

Executive Summary of Master Thesis

Driving Bottom-Up Change:

A Comparative Case Study of Generation B at Bühler AG

In the light of new change management strategies being used by large multinational firms, this study sought to investigate a new bottom-up movement at the Swiss company Bühler AG, called Generation B, and identify how it can assist the company in its change management. The study made suggestions for how this movement can assist the company in its change management, while comparing it to change management methods of other large multinational firms.

This comparative case study was extraordinarily well received on an international level across several industries. Several C-level executives and middle managers from Bühler AG praised the study and forwarded it within the company to relevant business areas for implementation. Meanwhile, many compliments have been received from firms participating in the comparative case study, both from Sweden and Switzerland. Feedback included that this thesis is a source of inspiration to carry over to their own companies.

Three research questions were addressed in this study: how can a bottom-up change movement diffuse into all parts of an organization (i), how can a bottom-up change movement assist its organization in the top-down execution of transformational projects (ii), and what value can be generated from creating alliances with similar movements in other companies (iii).

Using a grounded theory approach, 45 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Bühler employees, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of academia or independent organizations, and 16 interviews were conducted with senior/executive members of large multinational firms from Switzerland, Sweden, and Liechtenstein. The results, which were coded using qualitative analysis software, were compared to a theoretical framework consisting of 70+ academic sources.

The theoretical framework began by discussing the definition of transformational change within organizations, and the reasons for why most corporate transformations fail. To address these reasons, the role of leadership and empowerment within organizational change were discussed. This was followed by the main reasons for why change is resisted within firms, and various strategies to overcome resistance. Several change management processes and strategies were then presented. Finally, the theoretical framework was concluded by finding resemblance of Generation B within current academic contexts and discussing the risks and opportunities of various corporate alliances.

The results summarized key trends among 16 large multinational organizations with regards to the research questions, allowing the reader easy access to general opinions in different firms.

Based on gathered theoretical and qualitative data, the movement Generation B was identified as a hybrid grassroots innovation movement in the form of an employee volunteering program. The movement was also identified to contribute to succession planning and foster bottom-up cultural change. This is done by empowering young employees to voice their ideas, establishing a global network, bringing in new perspectives, and transforming the company.

Generation B could better diffuse itself throughout the company by inclusively communicating its purpose and role with all relevant stakeholders, by defining and communicating a clear

vision, by strategically addressing middle managers to get their buy-in, and by empowering employees to collaboratively drive change.

Generation B was found to have the potential to act as a bottom-up provider of explorative activities and implementation projects to assist transformational change. This could be achieved by communicating with executive management and aligning its actions regarding existing corporate transformation projects. To do this, Generation B requires a defined role in the transformation process to establish greater credibility and commitment from employees.

Key benefits from entering an alliance of similar movements were found to be knowledge sharing, learning skills and capabilities from each other, scaling collective impact of the alliance's collective vision, and attaining the internal benefits (increased employee motivation, skill development, employee satisfaction) and external benefits (increased corporate reputation, profitability, stakeholder engagement) of social alliances.

Lastly, the results show that hybrid change management solutions consisting of traditionally established academic concepts are now being used. While research has not yet concluded whether hybrid change management solutions offer a competitive advantage for a firm, managers should be aware that hybrid change management solutions could be an appropriate alternative to challenges which do not ideally match a singular change management concept.

This thesis is useful as a source of inspiration for firms who wish to innovate their change management strategies, and potentially also engage the younger generation in decision making. Executive and middle managers alike can benefit from carrying over various change management concepts and ideas expressed within this thesis to their own firms, for example Generation B. They can also profit from gaining a better understanding of the change management process and how to overcome resistance. Swedish managers in particular may find it useful to compare their change management strategies to those of other Swedish firms, and to those of Switzerland and Liechtenstein.