Chapter 6
Influence of the Capability for Change on the Explanatory Processes of Change: Proposal of a Model

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ABSTRACT

Early research on organizational change emphasizes the importance of change management. They offer a range of managerial practices that allow the organization to carry out its changes, which is more in line with a planned process. Such an approach overlooks the fact that organizational change can be explained by other processes such as the political process, the interpretative process, the incremental process and the complex process. Each of these processes offers particular characteristics of change. The observed change was marked by the different characteristics falling within the various explanatory processes of change. Results differ according to the context in which change evolved. Through this paper we seek to understand and explain the results related to the existence of different characteristics that are part of the different explanatory change processes (political, interpretative, incremental and complex processes) in a change planned by the senior management of a company.

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INTRODUCTION

Early research on organizational change emphasizes the importance of change management. They offer a range of managerial practices and actions that enable the organization to carry out its changes which are more in line with a planned process. Such an approach neglects the fact that organizational change can be explained by other processes such as the political process, the interpretative process, the incremental process and the complex process (Vas, 2005; Vas and Jaspart, 2010; Pichault, 2013). According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), these processes represent theoretical models developed to understand how organizations change. Thus, the explanatory process of change can be defined as a modeling of the progression of change.

Empirically, the observation of change cases has shown that the change has not followed the intended path. The change has rather been marked by the different characteristics of the explanatory processes of change. Results differ according to the context in which change evolved (Beldi, 2004; Cicconi and Soparnot, 2010; Vas and Jaspart, 2010; Pichaut, 2013). This observation marks the evolution of thinking from “change management” to “capability for change” (Rondeau, 2008). Indeed, recent works emphasize the importance of the capability for change to explain tolerance and the organization’s openness for change. However, these works are very limited and do not clearly explain the nature of the influence of the capability for change on the evolution of organizational change. Thus, it would be very interesting to better explain the importance of the capability for change throughout the process of change. This research contribution will allow better management of projects introducing organizational change.

This research work seeks to understand and explain the results related to the existence of different characteristics of the explanatory change processes (political, interpretative, incremental and complex processes) in a context of a project of change decided and planned by the senior management of a company. Specifically, this research aims to specify the contribution of the capability for change to the explanation of change. The objective is to develop a research model presenting the components of the capability for change that can influence the explanatory processes of change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this research is structured in two sections. In the first the different explanatory processes of change are presented. The second is devoted to defining the capability for change.

Explanatory Processes of Change

A review of the literature shows the existence of five explanatory processes, each presenting the particular characteristics of change (Vas, 2005; Vas and Jaspart, 2010; Pichault, 2013):

- The planned process is characterized by the succession of phases, the setting of objectives and the foreseeable results;
- The political process is characterized by continuous negotiation between the various influential actors within the organization in order to ensure a certain convergence of interests;
- The interpretative process is characterized by taking into consideration the actors’ interpretations during the change;