

Case study on an accelerated approach to a new world of work transformation

*Michael BARTZ^{1,2}, Martina HARTNER-TIEFENTHALER²,
Alessandro WÄRZNER², Sabine T. KÖSZEGI²*

¹*Department Business, IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, 3500 Krems, Austria*

²*Institute for Labour Science and Organisation, Vienna University of Technology, 1040
Vienna, Austria*

Abstract. The example of a medium size company shows that an organisational transformation towards a more virtual workstyle can possibly be accelerated by means of a reverse change approach. The affected organisation does not show signs of destabilisation, and the achieved economic advantages are substantial.

Keywords. New World of Work, virtual work, transformation, reverse change approach.

1. Introduction

This practitioners contribution looks into the New World of Work transformation of a technology firm. The company under investigation is a global manufacturer of photo copiers on the way to IT System Integration business. The transformation of its local subsidiary in Budapest Hungary is a pilot project of its European unit. Objective of this pilot with 60 employees is to establish new innovative work styles in the organisation, i.e. mobile working, virtual teams, non-territorial office, use of 2.0 communication and collaboration tools (cf. Bartz & Schmutzer, 2014). The expectation is that the establishment of New World of Work competencies in the organisation will have a synergetic impact on the market repositioning of the company as a solution provider especially for New World of Work business solutions.

2. Approach to organizational change

In July 2013 the entity in Hungary moved to a new office and changed internal work styles fundamentally. This means especially that – simultaneously to the move to the new office premises – home working and mobile working was introduced to the entire organisation. So the change was made towards a virtual workstyle. At the same time the company premises became a non-territorial office with shared work spaces. The company was originally used to an office centric workstyle, with a very limited degree of mobile working and dedicated work places in the office.

An accelerated implementation approach had been chosen for the transformation process which can be compared to reverse engineering methodology. This means that the organisation – by purpose – moved into the work situation with only minimum degree of preparation. It was ensured that legal requirements (work contracts) were fully met, information on the new work situation was provided to the employees and a basic set of so-called Rules of Engagement, which define the fundamental working principals for the new virtual work environment. – The actual in-depth change process started only after the office

relocation was completed. This contrasts common practice which proposes a one to three years preparation phase ahead of a significant organisational alteration.

3. Research Method

The entire change process is accompanied by an impact measurement research project. The research is based on a mixed methods design combining regular surveys, company data analysis as well as workshops and personal interviews. The objective is to understand the impact of the New World of Work transformation and the transformation process on the organisation, teams and individuals.

In the first phase of the research project a baseline measurement was taken before the office move, and a first follow up measurement round was conducted right after the deployment of the new office premises and the start of the mobile and home working scheme.

4. Results

A potential risk of the accelerated change approach was to see a decrease in the organisational performance and in employee satisfaction (cf. de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Based on our data, the first 6 months do not indicate that kind of negative impact. The organisation appears to remain stable.

Besides relative stability of the organisation it can be observed that its members start to embrace the new workstyle and new tools quickly. As an example, chat – which was formerly rather uncommon to use – became immediately a communication means of choice. Employees started to use it intuitively, without further instructions or formal training.

From the perspective of the reverse change approach it is remarkable that the organisation appears to be stable and as well due to the fact that the geographic location of the new office is considerably less attractive to the employees. The relocation of the physical office was an economic precondition for the New World of Work transformation, as it allowed to reduce infrastructure cost by 60%. The savings have set free funding to finance the change process and will start to contribute a substantial cost advantage to the company's financial results after the first year already.

In this practitioner contribution an insight into the accelerated change approach will be provided (underlying concept, advantages, risks). The presentation will also elaborate on the actual effect of the given changes on the organisation. Finally the underlying business case will be explained.

References

- de Menezes, L. M., & Kelliher, C. (2011). Flexible Working and Performance: A Systematic Review of the Evidence for a Business Case. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13, 452–474.
- Bartz, M., & Schmutzer, T. (2014): *New World of Work. Warum kein Stein auf dem anderen bleibt*. Wien: Lindeverlag.