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Abstract

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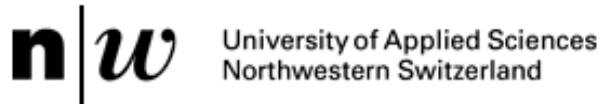
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Abstract

In today's fast changing business world, the importance of corporate culture and its necessity to change is increasing due to certain factors like internationalization, increased worldwide competition, rapid growth, different expectations from leadership and management, and also the nature of work itself that asks for more autonomy, flexibility, speed, shared knowledge and changing skills. It is said that a strong and effective corporate culture can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage because it is difficult to imitate and it attracts the specialists needed in the competing industry. But are strong corporate cultures flexible enough to change according to the requirements of its environment especially when a corporation is growing rapidly on an international basis? To what extent do different national cultures have an influence on corporate culture and what impact do they have on the leadership orientation and style of a corporation? And, are corporate cultures in general changeable and / or manageable?

These are the questions discussed in this dissertation to generate a basis to develop an appropriate change management process for the implementation of a new corporate culture during times of self-paced rapid international growth. Usually a change in corporate culture is discussed in relation to reorganisations, mergers and acquisitions as well as to downsizing but hardly in the context of self-paced rapid international growth of a small or medium-sized corporation. The existing research gap is closed by connecting the topics of corporate culture, leadership and change management with medium-sized corporations, phases of rapid international growth and the corresponding developmental stages of the various units of a growing corporation. The theoretical review and conceptual framework illustrate along the topics of culture, leadership and change management concepts the different influences that have to be considered when implementing a new corporate culture. The applied research based on a case study shows the results of assessing corporate culture aspects as well as strategic leadership orientations, leadership styles and competencies. It demonstrates how important it is to analyse the existing culture and to define a clear vision and target for a new culture in order to find out if a change is really needed and, if yes, what a reasonable extent will be.

The investigations of this dissertation in theory and practice increasingly show that there are five central factors that are essential for the success of a corporate culture change in a rapidly growing corporation: considerations of hard *and* soft factors, developmental stage(s) *and* strategic leadership orientation, national *and* corporate culture(s), culture change management as a *process in phases*, and considering change in a *learning cycle*. As these factors have never been en bloc unified in a culture change management process, they have been the basis to develop a new holistic concept for managing corporate culture change for rapidly growing, multinational small and medium-sized corporations. It is shown why change management processes today no longer terminate with a stage of refreezing or stabilizing but are never ending, become self-evident and part of daily life in a corporation. Therefore, they have to be designed as a cycle concept, especially for corporations that rapidly grow on an international basis. When discussing the findings on the above stated five central aspects in terms of corporate culture change, it becomes evident that the intention to implement an entirely consistent corporate culture throughout the whole corporation with all its units during a phase of rapid growth is not applicable as too many varying needs exist in terms of leadership and respect for national cultures. It also clarifies that it would be difficult to introduce a consistent leadership style in the same context. A solution is provided with the new cycle concept that facilitates starting into the direction of and finally reaching a sustainable new corporate culture by working through the steps and phases suggested. Testing the entirety of the presented new cycle concept in order to validate its success or elaborating a balanced scorecard to monitor such a process will open up new possibilities for further research.