

Change process in the context of corporate communications: Stages for exploiting the potential of social media

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Many companies waive even to its use of social media, because they are afraid of losing control over their communications and their benefits concerned. It must be admitted honestly that companies have already lost this control by the various possibilities of Web 2.0. The messages of the sender as well as the reactions of the recipient on the given messages cannot or only partially be controlled. The reactions of the people in the social web can thus be neither controlled nor purposefully reliably predicted. To trigger and use viral effects, the control must be issued. Thereby is some unpredictability because of the fundamental properties and forces of social media: the relationship and exchanges between people. The loss of control is new and unfamiliar to businesses because the media Social Media sets itself apart from the previously used controllable communication channels. The implementation of a change management is a requirement that companies can succeed utilize the potential of social media. Established thought-, action- and organizational structures need to be reconsidered, given to the power shifts in the dialogue between companies and their stakeholders.

Introduction

„The only constant is change“ is a famous quote by Greek philosopher Heraclitus. This is true, then as now. Changes are taking place more and more rapidly, and thus the rate at which companies must adapt to this change. Following the principle of „survival of the fittest“ according to Darwin only those systems survive, that have a high ability to adapt to changing conditions. The complexity of the environment is characterized for example by the long ever-increasing globalization, the development of information technology or demographics. The more the framework changes, the more organizations also need to change. Just so they can be successful in the markets of the future (Peclum 2012, p. 49).

1. Definition Change-Management

Under Change Management all tasks, measures and activities are summarized, that are intended to bring a comprehensive, cross-sector and content far-reaching change in an organization. These are used to implement new strategies, structures, systems, processes or practices. At a conceptual level, change is a matter of moving from one state to another, specifically, from a problem state to a solved state in a planned, orderly fashion. This essentially means to leave the current state, to occupy a new one and to have some structured and organized processes to get from one to the other. The aim is to effectively implement new methods and systems in an ongoing organization. The focus of change

management is on the design of the path to the destination and not in the application of methods and procedures of the strategic target planning. Change Management is, as opposed to strategic management, which seeks an optimal adaptation to the environment, a task that is mainly aimed inward, on the members of the organization to be converted. The aim is to implement the derived optimal adaptations based on the strategic management (Lauer 2014, p. 4).

Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change - Although any profound change is always unique in their complexity, so it is based on the experience firmly with various change processes, that change processes follow recurring patterns respectively different basic principles. The most famous and oldest model comes from Kurt Lewin. His three stage theory of change is commonly referred to as: Unfreezing, Moving, Freezing (Peclum 2012, p. 69).

- Unfreezing. Under unfreezing Lewin understands how to prepare a change. The unfreezing stage is probably one of the more important stages to understand in the world of change we live in today. This stage is about getting ready to change. It involves getting to a point of understanding that change is necessary, and getting ready to move away from our current comfort zone. This first stage is about preparing ourselves before the change. The more we feel that change is necessary, the more urgent it is, the more motivated we are to make the change.
- Moving. In the second phase the company is passing over to the new level. The introduction of new group standards is reinforced by direct intervention of those responsible and by training and monitoring of the process. Lewin was aware that change is not an event, but rather a process. He called that process a transition. Transition is the inner movement or journey we make in reaction to a change. This second stage occurs as we make the changes that are needed. People are "unfrozen" and moving towards a new way of being.
- Freezing. The last phase is the solidification of "getting used to" of the group. The new process must be fully seated and naturally included. This is ensured by continued monitoring via the introduction phase, whether the process works and is maintained. Lewin refers to this stage as freezing although a lot of people refer to it as 'refreezing'. As the name suggests this stage is about establishing stability once the changes have been made. The changes are accepted and become the new norm. People form new relationships and become comfortable with their routines.

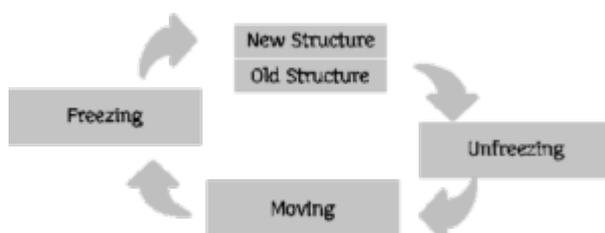


Figure 1: Lewin's 3-stage model of change

Source: Lewin 1958, p. 210

In addition to the phases it is essential to know basic error- or success factors of a change process and to take them into account in the management of the change process.

Success factors in the change process - a clear definition of vision and goals is very important at the beginning of a change. If this is not the case, so it lacks the parties to orientation and a basic understanding of the meaning and the need for change. It is important to define both the orientation and premises of the change and the reasons behind it and to communicate on a broad basis. The aim must be to create a broad awareness of the problems standing behind the change and to give the parties concerned orientation.

A change process also requires a high level of information and communication. Unclear, delayed or incomplete information within a change process often have misunderstandings regarding objective and benefits of change on the part of staff to follow. Rumours and emerging fears can also quickly

arise pressure. Accordingly, it is important to continuously maintain an open, lively and trusting communication in the course of change (Doppler and Lauterburg 2008, p. 160). Another success factor in change processes is linked to the responsible or affected executives. Leaders must therefore not only stand uniformly behind the change process, but also be able to deal professionally with the insecurity of affected employees, to engage and to win them for the planned change.

It's a crucial factor, to participate managers and employees as early as possible in the refinement of change. The ways of doing this are manifold; a possibility, for example, is the integration of individual representatives in the project organization. This allows integrated different perspectives in the process, and ultimately an increased acceptance of the forthcoming changes.

Further, not less relevant success factors are cited flexible planning and regular monitoring of the process and a profound anchoring of change. Accordingly, it is necessary to take into account in the planning of the process that major changes often take years to complete and therefore in its design must be flexible enough, to adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

Risks in the change process - the ability to change is one of the success factors of a company. But wherever people work, it is not done with the pure implementation of change projects: The human being is, as soon as the change relates to him personally, skeptical and fearful. Active and passive resistance is often the result.

Missing information, no matter the reason, provide plenty of opportunity for misinformation, misinterpretations, own opinion and agitation. Some employees make their own impression of the project before it was ever substantiated. For many people, changes put considerable strain. The usual security and stability is questioned (Lindinger and Zeisel 2013, p. 137).

The main factors for failure are the lack of commitment of the top management levels, followed by unclear target images and visions of change processes and the lack of experience of the managers in dealing with the uncertainty of the employees concerned. Thereby management becomes a central element of control! Other determinants, such as disagreement among senior executives, a lack of support from line managers, insufficient opportunities to cope with anxieties and resistance as well as the fundamental neglect of psychological factors in regards to project planning, make clear that psychological factors are particularly critical to the success of change processes (C4 Consulting/Technische Universität München 2007, p. 31).

The implementation of a change management is a requirement that companies can succeed utilizing the potential of social media. Established thought-, action- and organizational structures need to be reconsidered, given to the power shifts in the dialogue between companies and their stakeholders (Kreutzer 2014, p. 1).

2. Stages for exploiting the potential of social media

In what stages the process or the integration of social media can develop, shows figure 2.

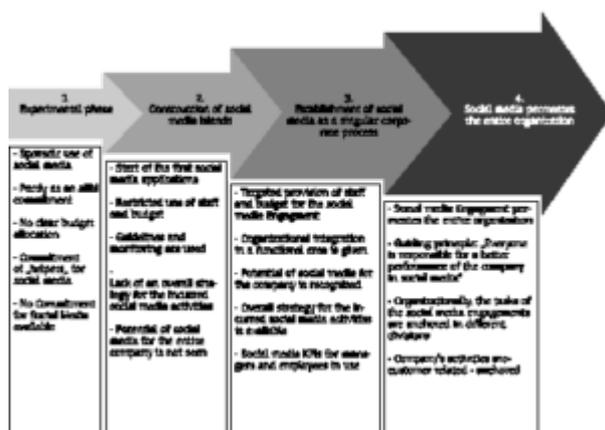


Figure 2: Stages for exploiting the potential of social media

Source: Kreutzer 2014, p. 10

The social media newcomers are mainly to be found in the stage 1: Experimental phase. Here it comes - often without dedicated allocation of human and financial resources - to initiate first steps without any real corporate commitment (Kreutzer 2014, p. 9).

The social media pioneers who deal a bit longer with different social media applications, are often found in the stage 2: Construction of social media Islands. Here social media applications are started within the company with limited human and financial use. A social media overall strategy is not visible even in batches; nevertheless first Guidelines are created and monitoring tasks are processed.

Some of the social media Pioneers are already in transition to stage 3:

Establishment of social media as a singular corporate process. In these companies, the great potential of social media has been recognized for hedging and expand its own business area and anchored organizationally in functional form. Staff and budget are - oriented to the objectives to be achieved - provided.

Stage 4: Social media permeates the entire organization represents the most complete form of organizational implementation of social media marketing. Here the company-wide commitment in social media covers the entire organization - so as it's the case today in a market-oriented business management. The activities in social media have to give up their close ties to a functional area and penetrate the entire organization (Kreutzer 2014, p. 9).

It is understandable that the requirement of a change management is particularly strong in the first three stages in this process. Finally, the existing organizational and operational structures must be comprehensively developed. Not only existing information and process silos have to be set up, but also responsibilities have to be changed, that no longer meet the new demands of social and digital age (Kreutzer and Land 2013, p. 228).

3. Survey along sanitary traders

In a snap poll in March 2016 following question was asked: „In what stage of the integration of social media is your business?“ Of the four questions one answer could be chosen.

Interview participants (n): 60

Survey method: online

Survey period: March 2016

Respondents for the snap poll are decision makers and users who work in small and medium enterprises in the sanitary business. The questionnaire is generated by using a survey software that runs on a web server. To fill in the questionnaire, the respondent has to go to the corresponding internet address. The multiple participation in the survey is excluded by matching the IP address.

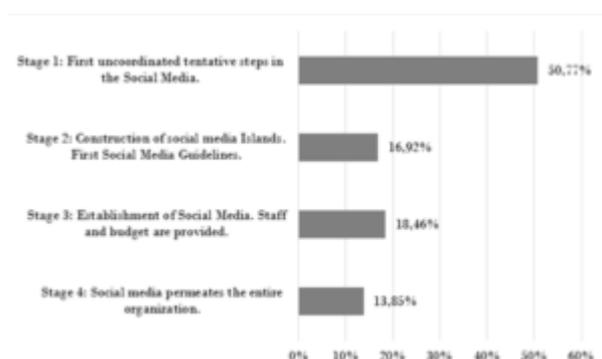


Figure 3: In what stage of the integration of social media is your business?

Source: author

Stage 1: First uncoordinated tentative steps in the Social Media.	50,77%
Stage 2: Construction of social media Islands. First Social Media Guidelines.	16,92%
Stage 3: Establishment of Social Media. Staff and budget are provided.	18,46%
Stage 4: Social media permeates the entire organization.	13,85%

Table 1: In what stage of the integration of social media is your business?

Source: author

Target of the survey - Social media marketing means mainly the long periods building of customer relationships, creating loyalty and trust as well as the sustainable improvement of the image and brand awareness. The available online tools enable rapid response to possible negative developments and provide businesses therefore the opportunity to quickly take countermeasures (Scott 2007, p. 20). Social media marketing is marketing through the targeted use of social media to publish user-generated posts and to exchange information. It is thus a form of marketing, which aims own marketing objectives through the use of and participation in social communication- and exchange processes through standard web applications and technologies to achieve (Hettler 2010, p. 38). The aim of the survey was to find out how targeted small medium sized enterprises use social media.

Result of the snap poll - The snap poll consisted of a question and four possible answers, of which one response could be chosen. About 50% of the participants responded that they are at level 1, and take the first tentative steps uncoordinated in the social media. Nearly 17% are in stage 2 and build first social media islands in the company. First Social Media Guidelines are available. 18,46% of respondents already established social media in the enterprise and provide staff and budget. In this third stage the great potential of social media is detected and used by the company to hedge and expand its own business unit. In at least about 14% of the companies social media permeates the entire organization. These companies in stage 4 utilize the most comprehensive form of organizational implementation of social media marketing.

4 Limitations and outlook

The survey is a scientific method by which information about the level of information, opinions, values, behavior of people or basic demographic data are to be obtained. As a scientific method, they must be carried out according to strict rules. Survey forms as Polls do not meet the academic requirements. Since the survey was carried out only under specialist dealers in the sanitary sector, it gives a good impression about the current state of integration of social media within the organizations.

More than half of the companies are still in the first phase of uncoordinated tentative steps in the social media. By moving up of young people into working life, the opening up to social media will continue to forge ahead. Young people use the social media self-evident. They cannot be an indispensable part of everyday life, thus they will increasingly find its way into the companies.

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Klíčové slová/Key Words

change management, change process, social media, social media guidelines
riadenie zmien, proces zmeny, sociálne médiá, inštrukcie sociálnych médií

JEL klasifikácia

M31

Résumé

Proces zmeny v kontexte podnikovej komunikácie: Stupne pre využitie potenciálu sociálnych médií

Mnoho podnikov sa dokonca vzdáva využívať sociálne médiá, pretože sa obávajú straty kontroly nad vlastnou komunikáciou aj s tým prislúchajúcimi výhodami. Je potrebné úprimne pripustiť, že spoločnosti už stratili túto kontrolu pri rôznych možnostiach Webu 2.0. Správy odosielateľa ako aj reakcie príjemcu na túto správu nemôžu byť úplne kontrolované, alebo ak, tak len čiastočne. Reakcie ľudí na sociálnom webe teda nemôžu byť ani riadené, ani účelne a spoľahlivo predvídateľné. Pokiaľ je potrebné spustiť a používať virálne efekty, musí byť zabezpečená kontrola. Nepredvídateľnosť v komunikácii vychádza zo základných vlastností a síl sociálnych médií: vzťah a výmena medzi ľuďmi. Strata kontroly je novou a neznámou pre podniky pretože sociálne médiá sa odlišujú od predtým používaných komunikačných kanálov. Implementácia manažmentu zmeny je požiadavkou na to, aby podniky mohli úspešne využívať potenciál sociálnych médií. Zaužívaná myšlienková a akčná organizačná štruktúra má byť prehodnotená vzhľadom k posilneniu dialógu medzi podnikmi a ich zúčastnených strán.

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