

Consultants' versus Managers' - Perceptions of a Group Development Intervention Program

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Abstract

The present study examines a large scale intervention program within the manufacturing industry with the purpose of improving cooperation and health among both management and production teams. Altogether 31 management teams and 132 production teams, comprising 1596 individuals, participated in this intervention program. All the management teams were assigned a budget of nine hours of consultation-time each, plus a GDQ-measurement before and at the termination of the project. There were six meetings during the project and each meeting lasted one and a half hours. Four groups met concurrently, in the same room together with the two consultants. The present results target the issue of consultants' and managers' perceptions of the intervention process, but not the outcomes or the result of the intervention performed. Interviews were carried out with the two consultants who conducted the whole intervention and ten of the top managers who participated in the intervention. The interviews focused upon critical aspects associated with either success or failure before, during and after the intervention program. Content analyses were performed for consultant and managers separately, in order to extract themes describing their views of the intervention process. Similarities and differences between consultants' and managers' perceptions of the process are discussed.

Keywords: Intervention program; Group development; Consultants; Managers; Manufacturing industry

Introduction

The initiating focus of the present study was interventional, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), and aiming at increasing work satisfaction and reducing emotional exhaustion and sick leave in one of the factories of a large Swedish manufacturing industry. Results from the intervention have been reported earlier by Jacobsson et al. [1]. The main intervention consisted of a series of workshops targeting known processes in group development [2].

Thematic analysis of interviews, involved both managers and team leaders who were recipients of the workshop intervention, revealed that the managers' attitudes towards the intervention either facilitated or hindered the change process; an enhanced communication, cooperation and awareness of group processes facilitated change and the structural factors, such as change in production speed and employee turnover, constituted to the implementation of change [3,4].

Change

The theoretical assumptions of change and, in particular, change within groups, as it was outlined by Lewin [5], have altered prevailing notions within the fields of applied research, action research, and group communication [6-8]. The process of change, as a process of affecting the restraining and driving forces, holding the force field in its equilibrium, through the stages of 'unfreezing', change and 'refreezing' Lewin [5] may be defined in the context of specific mechanisms in the various stages, are directed towards the individual. The 'unfreezing' stage is the process of motivating for change [6]. The changing, or moving, stage requires the development of new attitudes. In the final stage, 're-freezing', the individual has to feel that the new behaviors and values are consistent with one's own personality and personal attributes. Organizational change that employs a group development technique are more likely to be maintained since the new values and behaviors have already been talked through and have been tested by the group [6]. In accordance with Schein [6], it is Kotter [9] opinion that the motivational factor is highly underestimated when organizations try to make changes and is

the main cause of failure to implement change. In Kotter's experience, a change process follows a series of steps whereby the 'vision of change' is communicated and implemented through a process of systematization.

Beer et al. [10] propose further a sequence of steps whereby coordination, commitment and competence provided the working factors wherein roles, responsibilities and relationships develop as the organizational system is transformed; these processes influence the individual through the work of "task alignment", whereby managers transform the interventional components into usable tools for the benefit of the actual work assignments. Beer et al. [10] are convinced that change programs fail because they try to enforce change onto the individual through a sort of conversion process emanating from the organization top. A successful change avoids abstract words from the top and uses a middle manager allowing him/her to transform the visionary words into practical notions, meaningful to the employees. Ford [11] presents a different perspective when he describes the change process as a 'shift in language'. By this notion, the organization exists as a network of conversations and the change is then inherent in the language so the change process evolves through shifting conversations.

Defences

Argyris [12] argues that individuals fear possible threats and are afraid of "losing-face" and experiencing shame. This reaction ensures the preservation of suboptimal structures retaining beliefs, safety, as

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opposed to the change-process which is then perceived to be a threat. According to Argyris [12] theory, this belief is a universal phenomenon which in turn implies that an organization defends itself against change. The organizational defenses cause skilled incompetence in several ways. Since few individuals dare to question or demand clarification, efforts that are intended to increase understanding and confidence often lead to misunderstandings and disappointment.

The client

Schein [13] suggests a clarification of the client role and postulates a division between different client roles in order to provide the helper tools in pursuit of a successful intervention. According to Schein [13], it is not always clear to the consultant which intervention will accommodate a particular type of client with possible impact upon other 'client-types'. Appelbaum and Steed [14] observed that clients, among other things, appreciated consultants' communication, client-focus, clarity of objectives, adaption to the client's readiness for change, understanding of the client environment and that the 'implementation' was performed by the consultant. In interventions where clients were more involved in the planning, their participation was more forthcoming, as shown much earlier by Coch and French [15] in their famous "Harwood" study. Since different individuals express different needs, a successful intervention must cater for these needs [16]. The client's perception of an high quality intervention as a positive experience may provide the key to success [17]. When investigating employees' 'readiness-for-change' in initiating team-work, Eby et al. [18] found that the employees' perception of the organizational structure as flexible and adaptable to change favored their perceptions of the organizational 'readiness-for-change'.

The manager in the role of client

Middle management exerts a special position with regard to implementation of change [9,10,19-21]. Middle management may implement the determining factor modulating whether or not a change will be executed successfully [19]. Available evidence implies that the managers who are most in need of change implementation are those showing most resistance and least capacity for change implementation [20]. Consequently, manager resisting change ought to be provide with additional support, and if persistently resistant will require relocation in order for change procedures to proceed [9,10].

The consultant as helper

Schein [22] has found that most facilitatory situations involve similar processes, whether involving individuals, groups or organizations. This process is construed as an "accomplice" (or "helper") - i.e. a 'help-receiver-situation'. According to this notion, Schein [22] describes how the 'helping-situation' induces an imbalance in the social economy such that the helper automatically receives power and status and, conversely, the person being helped (client) loses power and status. Schein postulates central to client participation is the preservation of his/her self-image without any 'loss of face'. The "accomplice" may select either the role of expert, doctor or process consultant. In the role of the expert, he/she provides information and support, in the role of doctor diagnosis and prescription, and as process consultant questions unlock the client's essential requirements. Schein believes the use of the process consultant role is required at an initial stage with expert or doctor roles most suitable when the need for assistance has been determined clearly. Obvious problems arise when an accomplice assumes the role of expert or doctor at an initial stage in order to advise, diagnose and prescribe without a complete comprehension of the problem.

Group Development

A group may be conceptualized from a holistic perspective wherein the group dynamics may be treated as a single factor and therewith be subjected to interventions. The group may be seen also as a dynamic system that has the ability to evolve towards a higher level of development [2]. This development towards a higher level may be facilitated by various interventions targeting the needs of the group [2]. The increase of a group's developmental level has been shown to affect, above all, a group's productivity level [23]. To achieve a higher level of group development an intervention has to take into account the group's abilities and needs. The involvement of all group members emerges out the interventions created by the group's abilities and needs [2].

The context

Whether seen from the individual [22], group [2] or organizational [10] perspective, an intervention aimed at organizational change should always be constructed upon the individuals, groups or organizations specific needs with an adaptation stemming from already-existing skills [2,10,22]. Nevertheless, this procedure rarely, if ever, seems to be the case. Instead, it seems commonplace to apply already-developed intervention programs and implement them in several different places without regard to the specific needs or contextual deviations [24].

Interfering organizational changes, conflicting demands and change cynicism

There seems to be ample evidence that concurrent organizational changes in the form of economic changes, employee turnover, management change and conflicting work demands exert a obstructive impact on an intervention implementation [25-27] since both focus and energy are drawn away from the intervention. In their study, regarding a particular corporate enterprise [16], connected the repeated changes that had been introduced and not implemented, due to interfering changes, with an emerging "change cynicism". Reichers et al. [28] have also speculated that many failed implementations lead to despair in relation to changes and induce "change cynicism" among the employees. In the Saksvik et al. [27] study, the employees were experiencing "project fatigue" as a consequence of all intervention projects that were initiated but never followed up.

Research question

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the similarities and differences that exist between consultants' and managers' perceptions of the interventional process.

Method

The company

The manufacturing industry that was subjected to the interventions and the investigation of the present study was organized with a clear hierarchical structure, command regime and clearly defined tasks. The working day was divided into a daytime and an evening shift. The target group of the intervention under study, beside the consultants, consisted of production managers and team leaders who together formed a management team. The production managers managed a department and thus a number of team leaders. Team leaders, in turn, led a team comprising a number of "fitters".

The consultants

The consultants were granted funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to perform the project. The consultants were both

registered psychologists under The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), specialized in organizational psychology and they both had been working several years in occupational healthcare.

The project

The main goal of the overall project, and the consultants hope with their interventions, was to reduce sickness-leave (absence from work). The focus of the interventions was targeted at individual, group and organizational levels. The project's three focus areas had a main focus upon improving the psychosocial work environment, extracting information on health factors and convening a safe, healthy and sustainable work environment. The evaluation of the intervention in the present study deals with the first objective, improvement of the psychosocial work environment.

The intervention

The present intervention consisted of measuring the groups' maturity level with Group Development Questionnaire (GDQ) [2], six workshops and a two-day conference for the production managers and plant managers (PVC). The workshops were 1.5 hours long. The consultants sought to obtain workshops adapted to a particular phase of development since this has been shown to be the most effective way to work with groups based on GDQ [2]. Nevertheless, achieving this goal proved to be impossible, both financially and logistically. Therefore, it came about that the groups at the workshops were at different stages of each developmental level. The various sessions were divided into different themes.

The first run involved a review and discussion of the groups' outcomes on the GDQ measurement. In the second workshop, the participants were working with goals, both individual but also, and above all, the goals of the group. The third time the groups talked about how they work together and involvement in the group. In the fourth workshop the groups discussed meeting structure and in what way they wanted their group to have meetings. The fifth meeting considered decision-making and roles. The participants learnt about different decision models and what roles within a group implies. In the sixth and final workshop the groups talked about how they, as a group and as individuals wanted feedback, and on what they wanted feedback. The intervention consisted also of a two-day conference where all the production managers had the opportunity to meet, and where they were able to discuss concrete changes with their own managers.

Respondents

The respondents were managers from the five groups that had advanced most forward in scale four in the GDQ measurement and managers from the five groups that moved most backward in the same scale between measurements [3]. In the present study, the results from the interviews with those managers were compared with the interviews from the two consultants.

Instruments

In order to find potential overlaps between the managers and consultants perceptions of the intervention the same interview guide were used in the present research as in Lidberg's [3] research. The questions covered three topics, the consultants work in the project, group processes that occurred as a result of the project, and effects or results of the project.

Procedure

The interviews with the managers were conducted on the actual

manufacturing industry in late March, 2013. And the interviews with the consultants were carried out at the Psychological Institution of The University of Gothenburg in late May of that year. The consultants were kept unaware of the results from the interviews with the managers until after they themselves had been interviewed.

Data processing

The interviews with the consultants were transcribed before being coded. The coding was performed on a semantic level, which in turn implies that the statements in the text were considered to be trustworthy, as opposed to latent coding wherein the statements are being interpreted [29]. The encoded text sections were kept deliberately voluminous, in order to gain a greater understanding of the statements, which also meant that several coded sections fell into several themes. The coded text sections were then merged into themes where the starting point was that a theme would be internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous [30]. Each theme was then checked against the text to see if more coded sections fitted into the current theme. Then the themes were compared with the text to see whether or not they were consistent with the overall picture. In the next step, themes were organized, and a summary of all the themes was performed. The themes were then sent to and validated by the consultants [31].

Results

The themes that overlapped between participating consultants and managers (A), as well as the managers' themes that did not overlap with those of the consultants (B), and vice versa (C), are presented (see below).

A. Themes overlapping between consultants and managers

1. Positive experiences of the intervention
2. Hindering factors and problems
 - Conflicting processes
 - Lack of time
 - Not enough interventions
3. Facilitating factors
 - Feedback
 - Communication
 - The opportunity to meet
4. The Conference
5. Continuation
6. Organizational culture

B. Managers' themes that did not overlap with the themes from the consultants

1. The manager's stories about their own leadership
2. The managers wish regarding the participation of the production teams
3. Other contributing factors/parallel processes
4. Skills existing prior to the intervention
5. Unable to use the intervention
6. Becoming a team

C. Consultants' themes that did not overlap with the themes from the managers

1. The overall objective of the intervention
2. Internal resistance
3. Management is convinced
4. The specific processes of the groups
5. The consultants own processes
 - Increased status
 - Learning process
 - Empathy and understanding for the workers

Overlapping Themes

Positive experiences of the intervention

On the whole, both consultants and managers, found the intervention to be a positive experience.

Hindering factors and problems

Both managers and consultants experienced a variety of hindering factors that were in the way of the possibility to actually work with the change process

Conflicting processes: Both managers and consultants believed that the constant change in production speed and the personnel changes that came as a result of that, hindered the way of actually making the change process consolidated.

Lack of time: The consultants felt they had time constraints in a way that they did not get enough time from top management to implement the best possible intervention. The managers, on their part, experienced time constraints in relation to production speed and the actual work they had to perform. This in turn led to an experience of difficulty to work with the change process.

Not enough interventions: As a continuation of the theme "lack of time", but still a stand-alone experience, both consultants and managers experiences gave rise to the situation that the workshops were very limited. There was a common experience that for the workshops to have been successful, it would have required more time and more interventions. The correlation between the consultants experience of not enough interventions are most consistent with statements from the group of managers with groups that moved backwards.

Facilitating factors

Both managers and consultants experiences were such that, as mentioned in the first theme, the intervention was a positive experience. They also experienced some of the separate workshops to be more prominent than others.

Feedback: In one of the workshops the managers and their groups talked about how they wanted to receive and give feedback. Both consultants and managers felt that this was the most successful of the workshops. The managers said it was the one that was most useful and concrete. The consultant's experience, on the other hand, was that the reason this workshop worked so well was because it was the last one and by the time that it was given the managers had become comfortable with the way the consultants worked.

Communication: The managers traced a lot of their progression

and change to the fact that they had become better at communicating. The consultants also experienced that, as the workshops went on, the managers and groups progressed in their way of communicating with each other.

The opportunity to meet: One of the main factors that both managers and consultants attributed to the change process was the fact that the groups, for ones, could meet and talk about issues that were important to them. This, then, is a factor that is outside the workshops. It's not a method, like feedback, that was addressed as something to work with. But it is on the other hand something that the managers and their groups did every time they met for a workshop.

The conference

The managers all said that the conference was the best part of the intervention program. The conference was exclusive for the managers and their closest managers, the plant managers. At the conference the managers got the opportunity to talk to other managers in the same position as themselves, something they rarely could do at other times. The managers were organized in groups where they came up with ideas on practical changes they wanted. Then the plant managers had to choose the ideas they agreed to work with and then see to it that they were followed thru. The consultants were not as optimistic as the managers when they talked about the conference, but they could see that it had been appreciated by the managers.

Continuation

There was a strong feeling from both managers and consultants that they were not actually finished when the workshops and the intervention ended. They had both wanted to see a continuation. The manager's, mostly from the groups that moved backwards, talked about earlier interventions that had been ended in, what the managers thought was, a too early state. They were also disappointed by all those occasions that changes are initiated, but then never followed up. Some of the managers also said they had a hard time committing themselves to the change program because of all the previous disappointments. The consultants felt that they were just getting the managers and their groups to get comfortable and accepting the consultant's ideas as it was time to end the workshops.

Organizational culture

The managers described their organizational culture as one where orders came from above and there were no room for questioning decisions. Other cultural expressions could be observed in the tight time management, focus on what is done wrong and very little possibility to use your own creativity. The consultants were aware of these cultural expressions and used them when they planned their workshop. As a result, the workshops were concise, extremely well-structured and directive.

Managers Themes, not Overlapping

The managers' narratives about their own leadership

This theme captures the managers' statements about their own leadership, in the groups that moved backwards. Although the interview guide did not include any questions about the managers' own leadership, and although the interviewer did not ask any questions about it, a lot of the statements came to revolve around this issue. The managers related how they used their leadership in order to develop the teams, what they themselves and others thought and uttered about their leadership and what impact their leadership had on the teams. The

statements also addressed facts about how long they had worked and how they, as role models, were able to get others to follow their example.

The managers wish regarding the participation of the production teams

The managers, in the group moving forward, expressed disappointment in that the fitters were not included in the workshops.

Other contributing factors/parallel processes

Both groups of managers related much detail regarding other factors, beside the intervention, that they saw as either just parallel processes or contributing to the group development process. These factors were the company's own developmental programs targeted at leadership, group and organizational levels. They discussed several aspects concerning a control-, quality- and goal systems that were part of the production process and their experience that these processes already contributed to the group's developmental process.

Skills existing prior to the intervention

This theme follows from the prior theme: "Other contributing factors/parallel processes", but concurrently it contains additional and different information. The theme was substantive in the sense that all managers had something to say about it and they had a lot to say. The managers said that the intervention was not really novel, the company had their own activities targeted at developing the processes that the intervention was targeting. The managers also said that the group climates and developmental levels already were good, in the sense of co-operation and more. In the managers' perspective the intervention did not contribute any notably new knowledge or information but was seen as an intervention that rather confirmed that the things the managers knew, and the way they worked, were right.

Unable to use the intervention

This theme exists with regard to the whole interview from one of the managers, in the group of managers that moved backwards. During the interview it became clear that the manager had experienced problems in both understanding the intervention and his ability to use it in his work with his team.

Becoming a team

Both groups of managers talked at length about how they developed into a team. However, in the group of managers that moved backwards the stories revolved around how they as leaders in different ways gave directives as to how the others were supposed to do, as individuals to become team members in the team. Whereas in the other group of managers there were stories of how the manager worked together with the others to become a team through common decisions, goals and increased communication.

Consultants Themes, not Overlapping

The overall objective of the intervention

This theme captures the consultants' initial thoughts and notions regarding their project. The theme revolves around the general overall approach of the intervention, the goal to reduce sickness absence in the factory. The consultants explain that they wanted to achieve this goal by training the teams in group processes and enhancing organizational knowledge to create incentives for group members to develop their groups.

Internal resistance

Before the consultants were able to go out into the factory and work

with the managers and their teams they met with a lot of resistance from both management, HR and other units within the company involved in the development of work. The theme revolves around all the conflicts with various units of personnel, which the consultants ended up in, when they tried to get their interventions anchored, but also about the lack of interest from top management.

Management is convinced

In this theme, the consultants described how they tried to get the project anchored and approved by management. Also, how they finally left top management and found approval for the intervention by the plant managers.

The specific processes of the groups

After the intervention was terminated the consultants had been wondering whether or not it would have been a better intervention if they had worked among the individual groups' specific dynamics instead of gathering several groups and address common group dynamic issues.

The consultants own processes

Some of the themes came to be grouped together in that they were linked together in explaining what happened to the consultants.

Increased status: The consultants experienced that they came to be known around the company and that people were impressed by how they successfully convinced management to conduct a large intervention project. This, in turn, resulted in the situation that people started to listen more to what they had to say, and gave them access to new forums.

Learning process: The theme addressed the consultant's narratives concerning how they perceived the project as a long-term learning process, whereby they constantly achieved new insights into the reality of working with a large organization. Additionally, during the project they were given opportunities to evaluate and possibly revise the paths they chose.

Empathy and understanding for the workers: From the outset, the consultants' ambition was to improve working conditions for employees (recipient) by creating a better working environment. During the project, the consultants obtained more and more insight into the individual employee's work situation.

Discussion

The responses generated by the research question, presented in the Results section, and further examined here, take as their point of departure those themes overlapping between the consultants and managers.

Consultants and managers agreed that the intervention was a positive experience, something that seems to have exerted a powerful influence on the outcome of the intervention [17]. Several researchers [25-27] indicated the propensity for a constant shift in the surrounding environment to induce a disturbing impact on the possibility to implement change, which was the experience of both managers and consultants. Lack of time was a shared experience but differed in that the consultants felt they did not get enough time to work with the implementation and the managers that they had too much other things to do. The experience of time-parsimony in interventions was shared mostly by consultants and the groups that showed retrograde development. This might be a shared experience of not targeting those groups [2] or the managers' [19] actual areas in need of development [26].

Feedback had a unique position since all managers from both groups perceived this as the most useful theme addressed in the workshops and most usable tool in developing the group. This experience was shared with the team leaders as well [4]. The reason the consultants experienced it as most positive was that they felt it was by then, since it was the final workshop, the managers felt secure in relationship to the consultants. Perhaps this type of feedback shaped a sort of task alignment [10] to the managers, that happened to coincide with the breakthrough of the consultants' work on creating a balance in the helper-help receiver relationship [22]. Since enhanced and altered communication seems to be of immense importance in any change process [2,5,6,11,14], one may speculate that the shared experience of communication offers both a key factor in the consultants process of implementing the change [14] and a vessel, or "task alignment" [10], whereby the change process found its way into the group and organization. Concomitantly, the situation may be seen as the change process itself [11]. The shared experience of the opportunity to meet, as a facilitating factor, may be construed to be related to the enhanced communication since it is, with regard to what was observed in the study [2,5,6], i.e. one of the key factors of the change process. Although possibly superfluous, these remarks serve to indicate that both communication and an opportunity to meet appear intuitively as key factors. Nevertheless, they are neglected, it seems, when change is forced upon employees [10] or ill-communicated [9]. Although the managers were more enthusiastic about the conference than the consultants, they both shared the experience that it contributed to the intervention. The conference probably served many purposes relevant to the change process. It was an opportunity for the guiding coalition to communicate the vision and empowering the managers to act on it [9]. Further, the hands-on changes that were enforced as a consequence of the meeting probably served as "task alignment" [10] at the same time as the conversations carried the change process [11]. The desired continuation was an experience the consultants shared mostly with the managers exhibiting retrograde development. The managers talked about earlier interventions that were never followed thru and they gave expression to "change cynicism" [28] and "project fatigue" [27]. Since the other group of managers did not give expression for this shared experience with the consultants it may be interpreted as the consultants possibility to detect the different needs of the different individuals and groups [16]. The theme "Organizational culture" evolved into a theme expressed in both consultants' and managers' interviews. However, the manager's statements revolved around the inflexibility and rigidity of the company as a 'hindrance' factor, something that the employees [18] interpreted as a low readiness for change. The consultants, on the other hand, used the organizational culture as a model when designing the workshops to make it feel recognizable and safe. The question then is what effect it actually had.

The first theme, from the managers, that did not overlap with any theme from the consultants was the manager's stories concerning their own leadership. This theme was captured among the managers with groups that retrograde development. It seems that the managers and their attitudes towards the intervention remains of immense importance [3,9,10,19-21] and since the narratives of their leadership were exclusive for the 'retrograde' managers and not shared by the consultants its appealing to interpret the statements as either a way of defending themselves against shameful associations [12] in that they were afraid of implementing the change [19], or as an expression of resentfulness that their specific needs were not being met [16]. The second experience, this time by the managers that showed progress, not shared with the consultants was statements about that they had wanted the fitters to have been involved in the workshops. Since the theme was exclusive for the 'progressive' managers it could be interpreted as

a competence in understanding the change process and the need to communicate the vision [9] but maybe, also, a lack of confidence in distributing the change process. The fitters were not included since this was not possible due to the production requirements. Nevertheless, they were definitely recipients of the change process as both indirect and ultimate clients [13]. Another experience that the managers, from both groups, did not share with the consultants was that the managers attributed their development to processes parallel to the intervention. These processes were the company's own developmental programs and policies. These statements lead to questions regarding whether or not the managers even experienced a need for the intervention. Furthermore, whether or not there existed enough motivation to effect change [5,6,9]. This theme continued into the next where all the managers from both groups, saw their change in group development as a consequence of their own skills. Their statements also revealed that they perceived their groups as already mature. This observation may be combined with the question whether the managers felt a sense of urgency at all to change [9]. Another interpretation may be that the consultants worked as process consultants [6] and adjusted the implementation in accordance with the manager's needs [16] so that they were able to integrate the new behaviors and knowledge with their previous capabilities and knowledge. The theme consisting of just one manager, who did not seem to be able to use the intervention at all, was not shared by the consultants. The reason for that is unclear but it once again suggests the manager's importance in distributing a change process [9-11,21]. Why the managers' theme of becoming a team were not a shared experience with the consultants raises questions, especially since this was the purpose of the intervention [1].

The first of the themes of the consultants that was not shared with the managers was the expected and desired outcome of the intervention. Since this was the starting point and reason why the change was implemented it seems remarkable that the managers did not share this consideration. More so, since Kotter [9] and Schein [6] describe it as an absolute necessity in motivation-for-change. On the other hand, the GDQ measurement served as a starting point for the development of the groups, and several managers reported that they felt a need to do something when they became aware of the state of the group. The reason the consultants' experience of internal resistance was not shared with the managers seems likely: since the managers were not a part of or aware of this ongoing process. Nevertheless, it is a worrisome consideration that top management and HR were not interested in supporting the intervention since this seems to be important in getting the change process distributed and permanent in the organization [9,16,25]. The theme containing the consultant's stories of how they discovered their guiding coalition [9] and project team was, for the same reasons as the theme before, not shared with the managers. The consultants met with the plant managers and informed them of their vision and it was the consultants' experience that the reason they liked it was because it targeted their needs of creating teams out of the loose groups of managers and team leaders, a textbook example of "task alignment" [10]. The consultants' doubts as to whether it would have been better to work with the groups specific needs, something that were not possible due to the need to adapt the intervention to the factory's production, reflects a sensitivity to the needs of the managers [22,26]. Beside the theme where the consultants explained their status increase, the final themes may be construed as aspects of their role as process consultants [22] wherein they developed empathy and understanding for the clients and evaluated their actions and applied them as learning processes.

Limitations

Since the study is a qualitative analysis of a specific intervention,

one has to be careful with generalizing the findings to encompass wider issues. Furthermore, risks inherent of transcribing and encoding procedures must always be considered in this type of analysis.

Conclusion

In summary, it seems that what Lewin [5] described as the core specifics of the change process, i.e. meeting as a group and discussing the change, emerges again as the central aspect to be considered by the consultants. Furthermore, the change program to be implemented has to take into account the contextual needs and the employees' (recipients') individual skills. Specifically, one has to listen to the middle managers' fears and hopes regarding the type of change so that they do not counteract the process under implementation. In order to implement the change one ought not to overlook structural problems/pitfalls and one ought to ensure also that the visionary goal of the desired change may be translated into contextual needs/realities. This latter requirement must be consolidated at the management level where the change may be understood in terms of concrete behaviors relevant to the actual work in progress.

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