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MaCoTra Singing ORGANISATIONS THAT TRANSFORM:
A Search for Constructs

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ABSTRACT

This article is a derivative of my doctoral thesis at the University of South Africa's (UNISA) School of Business Leadership (SBL) from 2001 to 2003. The electronic version of the thesis is available on the Unisa Institutional Repository.

An integral part of the study involved developing a grounded understanding of those constructs that may be used for further case study research on the challenges of organisational transformation in non-Western emerging nations, using evidence from four Zimbabwean companies as anchors.

This article is a contribution towards appreciating the fourteen constructs that were unearthed through the study. It also shows how cross-case analysis enhances the refinement of constructs as defining categories of the study of organisational transformation.

I recommend that the fourteen constructs be used in replication studies on organisational transformation in Africa and other non-Western emerging economies.

Introduction

Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that for building theory from case studies, a researcher gets started with neither theory nor hypothesis and possibly a priori constructs. She argues that this focuses efforts, provides better grounding of construct measures and retains theoretical flexibility.

This article contributes towards the identification, definition and refinement of constructs for the study of organisational transformation in non-Western emerging nations, using evidence from four Zimbabwean companies as anchors.

Tentative Constructs

From the literature on change, an initial set of twelve tentative constructs was used to search for further constructs. Ten of these constructs fall under the challenges of initiating, the challenges of sustaining, and the challenges of redesigning the transformation (Senge, 1999; Chowdhury, 2000).

Initiation of a change effort refers to the start-up of the initiative.

Tentative constructs under initiation include **time** (time available for the effort), **help** (the kind and quality of help provided), **relevance** (the extent to which the effort is considered relevant) and **walking-the-talk** [the credibility of the leader(s)].

Sustenance of the change initiative refers to maintaining the momentum of the change.

The tentative constructs under sustenance include **fear and uncertainty** (how fear and uncertainty are managed), **measurement** (how progress is measured and assessed), and **belief in the change effort** (the extent of polarisation in belief about the effort).

Redesigning refers to developing the capacity of people to reshape the change process taking into account the interdependencies within which they operate.
The tentative constructs include **governance** (power and accountability of actors), **diffusion** (how learning pervades the company during the change), and **purpose and strategy** (rethinking company purpose and strategy).

Two other possible constructs came up during the literature search: **triggers of transformation** and **best practices of transformation**.

Methodology

Four organisations (from the business sector) that transformed in the emerging economy of Zimbabwe between 1980 and 2000 were selected for the study. The selection was based on the combination of theoretical categories, polar types, accessibility and cross-case diversity.

The number of cases (four) is consistent with the minimum cases Eisenhardt (1989:545) suggests when she retorts: "…, there is no ideal number of cases, a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well. Fewer than 4 cases, it is often difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing, unless the case has several mini-cases within it, …".

Pseudonyms were used for both company and individual confidentiality: CROP (was agro-industrial and represented both the agriculture and manufacturing sectors), FINANCE (represented the financial services sector), LEISURE and PLEASURE (represented the tourism industry). Whereas LEISURE was once a parastatal, PLEASURE was part of a conglomerate that continued to be unbundled.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to begin the capturing of experiences of the four companies under the twelve tentative constructs. This guide also provided a frame for the other data collection methods used. However, as the iteration between data collection and analysis continued, two more constructs (**key players** and **success**) surfaced. The data collection instrument was therefore modified to include these other two possible constructs resulting in fourteen tentative constructs.

Multiple data collection methods (including interviews, focus group discussions, observations, archival sources and intensive literature search) were employed. This was because the triangulation that is made possible by "multiple data collection methods provides stronger substantiation of constructs." (Eisenhardt, 1989:538).

Tentative definition of constructs

Fourteen constructs that formed the basis of data collection were initially defined from the within–case analysis as reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Tentative definition of constructs for data collection purposes

CONSTRUCT	TENTATIVE DEFINITION
Triggers of transformation	Critical incidents that the organization has to respond to for its survival.
Best practices of transformation	Tried and tested ideas and ways of conducting business that can be migrated within and across organizations and environments.
Key players	Those actors influencing others through their credibility, capability and commitment.
Time	Pilot group's flexibility and control over its own energy and priorities.
Help	Coherent, consistent, knowledgeable coaching, guidance and support.
Relevance	Presence of a clear, compelling business case for learning.
Walking the talk	The match between espoused values and actions.
Fear and anxiety	Concerns about exposure, vulnerability and inadequacy triggered by the conflict between increasing levels of candor and openness among members of the pilot group.
Assessment and measurement	Establishing the degree of success of the transformation effort.
Belief in the transformation effort	The extent of polarization in belief about the transformation effort.
Governance	The legitimate autonomy of a pilot group to act in tune with existing power and accountability structures.
Diffusion	The ability to transfer knowledge across organizational boundaries, making it possible for people around the system to build upon each other's success.
Strategy and purpose	Where the business is going and what the business is there for.
Success	The achievement of desired results/outcomes.

Given the cross-case evidence these definitions were then refined. Evidence that was relevant for the refinement of each construct is detailed below, followed by the refined construct definition.

Triggers of Organizational Transformation

The four cases highlight that government was a key trigger of organisational transformation. Particularly, government promises to the electorate and accompanying legislature triggered changes related to the quality-of-work-life of employees in all cases under study.

For FINANCE and LEISURE, government appointed board chairmen and mandated them with turning around the two entities. Both had to deal with image clean-up. FINANCE specifically focused on good corporate governance based on openness, integrity and accountability. Government also played a significant role in the privatisation and listing of these two companies.

The actions and inactions of government resulted in negative publicity that caused the decline of the economy, significantly impacting the operations of the four organisations. LEISURE and PLEASURE, in the tourist industry, had to grapple with retarded growth after a period of growth.

Globalisation, particularly technological advances, led the four companies searching for e-commerce capability. This was closely linked to benchmarking work process best-practices and establishing global strategic alliances and networks to enhance more global operations in the face of heightened competition.

Only PLEASURE had quality of leadership as a trigger. Of significance is the importance respondents placed on servant leadership as a critical success factor of change efforts. This was reinforced through the constant cross-referencing of the manner in which two PLEASURE leaders, code-named PLEASURE LEADER 1 (PL1) and PLEASURE LEADER 2 (PL2), handled changes.

Natural disasters like drought and fire come out clearly as triggers, more so for companies like CROP in an industry that is agro-based.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'triggers of organisational transformation' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Triggers of organisational transformation
Clusters of forces that create motion in and around an organisation.

Best-Practices in Organizational Transformation

The best-practices in organisational transformation that were relevant for the construct refinement are discussed under local and global best practices.

Local best-practices

Each of the four cases exhibited local best-practices.

The most outstanding CROP best-practices were around the Shanduko, the Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) and land redistribution initiatives.

Under SHE, ecological harmony was achieved through collaboration with all key stakeholders (government, business and community) resulting in CROP winning awards on environmental management systems.

Shanduko and land redistribution initiatives also reflected total collaboration with key stakeholders.

CROP was at the forefront in establishing linkages with government to address land redistribution. Its scheme became a model. CROP also demonstrated how a small organisation can benchmark in and outside Africa for best practice and then contextualise business issues.

FINANCE provides best-practices in forging strategic alliances with key stakeholders, running strategic planning parallel to strategic implementation and establishing ultra transparency. The collaboration with key stakeholders enabled FINANCE achieve its vision one year ahead of time and overlap Vision 2003 with Vision 2000 using what was called 'A Process Approach Model'.

Ultra transparency was further enhanced by the engagement of joint auditors.

As a result of the best-practices in multiple, simultaneous interventions to turnaround a near-collapsed bank, privatise and list the organisation, FINANCE was voted best bank in Zimbabwe in 1999 and 2000.

LEISURE's turnaround in its first year of operation is another best practice that involved collaboration with key stakeholders.

PLEASURE prides itself of its intuitive focus on servant leadership principles during PL1's time. There was a 'Bill of Rights' for staff (extending beyond the traditional Human Resources practices to supplier-product driven training by supplier at supplier's cost and premises) and another for customers (including culture enhancement through theme dinners, ethnic promotions and vehicle/street product/services promotions).

Significantly, the World Action Programme (WAP), as a part of the PLEASURE capability creation process, included multi-level cross-functional groups as a burning platform. WAP was conceptualised by Mbigi as a process integrating Afrocentric and Eurocentric methodologies. In particular, WAP integrated General Electric's (GE) Tichy and Sherman Model (Tichy & Sherman, 1993) with the Mbigi Ubuntu Transformation Model (Mbigi, 2000). WAP also used Mbigi's 1995 African Religion metaphor as a diagnostic tool to identify the dominant spirits to be dealt with in an organisation.

The local best-practices from the four cases indicate that organisations can effectively and efficiently determine their destinies through the integration of ideas from key stakeholders.

Of the 6 transformation techniques {Statistical Process Control (SPC), Just-In-Time (JIT) Manufacturing, Total Quality Management (TQM), Group Technology (GT)/Optimum Production Techniques (OPT), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) and Core Competencies) surveyed, only JIT and core competencies were explicitly mentioned in PLEASURE.

The Group of companies of which PLEASURE is part went the way of core business, reflecting attention to core competencies. PLEASURE remains as part of the Group. However, JIT was tried and failed in PLEASURE.

Interestingly, continuous improvement was attempted by all four with the CROP Shanduko and SHE initiatives standing out as local best-practices.

Annual reports evidence, in terms of mill performance ratios, indicates that CROP was applying TPM although no respondent explicitly mentioned it. The application of TPM concepts were confirmed through observations in the mill during my one-week visit for data collection and analysis.

Global best-practices

The Group of companies of which PLEASURE was part adopted TQM and the GE model in its unbundling. PLEASURE talked about focusing on total quality that was not reflected on the ground. The consultant who brought JIT to PLEASURE failed to contextualise JIT. WAP was considered by respondents a best-practice intervention because, according to them, it contextualised Eurocentric methodologies to the African environment.

Evidence from four global organisational cases sampled, two Western and two non-Western, strongly suggests that best practices in organisational transformation are a function of the ability to integrate and contextualise theories and practices.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'best practices of organisational transformation' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Best practices of organisational transformation
Tried and tested ideas and ways of conducting business that can be benchmarked against.

Key players

Government, chief executive officers (CEOs), management, staff, strategic partners, suppliers, customers, internal and external consultants were highlighted across the four Zimbabwean cases as influential carriers of ideas related to change.

Other key role players were steering committees, change champions and community members (CROP and FINANCE); Chairman and Board (FINANCE and LEISURE); business unit leaders and community members (CROP); the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and prospective new shareholders (FINANCE); general managers, new shareholder and three different group chairmen (PLEASURE).

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'key players' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Key players
Any stakeholders operating as the 'seed carriers' of new ideas and new practices.

Time

In cases where there was need to create a sense of urgency {SHE (CROP), turnaround (FINANCE and LEISURE), shareholder take-over (PLEASURE)}, change was immediate and little/no time was given for reflection and practice in the initial stages of changes. Very little time was devoted to bedding the franchise in PLEASURE.

There was time for reflection as far as computerisation was concerned with periods for parallel runs (for example in CROP). Shanduko was immediate with a four-six months training and one-year time window for practice.

Whereas there was six months for privatising FINANCE, privatisation and listing was simultaneous for LEISURE.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'time' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Time
Enough flexibility and control of events allowing people involved in change to devote energy towards reflection and practice.

Help

Generally, all four cases highlight that external consultants helped build capacity and capability for sustaining the changes.

Other forms of help given/needed were saturated communication and capability to deal with identified challenge areas, employee sensitisation and inculcation of a sense of inclusivity (all four cases), relocation of employees with health problems (CROP), moral support from CEOs and staff of correspondent banks (FINANCE), supplier-driven training and upskilling internal change agents (PLEASURE).

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'help' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Help
Coherent, consistent, knowledgeable coaching, guidance and support to develop internal resources needed to build capacity for ongoing transformation.

Relevance

Relevance of changes was discussed in terms of benefits to be derived by key stakeholders (government, business and community) from the changes.

Value-based business grew and employment was created in all four cases (although at different points in time). Code of conduct for staff brought a sense of common purpose in all four cases.

For FINANCE and LEISURE, business was turned around and privatisation was a vehicle towards indigenising the economy.

In particular, a strong element of people care was expressed in CROP (ecological harmony), FINANCE [had human resource (HR) balance sheet installed] and PLEASURE (had 'Bill of Rights' for staff as well as customers and valued being of service to the community during PL1's time).

Although there was mixed evidence in terms of relevance to personal goals, the comments suggest the intention of the changes was to equip people with survival skills in a turbulent environment. The need for learning to build capable organisations was expressed strongly.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'relevance' from the within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Relevance
Making a case for transformation, articulating an appropriate business focus and showing why new efforts, such as developing learning capabilities, are important for individuals and business.

Walking-the-talk

Some advocates fully lived up to the values espoused by the changes {where initiatives were directed from the Group of companies' head offices (CROP and PL1's team in PLEASURE) and the FINANCE chairman appointed in 1983 and FINANCE team leaders}.

LEISURE CEO was considered to have walked the talk initially, becoming invisible with business growth.

In CROP, one HR manager is said to have walked the talk and another only partially.

For PLEASURE, the team that took over from PL1 is claimed to have failed to live to what they espoused.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'walking-the-talk' from the within-case was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Walking-the-talk
Fully living up to the new values espoused by the transformation.

Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety were acknowledged in all the four cases. However, the manner in which fear and anxiety were dealt with was different.

The FINANCE CEO tolerated and dealt with these two issues positively. An example in the within-case analysis is that this CEO said 'the turnaround journey involved tests of staff's character and calculation, courage and determination in the face of adversity and uncertainty'.

PL1, in PLEASURE, fostered trust across the organisation. After PL1, PLEASURE evidence strongly suggests the new shareholder, PL2 and team created fear and anxiety. There was perceived nepotism and victimisation resulting in very low trust between management and shareholder.

For CROP, a new language (including derogatory nicknames) emerged when things were not working. During some focus group discussions cutting across organisational levels, some respondents indicated even the provision of evidence in such groups could result in victimisation.

Respondents in LEISURE interviews said fear and anxiety were acknowledged and often stepped up.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'fear and anxiety' from the within-case was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Fear and anxiety
Concerns about exposure, vulnerability and inadequacy triggered by the conflict between increasing levels of candor and openness and low levels of trust among people involved in transformation.

Assessment and measurement

A variety of assessments and measures were put up to establish whether the efforts were achieving the desired results/outcomes in each of the four cases. Examples were Shanduko and SHE reporting procedures and mill performance measures (CROP), performance measures against identified challenge areas (FINANCE and LEISURE) and target-based assessments during PL1's era in PLEASURE.

Focus group participants were unclear as to how assessments and measures were done during PL2's time up to 2000.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'assessment and measurement' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Assessment and measurement
Establishing whether the transformation effort has achieved the desired results/outcomes.

Belief in the transformation effort

Groups of believers and non-believers were identified with changes in FINANCE, LEISURE and PLEASURE. In cases where key staff disagreed with what was going on (FINANCE, LEISURE and PLEASURE), they left.

However, CROP evidence points in the direction of three groups - the committed, doubters (who became disciples once convinced) and the pretenders (who moved back to old ways).

Upon studying the evidence under this construct, one research assistant gave an even more telling description of the extent to which views about change may be polarised. She described the above groups as either composed of risktakers or undertakers or caretakers.

This research assistant characterised the three categories as follows:
  ➢ *risktakers* are those staff convinced that they can control their destiny in a change situation,
  ➢ *undertakers* are convinced time should be spent engaging in reflection over past successes and failures,
  ➢ *caretakers* are convinced the status quo has to be preserved.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'belief in the transformation effort' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Belief in the transformation effort
The extent to which the convictions of organizational members over the transformation effort are polarized.

Governance

Evidently, changes were propped up by power and accountability structures in the four cases. However, these were unclear in PLEASURE during PL2's era, which respondents described as having been characterised by a total lack of accountability.

From the cross case-data, the definition of 'governance' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Governance
Power and accountability structures set up to focus the transformation effort.

Diffusion

Although LEISURE one-on-one respondents, PLEASURE focus group and one-on-one respondents (for the PL2 era) argued that insufficient learning took place, CROP, FINANCE and PLEASURE evidence suggests that key stakeholders were informed about the nature of and experiences from changes.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'diffusion' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Diffusion
The process by which an entire organisation and its external partners learn from the experiences of the transformation.

Strategy and purpose

All four companies forged strategic alliances to sharpen their strategic focus and used specific change efforts to redefine their agenda.

CROP used the SHE initiative to focus its strategic agenda on both ecological harmony and corporate citizenship. FINANCE set up a department in charge of corporate planning, change management and training. Tourism's key strategic value drivers motivated the LEISURE strategy and PL1's visionary leadership positioned PLEASURE for possible listing as a separate entity (never to be realised after his death).

In PLEASURE, after PL1, each leader brought in a different strategy in a manner staff said was confusing the staff.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'strategy and purpose' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Strategy and purpose
Revitalising and rethinking the organisation's intended business focus and its contribution to the community.

Success

Success of changes was defined in terms of whether change efforts met/exceeded key stakeholder needs and expectations or not.

For CROP, Shanduko, SHE, haulage system changes and the development of a code of conduct were considered successful although Shanduko incentives could have been paid earlier. There were mixed reactions over the success of computerisation in CROP.

The FINANCE turnaround, growth and privatisation were considered success stories.

Although LEISURE turned around and was subsequently privatised and listed successfully at the same time, retarded growth followed.

People care and growth in PLEASURE were success stories for PL1 although the franchise registered only renovation successes. Business succeeded after PL2 with a supposedly bruised workforce.

From the cross-case data, the definition of 'success of organisational transformation' from within-case analysis was refined as below.

Refined Definition: Success of organisational transformation
Meeting, and better still, exceeding stakeholder needs and expectations.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The evidence from this study demonstrates that Eisenhardt's (1989) process of building theory from case studies is usable in the refinement of constructs. In particular, the cross-case analysis in this article has resulted in the redefinition of the fourteen constructs as reflected in Figure 2 below.

I recommend that the fourteen constructs be used as a basis for replication studies on organisational transformation in emerging economies.

Figure 2: Redefinition of constructs based on cross-case evidence

CONSTRUCT	DEFINITION	REFINED DEFINITION
Triggers of transformation	Critical incidents that the organization has to respond to for its survival.	Clusters of forces that create motion in and around an organization.
Best practices of transformation	Tried and tested ideas and ways of conducting business that can be migrated within and across organizations and environments.	Tried and tested ideas and ways of conducting business that can be benchmarked against.
Key players	Those actors influencing others through their credibility, capability and commitment.	Any stakeholders operating as the 'seed carriers' of new ideas and new practices.
Time	Pilot group's flexibility and control over its own energy and priorities.	Enough flexibility and control of events allowing people involved in change to devote energy towards reflection and practice.
Help	Coherent, consistent, knowledgeable coaching, guidance and support.	Coherent, consistent, knowledgeable coaching, guidance and support to develop internal resources needed to build capacity for ongoing transformation.
Relevance	Presence of a clear, compelling business case for learning.	Making a case for transformation, articulating an appropriate business focus and showing why new efforts, such as developing learning capabilities, are important for individuals and business.
Walking the talk	The match between espoused values and actions.	Fully living up to the new values espoused by the transformation.
Fear and anxiety	Concerns about exposure, vulnerability and inadequacy triggered by the conflict between increasing levels of candor and openness among members of the pilot group.	Concerns about exposure, vulnerability and inadequacy triggered by the conflict between increasing levels of candor and openness and low levels of trust among people involved in transformation.
Assessment and measurement	Establishing the degree of success of the transformation effort.	Establishing whether the transformation effort has achieved the desired results/outcomes.
Belief in the transformation effort	The extent of polarization in belief about the transformation effort.	The extent to which the convictions of organizational members over the transformation effort are polarized.
Governance	The legitimate autonomy of a pilot group to act in tune with existing power and accountability structures.	Power and accountability structures set up to focus the transformation effort.
Diffusion	The ability to transfer knowledge across organizational boundaries, making it possible for people around the system to build upon each other's success.	The process by which an entire organization and its external partners learn from the experiences of the transformation.
Strategy and purpose	Where the business is going & what the business is there for.	Revitalizing and rethinking the organization's intended business focus, its contribution to the community and its identity.
Success	The achievement of desired results/outcomes.	Meeting or, better still, exceeding stakeholder needs and expectations.

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