

## Foreword

Since the 1990s the term 'change management' has become an omnipresent buzzword in management theory. These days, change projects are central tasks for managers in every type of organisation whether they are companies, public bodies or NGOs. Organisations and the people within these organisations have to change constantly to ensure a high degree of competitiveness and to progress towards long-term goals. The outcome and the success of change projects are crucial for further development. Various authors – particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom – have published extensively in the field of organisational change. Analysing change management projects and understanding failure to change has been of sustained interest for researchers in this field of management theory.

Within this research area various studies have been conducted covering project design, contextual elements and success factors. Empirical research is primarily used in studies analysing critical success factors of change projects. These critical success factors enhance the likelihood of successful change by minimising resistance to the project. However, most of the studies – some of them with a scientific background, some with a consultancy background – focus on large corporations in an international context. Studies with a focus on German small and medium-sized companies which are the backbone of the German economy barely exist.

By analysing critical success factors of change management in German small and medium-sized enterprises Mr Fritzenschaft addresses this existing research gap. The overall objective of his study is to gain a better understanding for the reasons why change projects fail and to provide specific recommendations for small and medium-sized enterprises. The large-scale nationwide empirical research is based on a theoretical framework of change management and was conducted among 416 German small and medium-sized companies.

The online-based research was carried out in cooperation with the Oskar-Patzelt-Foundation ('Großer Preis des Mittelstands'). The analysis of the data provides interesting insights into the most common reasons for change, the success rate of change projects carried out and the assumed success factors of these projects.

The respondents of this survey identified a mixture of hard and soft factors to be responsible whether a change project will be successful or not. This is similar to the results of previous studies conducted among international corporations. However, there are some critical success factors which show a tendency to be more important for large, international corporations than for German small and medium-sized companies. One example is the factor 'support and commitment of the management' which is usually ranked highest in empirical researches among international corporations. For small and medium-sized enterprises in Germany this factor seems less important – maybe an indication that support and commitment of the management is much more visible in smaller companies.

The study of Mr Fritzenschaft is of high practical relevance as change management is a constant challenge not solely for large corporations. Managers in small and medium-sized enterprises should keep in mind that there is not one best way of leading change that will guarantee successful outcomes. This study is one of the first researches in change management in the German SME-sector and provides recommendations for managers how to deal with change initiatives and how to overcome resistance to change. The findings of this large-scale empirical study can help managers in small and medium-sized enterprises to increase the likelihood of successful change.

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