

Chapter 4

Leading Digital Change and the Management of Hybridity in Social Work Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Constant organizational changes and simultaneous confrontation with different ‘rationalities’ of their stakeholders have become a new ‘normality’ in social work management organizations. This chapter addresses the design, implementation, and sustainable development of an innovative transformation framework of leading digital change consisting of four interrelated phases: (1) identification of the demand for change, (2) development of a digital change strategy, (3) implementation of digital transformation, and (4) monitoring and optimization. This framework can be applied at the level of individual change agents, change programs and initiatives, and to the organization itself. Future research needs to discuss benefits and drawbacks to related challenges in its implementation that require organizational learning, the replacement of old management practices, the development of new digital literacy skills and leadership competencies, and the facilitation of personnel development to mobilize the staff to enact changes in their behavior, values, and attitudes in volatile environments and uncertain times.

INTRODUCTION

Change management has received considerable attention as the new paradigm for the management of organizational transformations within the social economy. As such, constant changes have become the new ‘normality’ in social work organizations. In most welfare states, social enterprises are not only to a large extent, dependent on the service providers which finance social service in a kind of monopoly market. It is inherent to such organizations to be confronted permanently and simultaneously with different ‘rationalities’ of their stakeholders. As hybrid organizations, they have to mediate between the logics of governmental, market-based, and societal structures (Brandsen et al., 2005). This is also crucial in

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light of the various challenges of integrating digital technologies into almost all areas of education and social work and developing new virtual business cultures within those organizations.

Against this background, this chapter will discuss how digital change management can be designed, implemented, and sustainably developed in social work organizations, what principles of leading such changes could be relied on, and what leadership qualities and competencies must change agents have. Additionally, digital change agents and innovators have to face so-called ‘adaptive challenges’ that require a re-thinking of organizational learning processes, a transition to more human-centred management practices, the enhancement of digital literacy and citizenship skills as well as leadership competencies, and the mobilisation of staff to internalise change in behaviour, values, and attitudes in volatile environments and uncertain times (Arnold, 2019). Finally, a sustainable framework that supports digital change management in social work institutions will be introduced and thoroughly discussed regarding its implications from different organizational perspectives such as at the level of individual change agents, change programs and initiatives, and the organization as a social system itself.¹

HYBRIDITY AND MULTIRATIONALITY IN SOCIAL WORK INSTITUTIONS AS THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In Germany, social work organizations may take different forms: “(1) state agencies and administrations, that can act both as funding partner and provider of services, (2) welfare organizations and (3) social economy enterprises, whereby in practice, different hybrid forms of the latter ideal types occur” (Schiffauer & Seelmeyer, 2021, p. 134). As ‘hybrid organizations’ (Denis et al., 2015), social work institutions form enterprises across sector boundaries in which different, mutually dependent values, logics, and action orientations of the respective stakeholders have a significant influence on organizational control. In Germany, they are often confronted with a multitude of competitors in a generally limited ‘social market,’ the so-called ‘third sector’ beyond the state, society, and market (Arnold et al., 2017, p. 46): “Hybridity is not, therefore, any mixture of features from different sectors, but according to this view, is about fundamental and distinctly different governance and operational principles in each sector” (Billis, 2010, p.3).

According to Heinze, Schneiders, and Grohs (2011), the evolution of hybrid organizations can be attributed in particular to changes in the 1990s, when the welfare state that traditionally adheres to the dominant principles of social security, decentralized benefits, and corporate participation structures in decision-making processes had to adapt to the New Model of Governance (NSM). The perception, recognition, and implementation of different (sector) logics became decisive for the control of educational, social, non-profit organizations: “different orientations (e.g. state and association-related orientations), creating unity while maintaining diversity (e.g. organizational unity and diversity of stakeholders), the balancing of different control logics (...) and the creation and maintenance of community or the emancipation from their ties” (Eurich, 2013, p. 242, transl. MA). According to Evers and Ewert (2010, pp. 112ff.), four dimensions are particularly crucial for the control of hybrid organizations: (1) The availability of a multitude of different financial sources (e.g. fees, government grants, donations, fundraising, etc.); (2) organizational control that allows for the participation of stakeholders and interest groups at state and federal level (e.g. charities); (3) formal goals (e.g. cost-covering principle) are subordinated to the objectives of the social enterprise; (4) corporate identity emphasizes aspects of the change in the organizational environment in addition to the service to the customers. Eurich (2013, p. 251ff.) adds that

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