.

While most of the results correspond with generalized key factors suggested by Müller-Christ (2014), the specific approaches of the two non-profit organisations can be helpful for both other NPOs as well as for-profit organisations struggling with the complexity of today’s world. They could even indicate that the rising number of contradicting goals can sometimes better be dealt with by non-profit organisations legally bound to use profit only as a means to pursue other, higher goals than by corporations indented on making yearly profits.
2.2. Corporate Values – the gap between rhetoric and implementation

By Jasmine Werner & Jennifer Blome

In the field of corporate culture, this research focuses on communicated corporate values – principles that are intended to guide a company’s conduct and its relationships – as well as their implementation in practice. Several studies reveal a positive impact of shared corporate values on companies in terms of increasing their economic performance as well as on employees and their job satisfaction. Communicated corporate values, however, do not necessarily conform to the actual actions and behaviours. This research aims to examine the causes of discrepancies between proclaimed corporate values and their implementation, the communication of corporate values regarding quantity and conceptual orientation and to explore their impacts on individuals.

In the context of a systemic approach, the research subject is examined from a variety of complementary perspectives by using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Firstly, a literature analysis is accomplished to discuss the causes and motives for acting contrary to proclaimed corporate values. Therefore, the topics of evolutionary biology and neurobiology, dilemma ability, conscience, authenticity and integrity, acting against better knowledge and ethics are reviewed and interpreted within the research group. In the second place, published corporate values are examined regarding the extent of their communication and their content-related meaning. By means of an online research thirty randomly selected companies are analysed. Their corporate values are measured quantitatively, classified into relational and economic values and at last examined for correlations to their financial figures. Finally, the impacts of corporate values and their discrepancies between communication and implementation on humans are explored through a problem-centred group discussion with students and lecturers of the master’s degree programme in Business Psychology at the University of Bremen. This group discussion is evaluated and interpreted by using the sequence analysis method and the so-called ‘Kernsatz’-method.

The research results indicate that the examined companies focus on proclaiming relational values. In particular, the implementation of relational values requires a continuous commitment and trade-offs. Discrepancies between proclaimed corporate values and their actual implementation may be unavoidable due to conflicting goals, nevertheless such discrepancies should be reduced due to their various impacts. Especially employees identify themselves with corporate values, which raises expectations of their own and the company’s behavior. Acting contrary to these corporate values could have negative consequences on their relation of trust and motivation.

A comprehensive interpretation of these research results can provide recommendations for improving the determination and communication of corporate values in order to reduce the negative impacts of discrepancies in implementation.
2.3. VUCA – Leadership Development

By Ankie Sophie Jakob

VUCA is an acronym for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, which also describes the world of business in the era of globalization and digitalization. VUCA creates a new level of challenges in strategic leadership. To operate in the chaotic and complex world of leadership, it requires more than the basic tools and concepts. The work addresses the important question of which competences or skills leadership demands in order to cope with VUCA. Therefore, we focus on the design of a didactic concept for VUCA leadership development training, implemented to provide a hand on experience for the participants. The research report is based on a qualitative design and follows the concept of systemic research. For this purpose, empirical expert interviews are carried out following a customized interview guideline. The first interview partner is a 60 years old male, who has more than 30 years of work experience in the field of leadership development. The second interview partner, a 46 years old male, is an experienced systemic organisational developer and trainer. For the evaluation and the interpretation part, this work follows the inductive methods of key phrases proposed by Thomas Leithaeuser and Birgit Volmerg. Regarding state of the art research, VUCA is of major concern. However, it is still a big challenge to decode VUCA in a way that the participants understand the holistic concept and train their intuitive handling. The results of this work show that changing the stance and mind-set is the key factor for success in the VUCA world. However, a set of methods is required to gain this new experience. The interviewed experts recommend didactic methods like business games, system constellations, Reflecting-Team or theme-centred interaction. These findings are a promising base for further research projects. For example, it opens the possibility for an in-depth analysis of the experience of VUCA in management development courses. Further research could also investigate the efficacy of the quoted methods, and long-term studies could reveal whether the leaders sustainably changed their habits concerning VUCA challenges.
3 Projects Research Area C – Market and Consumption – Supervisor Ulf Over

3.1. Corporate identity: a sample study on its change during corporate growth, its impact on the stakeholders and its unity in a medium-sized German company

By Stella Milo, Robin Klarer & Katharina DiCapua

This qualitative research study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between corporate identity (CI) and corporate growth in a medium-sized German company and its impact on the stakeholders and its unity. Medium-sized companies are the core of the German economy, as they account for approximately 99% of the German enterprises. Because of the rising challenges for medium-sized companies such as globalization, clear communication to stakeholders via means of a strong CI is of paramount importance to ensure the company’s economic success and stability.

This sample study is based on four problem-centered interviews. All interviewees were male, between 28-66 years of age and were selected to give a broad perspective in terms of seniority and field of activity within the company. The content of the interviews was reduced by means of content analysis using Volmerg’s (1988) method of key sentences. The most salient statements were clustered in categories, which were in turn merged into bigger themes when possible.

The results of the investigation indicate that only few changes in the CI were due to corporate growth hence leading to low impact on the stakeholders and a strong unity of communicated values. Despite the lack of change, stakeholders continue to give a strong importance to ensuring the continuity of the underlying values of the CI. This is in line with organizational theories where management attempts to retain the company’s values with value based recruiting and strategies such as team building.

Contrary to our former expectations that CI would change due to strong corporate growth, this study showed instead that the values that were communicated by CI actually enabled the company growth in the first place.
3.2. Sustainable Brand Communication – How Important is Communication of Sustainable Behaviour for a Corporate Brand?

By Petra Seif & Lina Ahmels

With growing importance of sustainability in recent years, consumers are increasingly demanding that companies contribute to the sustainable development of society. Promoting a convincing presentation of their sustainability ambitions can help companies remain competitive. This study is intended to help understand how sustainable action is perceived and can be communicated. More precisely, this research examines whether individuals are willing to act in a consciously sustainable manner and therefore pay more attention to brands that represent this attitude themselves. The theoretical background of this research project is an identity-based approach to brand management. The central aim is to show whether and how sustainability can be anchored in brand management and how companies can communicate this effectively and with lasting value. In cooperation with a company a process is developed that shows how companies can proceed if sustainable communication is to be pursued. An empirical study was conducted using qualitative surveys. A group discussion and three guided interviews with experts served to identify new findings on the relevance of sustainability aspects to consumers. Subsequently, two further expert interviews were conducted with representatives of a company whose results served as a basis for an exemplary illustration of the process. The so-called Kernsatzmethode was used for the evaluation and interpretation of the group discussion and interviews. The study results were used to develop practical implications for the communication of relevant sustainability aspects and to derive recommendations for companies. The findings indicate that companies could derive benefits by advertising an eagerness for sustainable action among their relevant target groups. However, discrepancies between proclaimed sustainability and its actual implementation should be avoided due to negative impacts, such as loss in credibility. In addition, it seems that the cost factor could still be decisive for both consumers and companies. The results suggest that it might be important to show consumers their personal benefit to overcome the gap between sustainable awareness and actual consumer behavior.
3.3. The failure of change projects – causes and solutions

By Sarah Tesch & Sarah Rebolledo

The present study, which was conducted together with the Roth Institute in Bremen, contains theoretical and methodological considerations regarding the success of change management projects. The focus is on the examination of possible causes that lead to the failure of these projects as well as the derivation of recommendations for companies to avoid this failure. Through the transformation of society and markets, companies are increasingly concerned with the topic of change management. In the context of projects, different solutions are pursued, but often do not lead to the desired success. In order to analyze what exactly causes the failure of these projects, in this study external consultants, managing directors and change management experts were interviewed about their experiences with change management projects. The six male participants were mainly recruited through business contacts of the Roth Institute and questioned by telephone and personal expert interviews. They all gained many years of experience in the field of change management.

The interviews proved to be very informative and showed different perspectives of dealing with the topic of change management. The transcribed interviews were evaluated using the core sentence method, which revealed key principles such as the idea of man, complexity, continuity, transparency and trust as well as self-knowledge, that must be considered in the change management process. These principles are primarily aimed to the management of a company, which ultimately bears the responsibility for the implementation of change projects. Researchers agree that managing companies often have inadequate knowledge of change projects. For this reason, in the future the above-mentioned principles should be passed on to management as part of a consultancy in order to raise their understanding of change processes to a higher level.
3.4. Key Competencies and Competency in the Digital Age

By Sophia Schmidt

For most of the people the topic of digitization may be put into practice well enough by implementing computers and IT systems. Often, however, the question arises if and in which working areas people will be replaced by automation trends. Since digitization and the associated change in the world of work can not be stopped or reversed, it seems important to actively shape change. By identifying emerging fields of work and the accompanying competences people can be prepared for meeting the new challenges of the digital age with confidence so that they can contribute to a long-term corporate success (Neuburger, 2016, online). It is the goal of the research project to examine indispensable cross-industry key competences for giving a face to an employee of the digital age. Four partially standardized, guideline-supported expert interviews with HR managers of medium-sized and large companies from various sectors were conducted concerning the influence of digitization on the company as well as required competences and their current coverage. After evaluating the interviews in a qualitative way by using the method of the formation of core sentences according to Volmerg, Senghaas-Knobloch and Leithäuser (1986) the results reflect different challenges faced by the companies in the digital age which enable the identification of required key competences based on the competence list of Heyse and Erpenbeck (2009). One of the potential challenges concerns change of hierarchical structures where leaders turn into advisors requiring an increasing competence in consulting skills while more freedom for employees leads to greater demands on key competences such as self-management and personal responsibility. Particularly in light of the substantial challenge of breakneck pace in the digital age which involves diverse, fast-moving and unpredictable demands on employees, executives and organizations the importance of a strategic competence management for the competitiveness of companies becomes clear. Besides, the research results clearly demonstrate that competences rarely appear alone but their relevance lies on their interaction with regard to meeting the challenges of the digital age.