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# Culture Leads the Way of the Organisation

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*Change in the business world of today is continuous and therefore generates a lot of pressure on companies and their employees. Either an organisation is pushed towards change due to internal or external reasons, or it is a conscious decision by the management to embark on a change journey, cultural aspects should always be taken into account. Without the full support of the employees and the culture, change is rather impossible to successfully manage since culture is the driving force; it has enormous strategic value and understanding its aspects is essential for any organisation to perform well. How can companies keep up with the constantly changing business environment and launch culture transformation projects without losing touch of their corporate culture?*

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## Transformation towards a Sales Culture

Sales culture is something many have been talking about during the past years, as with the help of a successful sales culture companies could potentially really enhance their sales growth. Culture change of any kind is always challenging due to the fact that cultures naturally resist change: it pushes people out of their comfort zones, which is why their emotional investments need to be carefully considered if hoping to succeed (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 477; Lewis 2011). Regarding sales issues, it is important to note that they are not caused by the sales employees, but instead by the company culture and management (Weinberg 2015, 8–13). What does it take for companies to commence a sales culture transformation journey?

## The Case Company

A research related to a sales culture transformation project was conducted on a case company in November 2020. The company is a Finnish firm in a global network functioning in more than 150 countries and employs more than 284 thousand employees overall. In Finland it employs around 1 200 people in the fields of audit, tax, legal and consulting. The case company needed a comprehensive sales culture and CRM, which is why a new strategy focusing on sales and client leadership, and a new CRM tool, Salesforce, was introduced to use in March 2020. This was the starting point of the cultural change journey.

The goal of the research was to see whether and how the Salesforce had changed the sales-related behaviour and sales culture eight months after it was first adopted. The timeframe for investigating a thorough culture change within the timeframe is rather impossible, however, the goal was to find out whether the organisation is at all moving towards the desired direction. The key questions were: had the employees entered their sales-related activities and opportunities in increasing amounts, and most importantly, had the case company's culture and employees shown behaviour change and motivation towards sales and client leadership? Did the employees really understand and advance the new strategy?

In order to find out the direction of the sales culture transformation, the employees were surveyed to find out their personal views of adopting the new sales culture and use of Salesforce, and also reflected against sales data provided by the case company. In total, 77 answers were received, giving it an answer percentage of 13 %. Despite the rather low participation rate, the results provided a good framework to the current situation.

## **Key Findings**

Even though the research was conducted at a fairly early stage of the change, the results indicated an emergence of a new sales culture: employees were in support of the change and also the behavioural patterns for instance related to recording sales-related activities in Salesforce, indicated positive developments. One of the most visible changes was the increase in the use of Salesforce, as more than 10 000 activities, opportunities and client data were recorded in the new CRM, while a year ago the same figure was only around 500.

Despite the positive signs there was still a long way to go. Based on the findings, three key development themes were discovered, all of which could contribute to adopting the new sales culture: more training, clarifying the goals and compensations, and lastly, focusing more on the actual sales culture change rather than Salesforce.

## **Employee Involvement**

For the new sales behaviour to become rooted in the company culture, every employee needs to be convinced that the new methods are worth the trouble (Katzenbach et al. 2018; Schein & Schein 2016, 23–27). This particularly was one of the major challenges faced by the case company, since the hype over the new sales culture was heavily focused on the new CRM tool, Salesforce, but the sales culture change itself was left unclear for quite a few employees. Salesforce of course provided a new place and an improved method for recording all sales-related data, which is why it received a lot of attention, but it is still the people who change the culture, the tool cannot do it on its own.

It is common during culture change for new symbols, such as a new logo, name, or slogan to receive the most attention as they are easily visible. However, they only are the most superficial part of culture and without changes in the deeper levels of the culture and its values and rituals, it could all just wear off very quickly. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 376.) As found in the research, the communications seemed to have failed to fully convey the bigger picture behind the use of Salesforce and the sales strategy, which was confusing the employees.

## **Strategy, Strategy, Strategy**

Culture and strategy walk hand in hand: culture drives change, while strategy guides the culture towards the desired direction.

Goals and compensations are the key in linking employees to the company's strategy; if the company succeeds in reaching the goals, the wins should be celebrated and shared along the way (Baker 2020; Junkkari 2020). The research results indicated that the current sales-related goals and compensation incentives were a somewhat frustrating and demotivating topic to the employees – clear sales-related compensation incentives seemed to either be missing or they did not take the major differences across the departments and their businesses enough into

account. This was a big barrier in hopes of introducing a comprehensive sales culture to place. When employees understand what is expected from them and why, and how their performance is measured, they are more motivated to support the change (Junkkari 2020; Weinberg 2015, 8– 13).

In terms of achieving a sales focused strategy, employees pointed out that they needed more sales training and focused Salesforce guidance and better ways of sharing success and tips and tricks, which takes the business-related differences into account. It was argued that the training received earlier was focusing too much on the technical aspects, but how to, for example, really close sales was left with little to no attention. Also, a suggestion of arranging sales training to the junior-level employees came through from the results, since that could help embed the new way of working and sales-related thinking and working into the culture from early on.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the improvement suggestions and findings unveiled after researching the start of the case company's transformation project, it was easy to see how important it is to be able to quickly reroute your way. For the case company it was the strategy aspect that employees were not quite sure about. In addition to that, also some adjustments would be needed to better answer to the employees' training needs and how goals and compensations were formulated.

Regardless of the change at hand, the key is to be agile. Careful planning and risk management are of course essential and among the first steps when planning any kind of change. However, paying attention to what the employees are saying and how they feel towards the change should never be belittled. The attitudes and motivation of the team can make it or break it. Adjusting here and there to bypass setbacks, setting the sails to a completely other direction, or even returning back to some of the old methods if facing bigger barriers and finding out the new ways do not work well. Change should never be done just for the sake of change.

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