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Transformation Management (TM)

An effective approach to sustainable management through participation-driven organizational development (OD)

Karl Prammer

***Abstract* — Organizational design & development is expected to fulfill multiple purposes such as a fast-paced and resource-effective implementation, broad and deep acceptance, and high sustainability of the solutions developed and implemented at the same time. These are expectations, which cannot be easily accommodated, in particular where development is supposed to encompass radical restructuring. The concept of TM deliberated in this paper intends to offer both a theoretical and tried & tested organizational development approach. Following a brief outline of the scientific background, on the basis of which the TM approach was born (section I), along with a few motivations for the development of the approach (section II) the paper is geared to shine a light on the key cornerstones of the approach in terms of project management, instruments of intervention, as well as the behavior of the people who practice this approach (section III).**

***Keywords* — Organizational Development, Transformation Management, Project Management, Change**

I. Scientific background of TM

OD science focuses on researching interventions undertaken in organizations. The focus is directed towards developing and implementing concepts geared to manage, enhance, shape and counsel organizations. Additionally to describing and analyzing organizations as the object of research, OD covers the relevance of 'Interventionen von ManagerInnen, ExpertInnen, MitarbeiterInnen oder auch BeraterInnen.'[1] (Lobnig, 2009: 20 [2]) and the social processes related to these interventions. The objective of interventions of this type is to induce a change that is intended to ensure the survival and the development of an organization in its relevant environment.

Colleagues and I at the 'IFF Institute for Organizational Development & Group Dynamics' of Klagenfurt University developed what we refer to as the 'practitioner's model for OD research'. For the purposes of this paper, this practitioner's model for OD research shall be introduced in a nutshell referencing Kurt Lewin's statement: „You cannot understand a system until you try to change it" (after Schein, 1996 [3]). Additionally, the practitioner's model for OD research also builds on the core ideas of Heinz v. Foerster's second-order cybernetics such as, for instance, cybernetic examinations of circularity, self-referentiality, and the statement that observations are never neutral and detached from the observer. (see Foerster, 1998 [4]). From this perspective, the practitioner's model for OD research comes close to the scientific approach of what is commonly known as 'Action Research' (see also, Argyris/Putnam/Smith, 1985 [5]; Dickens/Watkins, 2006 [6]; Huxham/Dick/Stringer, 2009 [7]). It applies Lewin's circular Action Research model of Analysis, Planning, Acting (Execution), Observing (more fact finding), Reflecting and Acting again (Dickens/Watkins, 2006: 194). In keeping with the concept of the systemic loop (Königswieser/Hillebrand, 2004: 46 [8]) this model implies that observations and interventions are described prior to being reflected from multiple perspectives in an inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary way before being applied in an adjusted form in organizations. (see e.g. the case studies carried out by our students; Grossmann/Mayer/Prammer, 2013 [9])

Now and again, this scientific approach faces the reproach that research and this type of direct intervention in organizations do not really coincide: "[Action Research is] either producing research with little action or action with little research" and „the principles of action and research are so different as to be mutually exclusive, so that to link them together is to create a fundamental internal conflict" (Dickens/Watkins, 2006: 190). However, by consciously and actively taking into account the double role of the OD practitioner, who acts as a counselor and researcher at the same time, we create a substantial difference to the classic form of Action Research approach. While the Action Research approach defines itself through ethnographic observations the practitioner's model for OD research is typically based on the concept of 'Clinical Perspective in Fieldwork' (Schein, 1987 [10]), which was introduced for the first time by Edgar Schein.

In their double role, researchers are not tasked with performing fieldwork of any specific type as opposed to the concept stipulated by ethnographic fieldwork. Instead, they understand their role as ‚aides', who act without any specific intentions to change the 'object of their research' that they are mandated to counsel. This leads to a differentiated perspective: „The primary source of organizational data is not what is ´out there´ to be observed, but is in the careful analysis of how members of the organization relate to the outsider" (Schein, 1987: 30). In effect, this implies that this type of research work is highly 'self-reflective' (Lobnig, 2009: 22) and lends itself to contributing to the necessary scientific abstraction. Schein opts to describe this phenomenon as follows: „The ethnographer´s model of the organization is quite different in that it is built more on the assumption that the organization exists outside of the ethnographer´s consciousness and is there to be understood and deciphered, not to be perturbed" (Schein, 1987: 30).

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This being said, the practitioner's model of research combines the practice-oriented approach of Action Research with the enhanced perspectives of the double role of 'researcher-counselor'. Thus, it contributes heavily to supporting the process of forming hypotheses and theories in science in its own explicit way. It is indeed the trans-disciplinary orientation of our research approach that helps ensure a theory-practice-theory transfer by actively utilizing processes and structures specifically established for this purpose (see i.e., Prammer/Neugebauer, 2012 [11]).

Against this background and within the specific fieldwork carried out with systemic consultants, who socialized in a biotope of 'group dynamics' [12], 'radical constructivism' [13], recent biology' [14], 'recent 'sociology' [15], 'recent anthropology [16], ‚communication science' [17], as well as intervention approaches of ‚systemic family therapy" [18] and a „solution and resource-focused therapy" [19] (see also, Krizanits, 2009 [20]), the author and Alfred Janes jointly derived the basic principles of the TM approach [21] (Janes/Prammer, 2003 [22]) .

In a later stage, the author further developed the theory and differentiated the approach in a practical way, in particular with view to interventions and instruments best fit to serve a thorough and participation-driven intra- as well as inter-organizational development (Prammer, 2009a [23]). The approach is based on a multitude of OD cases, which were realized against the background of the OD practitioner's model described above. (see also, Grossmann/Prammer, 1998 [24]; Janes/Prammer/Schulte-Derne, 2001 [25]; Prammer, 2009; Grossmann/Prammer/Neugebauer, 2011a [26] b [27]). As an integral part of our research approach to meet the requirement of a pro-active transfer from theory to practice there are also first differentiations of TM in place both for (change) managers (Prammer, 2010 [28]) and consultants (Prammer/Weyrer, 2013 [29]).

II. Some key deliberations that triggered the TM approach

A. *The hierarchy dynamic*

Generally speaking, a basic deliberation is that managers nurture the hope that an untapped potential or a deficit of the current organization in relation to its relevant environment will be solved successfully by OD projects. However, OD projects might at times imply putting to shame leaders in their role as representatives of hierarchy. This is due to the fact that the notion 'hierarchy' stems from the Ancient Greek and means 'holy order'. That is why leaders who have not initiated a project and who have not been assigned an active role in this project frequently sense to be a failure themselves or happen to be attributed this failure by others, by which inadvertently they will not have answered the claim of holy hierarchy. In effect, this means that leaders who are not assigned an active role in the OD project perceive that they have been undermined in their position. If the project encounters rough times or really happens to fail these leaders will feel some 'Schadenfreude' and hence they will most probably not be inclined to support this project pro-actively. (see Prammer, 2009a: 136ff)

B. *The interest dynamic*

Another deliberation is the idea that large-scale complex organizational development of and within a company goes hand in hand with a whole range of colliding interests of a huge number of different stakeholders in and outside the company. Therefore, successfully managing organizational development takes coping with as well as 'taming' this very pool of interests. In principle, only a 'robust' project management and a well-grounded project organization in contrast to the standard organization lend themselves to ensuring safeguarding against possible counter-productive interventions from the stakeholders.

C. *The inner logic dynamic*

An equally important deliberation focuses on the observation that an organization's staff in a first place judges the suitability of existing or alternative new organizational structures, instruments and the ways in which people act from the perspective of their own functional unit or profession. This seems to be particularly true for societies that have a highly structured education system, which heavily relies on certifications and permits. This is particularly true, for instance, in the member states of the European Union with their apprenticeship system as opposed to countries whose education concept is shaped by 'on the job training'. It also applies to societies with high socialization in which people have a long-term or life-long adherence to companies or professions in contrast to countries with their general tradition of high mobility. This phenomenon is well observed in the USA, to name but just one example.

If members of an organization unit – in particular members of an OD project team – manage to pay attention to the inner logic which shapes the customers' needs and/or the apprehensions within their own environment the project team members will be enabled to step out of their reality construction of their functional unit and dive into a more comprehensive reality which goes beyond their profession and their functional unit. The identification of what is necessary to be successful and what the relevant quality criteria are changes from the perspective of the profession, the tradition of the organization unit they work in, and the socialization habits as such to a more comprehensive perspective orientated towards the customer. This makes it more likely for the actors of or parties concerned by a development process to come up with a commonly shared view on existing deficits or actions necessary to be taken. (see Prammer, 2013b [30]) It is in this phase that the business process approach on the basis of its horizontal customer logic is able to help get away from the vertical functionally oriented logic of the profession or unit that is of primary relevance, which as a rule determines the way staff think and act in an organization. The more protected the project team environment is, the easier the project team members will be able to practice this newly created perspective because the unit they represent will not be tempted to accuse them of betrayal.

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D. *The loyalty dynamic*

Members of project bodies face the challenge of coping with double loyalty, in particular when it comes to heavyweight OD projects across organization units. On one hand, they need to stay loyal to the project idea and the colleagues in the project body they are members of. On the other hand, they also need to stay loyal to their own functional unit and the colleagues there. After all, the reason why they have been appointed to represent their functional unit or profession is that they are trusted parties who are expected to give voice to their organizational unit's concerns effectively, or at least to fight for having their concerns taken into account or even integrated to a certain extent. Any 'either-or' is doomed to fail very fast. Representing only the interests of the own organization unit or profession will invariably lead to a person becoming an outlaw in the project body. Conversely, if members of a project body tend to fully and unconditionally commit to the project only, they will lose their attribution as a representative of the organization unit or profession and thus fail to bring about any acceptance for the OD project.

This necessity of meeting double loyalty will very quickly overwhelm a member of a project body. In the end, the balance of interests of both the OD project and the organization unit or profession at hand can never be ensured by representatives of these bodies alone. It takes the possibility to be able to speak openly about the necessity to meet double loyalty both within the project and the standard organization unit. It takes empathy and the awareness that it is crucial to take pragmatic action on the part of the colleagues in the project body. In addition, it takes sufficient room for manoeuver as well as the realization on the part of the organization unit that it is essential to develop in tandem with the project insights.

E. *The affectation dynamic*

A profound transition from the 'old' to a 'new' reality invariably goes hand in hand with affectations. It is only through such affectations that parties involved are able to let go of "the old" and embrace "the new". (see also „Affektlogik" by Luc Ciompi, 1998 [31]) Within heavyweight OD projects, parties concerned not being affected in any way and showing no perceptible emotions is less of a sign that all is working out in line with the change intended by higher management. It is rather a sign that the change process went unheeded and participants were not touched by it in any way. Or, it might just as well be a sign that participants have found ways for how to be able to carry on in the old system unscathed. In real life, it is common practice to pretend emotions are misplaced and there is a call for more factual thinking, which does not lend itself to increasing the likelihood of making the OD project a success. Quite on the contrary, people are made up of a mind and a belly. They have intellectual insights, but they also have feelings. In particular, this is true if and where tried and tested systems, stability, and anything that conveys orientation and identity are at stake or jeopardized. That is why change agents need to reckon with the appearance of situations charged with affectations. They also need to proactively tackle this in a helpful and tailored way. And this is also why an OD project management system needs to make available appropriate instruments and settings to support participants in their moving through a given change.

Against the background of these various dynamic phenomena and leaving aside the generally valid requirements for a short realization time and low staff resources we can subsume the success of OD projects in a nutshell as follows: The success of a heavyweight OD project is a 'function' of the 'contextual quality' of the solutions identified as well as the 'acceptance' of solutions approved and the process which led to solutions found. This is because the best solution is worth only as much as it has been implemented and is used in daily routine in a sustainable way. Conversely, a well-working and smoothly running OD process without generating any genuine and sufficiently innovative solutions means in the end having wasted precious time and valuable resources. To put it straight: it is very unlikely that the project will produce any success,

1. if hot issues remain unvoiced on a content level and there are no answers found to solve these issues, and
2. if socially relevant taboos remain unvoiced and if the majority of the key players – decision makers, grey eminences, experts, and staff concerned – find the approach and the way they are involved in the process to make no sense to them.

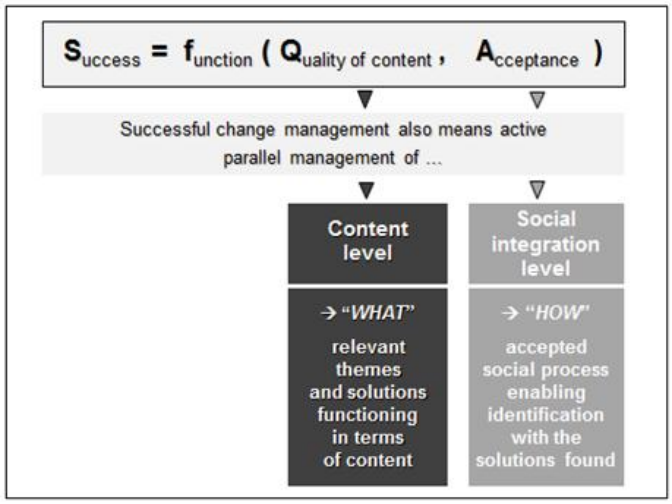

Figure 1: The Two Levels of OD Success

This means that in OD projects it is imperative to have both the 'content level' and the 'social integration level' in the focus, or proactively work on both levels. (see Figure 1 – The Two Levels of OD Success) Normally, a 'too little' on one level cannot be compensated with 'a lot more' on the level that has already been worked on well. If, for instance, employees concerned find the way the project has been run to be inappropriate and hence opt not to accept it, no matter how good the solution might have been claimed to be, it will be worth nothing. If, at this stage, employees put up resistance a solution update will hardly be the right answer. What it takes to resolve this conflict is a move from the content level to the

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process level by raising the issue about the way the project has been handled so far. Conversely, if project staff fails to identify useful and innovate solutions to satisfy project goals it will hardly prove to be meaningful to have yet another brainstorming. Nor will it make any sense to just sit around with everyone looking each other in the eye. In this case, it would be reasonable to change to the solution level by inviting experts who are able to provide workable solutions and offer them to support the project members.

There are two ideally typical OD approaches, each of which keeps the focus on either of these two levels (Prammer, 2009a: 15ff).

The one ideally typical approach triggers changes with higher management imposing organization-related solutions. Representatives of higher managements are then called on to specify and implement these blueprint solutions stepwise down the hierarchy level. Within this approach OD change agents primarily move along the content level of the function 'quality' on the basis of external expertise provided.

The other ideally typical approach triggers changes with all people concerned tackling deficits and untapped potentials, which would be relevant for the organization's survival, internally. This approach involves higher management or parties concerned establishing a reflection process among the parties concerned. This reflection process serves as the basis for developing functional solutions. Within this approach OD players primarily move along the process level of the function 'acceptance' and the permanent proactive involvement of the parties concerned.

Within the approach outlined first, the change intervention occurs via 'solution design'. It helps reach solutions fast and it allows for identifying radical, 'daring' solutions as well. This is possible because the OD change agents themselves are largely detached from their solutions. This group of people comprises managers, internal experts, and external advisors. The price to be paid for this intervention approach is the conditional acceptance of the solutions as well as the frequently partial feasibility of the solutions, a realization that might occur at a later stage in daily routine. This might sometimes even lead to the solutions approved being cut back on. It might likewise lead to solutions losing their cutting edge novelty impact. This issue of acceptance and the relevant response on the part of the parties concerned is obsolete if and where the organization's physical existence and survival is in danger, and if everybody is actually glad having received solution just in time to ensure the organization's survival.

Within the approach outlined second, the change intervention occurs via 'process design'. As a rule, there is a high acceptance for solutions identified this way, as they are the product of the parties concerned from within the system. The price to be paid for this intervention approach might be the long project duration and the fact that sometimes the solutions identified will be disliked by higher management and also that the probability of tapping radical and daring solutions is rather low.

In the reality of OD projects, the two ideally typical approaches outlined above are not really practiced in this pure and outspoken way. Consultants and change agents in either of the two approaches outlined above try – consciously or unconsciously – to put the disadvantages inherent in these approaches into perspective by working on the other design option here and there, respectively. It is not possible to benefit from either approach or eliminate the disadvantages of either approach by simply working on both in parallel. The reason is that each approach harbors

- specific socialization behavior patterns and attitudes which trigger the agents' focus and action taking in a specific way, and
- a certain inner logic and individual dynamics.

The TM approach, the basic principles of which are introduced below, tries to meet the requirements and take into consideration the dynamics of both approaches at the same time. The TM approach intends to capture and build on the advantages as well as limit the disadvantages of both approaches outlined above as extensively as possible. Figure 2 – Three Ideally Typical OD Approaches – below is designed to give a brief and comprehensive overview of the two ideally typical approaches as well as the TM approach as an independent third unique OD process approach featuring an own inner logic along with the project dynamics resulting from it.

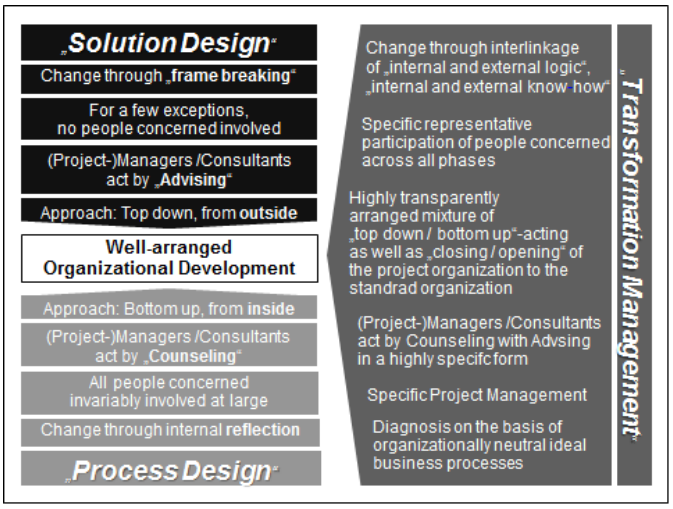

Figure 2: Three Ideally Typical OD Approaches
(see also, Prammer, 2009b [32])

III. The core pillars of the TM approach

The TM approach works on the levels mentioned earlier above: 'The Content Level' focusing on solution designs and the 'Social Integration Level' focusing on process designs. It is the process design the dictates the beat. The core element of the TM approach is the 'specific' intertwining of internal and external system logic. It also takes the specific mutual exchange of knowledge relevant to the project task of external experts (consultants, internal experts, managers) as well as of internal project key players (leadership and staff concerned). The term 'specific' is used to mean that expert knowledge is

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always presented in the system concerned by external experts in a rudimentary form only, which is untypical for experts. Experts do this consciously and declare this explicitly to internal project partners. As is common knowledge and current practice, experts try to offer ready-made solutions, though.

On the other hand, the term 'specific' is used to denote

1. that there are strict measures taken to temporarily cut off communication between internal project members and standard organization as well as between the project team and the decision making body. Note: ensuring a 'protected space' for creative thinking free of any danger of being punished.
2. that more often than not, representatives of top management are forced to make a statement in favor of successful project interventions and results on the OD path. Note: ensuring 'robust' statements and decisions from top management about the project frame to which project key players can refer like, for instance, necessarily accepted taboo breaches, project rules as opposed to the rules of the standard organization and other projects, solutions identified, etc.
3. that there are members of the system concerned represented in the project at any given moment, some of who on a permanent basis, for instance in the project team, and several others representing the system concerned with a less intensity in a discontinued fashion, for instance in an expert body, or a sounding board, or a decision making body, etc.

In principle, the TM approach involves a mutual injection and enhancement of knowledge as well as the reality constructions of internal project members and external experts. The approach is about a transparent and continuous 'opening' and 'closing' of the project vis-à-vis the standard organization. It is about a permanent thought-process and anchoring of the solution transfer right from the outset of the OD process. Last but not least, it is about a specific way responsibilities are perceived and managed in a triangle between project sponsor / decision makers, project staff, and consultants. To make sure this interplay of inclusion/exclusion and/or opening/closing is not perceived as a manipulative trick, it is necessary to guarantee highest transparency in an openly communicated way. The core instrument is social commitment of the key project players inside and outside the project.

Figure 3 – Possible Bodies of TM Project Organization – below shows the essential bodies with a broad and yet resource-effective representation of the members of the organization units concerned. In addition to the different bodies of representation, a so-called criteria-based staffing is designed to support this aspect of resource-effectiveness. On one hand, this criteria-based staffing contributes to ensuring transparency. On the other hand, it helps take the burden of inadmissible social engagement off the shoulders of representatives on behalf of colleagues who are not called on to participate in the OD project or co-work on devising new organizational structures, which factually are to be designed for them to 'live' in. Such type of 'criteria-based staffing' is meant to help reach acceptance for the OD solutions and processes in quite a different way as well. Key project players are not appointed due to their level of popularity, name, or closeness to any stakeholder but ideally due to the key aspects that are to be given a voice. This increases the likelihood of finding well founded and highly accepted solutions. In addition, high project performance capability and resource-effectiveness can be ensured due to the fact that projects are staffed in a criteria-based fashion to a minimum all the way covering as many key staffing aspects as possible.

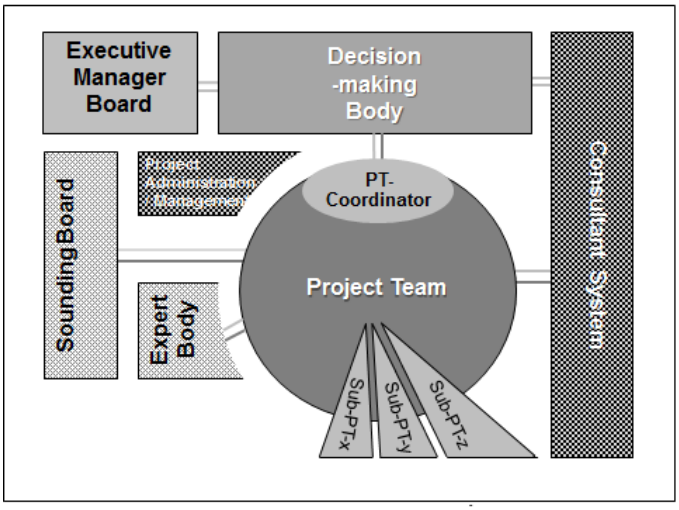

Figure 3: Possible Bodies of TM Project Organization

Figure 4 – Some Essential Cornerstones of TM Project Management – below depicts a few key corner stones of the specific project management that define the TM approach.

- Tailor-made project bodies ensuring high representation and high resource effectiveness
- Representation of all hierarchical level of the organization, departments and professions concerned
- A separate project body for diagnosis/conceptualization and decision-making without any double membership, if possible
- Criteria-based recruiting of project bodies
- Various types of project bodies for a broad and resource-effective representation at the same time
- Differentiation of roles free of any project team leader in the project team; PT coordinator (Team) instead of a PT manager
- Specific sets of robust rules within and between the PT committees and the standard organization as opposed to the standard organization and possibly commonly applicable project rules
- Well-structured repeated "circular planning" of goals and project framework
- "Temporary closing" of the project vis à vis the line organization to ensure creative thinking without the risk of getting punished

Figure 4: Some Essential Cornerstones of TM Project Management

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Irrespectively of whether it is just one consultant that offers advisory and counseling services as a unity, or two separate consultants that offer advisory and counseling as a group according to the complementary consulting approach (Königswieser/Sonuc/Gebhardt, 2006 [33]) with the advisor in close consultation with the counselor, either way the consultants act with a multidirectional partiality approach (see Boszormenyi-Nagy's, 1987: 99 [34]). In doing so, they all aim to give any and all individuals and groups that are likely to contribute to the success of the OD project an opportunity to have their say. The only thing the consultants are committed to exclusively is the subject matter at hand rather than the stakeholders involved.

When it comes to expertise, managers / consultants / experts invariably contribute a whole range of alternative solutions and they present them in a roughly hewn form. And they do so on purpose. These solutions directly answer essential system-inherent contradictions and core aspects of how to shape the already familiar organization system in the future. The solution models thus offered in an incomplete and undifferentiated fashion need to be specified by the project team to render them feasible in daily routine. In this environment project team members are able to embrace each solution and get a close feel for how a solution could work and what the advantages and drawbacks of each solution are. They do so prior to comparing them before finally selecting the one(s) rated best. They accomplish both steps jointly with the members of the decision making body. By defining rules of cooperation and thus committing all with the aim to oblige the project team members to work through each solution offered to them, project team members are prevented from discarding a solution they might deem to be unattractive to them at first glance.

Unless already in place in the organization, consultants are called on to provide work tools, such as for example, instruments for deriving and weighting criteria to assess the various solutions that have been subjected to differentiation as well as instruments for the assessment process itself. As a rule, any tool and instrument is likely to manipulate and thus impact social systems. Therefore, project team members including but not excluding other project bodies are invited to fine-tune these tools and instruments prior to their utilization. Once completed, they are again invited to review the process of their utilization.

In addition, explicit success factors and 'recipes for failure' are derived as well as review rituals established. As reviews lend themselves to improving the communication culture in organizations, they are designed to serve the following purposes:

- check the project framework for its functionality in a well-structured, consistent and transparent way in the triangle between project sponsor / decision makers, project staff, and consultants,
- adjust the project framework on the basis of previously defined rules of the game, if and where necessary,
- raise the topic of violation of multidirectional partiality of consultants,
- limelight counterproductive actions in the OD process that are identified in the recipes for failure.

The business process approach mentioned in section II of this paper forms a core and crucial element of TM. Thinking across divisional lines and professions with a view to customer needs and environments puts the mostly as well as most evident functional way of thinking of project team members along with their loyalty to the units they represent into perspective. Project team members gain new insights and generate a common system of references beyond the norms and points of view of the members of the project team by

- deriving a proposition for ideal processes without referencing any specific organization that is part of the OD process,
- having the project team members jointly analyze the status quo of the organization in terms of performance and functionality by pointing out aspects of weaknesses, strengths, untapped potentials, as well as the customer needs on the basis of the previously derived ideal processes,
- deriving central indicators of process quality and output quality of processes.

Additionally, consultants make a special point of balancing 'double loyalty' of project team members, that is their loyalty to the project itself and the loyalty to the unit or profession they represent. They do so by providing a specific portfolio of instruments to raise and tackle the question of doubly loyalty within and between all the groups involved.

As a last key item of the TM approach mentioned in this paper, all parties involved in the OD process pro-actively and explicitly address and accompany the emotionally charged transition process from the 'old' reality to the 'new' reality. This takes place in a cascade of 'key project players → managers → leadership → staff concerned'. One by one, these groups each receive instructions how to manage the affectations emerging during the change process on the basis of social settings and tools provided to them. Thus they learn how to handle their own affectations and they are enabled to support the next group following in the cascade in handling their affectations in their function as a role model (Prammer, 2010). Figure 5 – Emotional Phases of Transformation – shows this transition curve. The following generalized statements serve to give an idea for how to navigate as a key player in this OD context:

- Tell the people concerned in the language they speak and by using triggers to touch their sensitivities what this OD process is about and explain them the reason behind!
- Speak unambiguously and take your time for the people concerned to be able to be empathic!
- Act as you would expect others to act. Therefore, be the one who is the taboo breaker and make yourself available as a role model!
- Make sure there are plenty of resources unleashed to cushion performance cuts as a result of the emotional involvement on the part of the parties concerned with

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the transition and the necessary unlearning and relearning process!

- Offer settings in which parties concerned are able to pay tribute to the 'old' reality by bidding farewell to the past as well as to parties responsible for shaping the past. First and foremost, walk the talk yourself!

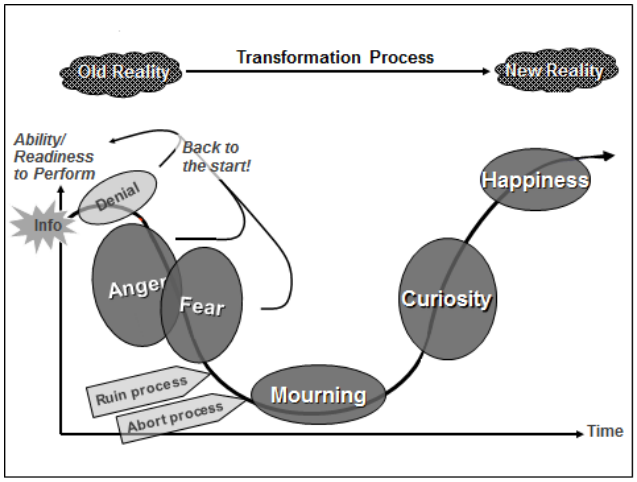

Figure 4: Emotional Phases of Transformation

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