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The need of effective strategic management during a planned change: An example of bologna change process from a Turkish university

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the road map of; pitfalls experienced during; role and readiness of internal stakeholders involved in a planned organizational change. Effective strategic management should be agile to enable companies to move quickly in response to new environmental changes, and replace outdated ideas and applications with processes that can provide to meet new requirements as they present themselves. An organizational change can either be planned through different change strategies deliberately or it can be less controlled and composed of emergent processes. Since Bologna Process (Official Site of Bologna Process, a) is a complicated change process which aims to bring many opportunities and help to improve the university, an effective strategic management is necessary to lead this planned change in order to get beneficial outcomes. The article initiates with a thorough literature review about managing organizational change and role of strategic management during a planned change. Hence, Bologna Process has highly interdependent duties adapting a qualitative research method seems appropriate to be able to investigate this change process in-depth. In this research 9 semi structured interviews had been conducted in order to collect data. Also participant observant notes, field notes and secondary data were used.

Keywords: Leadership styles, Learning orientation, Firm performance, High performing organizations

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1. Introduction

Strategic management and planned organizational change have been developed independently from each other but today in many organizations they convene for the sustainability of business (Chandler,1962; Barker and Duhaime;1997; David,2007:283). In order to achieve particular goals,

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organizations determine a plan of action which can also be mentioned as the long-term scope of organization. The plan of action or the scope of organization can be defined as strategy (Wheelen and Hunger 2003). For every organization; strategic management is a need to formulate and implement right strategies.

“Change Management” focuses on strategy and competitive advantage which can be defined as continuous process of synchronization of four key management levers: strategy, operations, culture and rewards (Berger et al, 1993). Approximately any change in structure, technology people or strategies have the potential to disrupt comfortable interaction patterns where effective strategic management process itself can be considered as major changes in organizations and processes (David, 2007:283).

Since globalization has gained importance lately; strategic management and change have become crucial concepts worldwide. In order to gain competitive advantage, organizations should adapt strategies in accordance with changes taking place in their environment (Chandler, 1962). Due to globalization, managers should maintain the congruence of the organization’s strategy, structure and ideology with the demands of an evolving and changing environment (Chandler, 1962; Barker and Duhaime, 1997). By being responsive to changes in environment, some organizations are able to renew themselves whereas some are not able to change or develop themselves (Barr, Stimpert and Huff, 1992). In this study, change process has been accepted as part of strategic management.

Organizational change can take place from broadest level to narrowest level in institutions. The contents of organizational change are categorized as “change in organization (state)” or “change in strategy (direction)” by Mintzberg and Westley in 1992. An organization can amend its culture and its corresponding strategic vision at the broadest level whereas at the narrowest level, it can alter its people and its operations (Mintzberg and Westley, 1992). The change taking place in an organization is at various level but the “characteristics of change” can vary by level. Change seems to be more strategic when it is more frequent at lower levels. Changes at middle level or below can be depicted as strategic (Mintzberg and Westley, 1992). The definitions of Mintzberg and Westley (1992) for a planned organizational can be seen in the Table below.

	Change In Organization (State)	Change in Strategy (Direction)
More Conceptual (Thought)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture • Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision • Position
More Concrete (Action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems • People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs • Facilities

Table 1 Planned Organizational Change

Research was conducted in a foundation university in Turkey which goes through Bologna Process by 2009. Since universities are characterized by the multiplicity of goals, diffused power and chaotic decision making processes; they are useful research sites for strategic change researchers (Cohen et al, 1974; March and Olsen, 1972). Moreover, Bologna Process is a proper example of a planned

organizational change for higher education institution which must be managed strategically in order to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in international ground. Finally for a developing country like Turkey, strategic management of Bologna Process and successful adaptation of the principles, gain a supplementary importance where chance of international mobility for students is low due to insufficient governmental funds and low income levels.

Since in this study, a foundation university's strategic management and one of its issues – Bologna Process (strategic change)- is investigated, university's strategic plan should be reviewed. University's strategic plan involves six primary issues such as creating awareness in education, internalization, being research-oriented, institutionalization, entrepreneurship, creating new concentration areas. As being issues of strategic plan, internationalization and creating awareness in education is provided by Bologna Process. Also, adaptation to the principles of Bologna Process is mentioned in "Strategic Plan"(2010-2014) of the university.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the interdependence of strategic management and planned organizational change during the Bologna Process. Since Bologna Process is a complicated strategic change process which aims to bring many opportunities and help to improve the university, an effective strategic management is necessary to lead this planned change in order to get beneficial outcomes. The article initiates with a thorough literature review about managing organizational change and role of strategic management during a planned change. Hence, Bologna Process has highly interdependent duties adapting a qualitative research method seems appropriate to be able to investigate this change process in-depth. In this research 9 semi structured interviews had been conducted in order to collect data. Also participant observant notes, field notes and secondary data were used.

2. Literature Review And Hypotheses

2.1. Managing an Organizational Change Strategically

Strategic change plays great role in evolving environments for firms to achieve competitive advantage and to survive. Strategic change is necessary for firms which suffered from weak strategic positioning or experiencing performance decline (Barker and Duhaime, 1997). It can be defined as "an attempt to change current modes of cognition and action to enable organization to take advantage of important opportunities or to cope with consequential environmental threats (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

Strategic change can be conceived as a process during which change agents make sense of an altered vision of the organization and engage in cycles of negotiated social construction activities to influence stakeholders and constituents to accept this vision. Studies indicate that top management activities are the key elements for the effectiveness of the overall strategic change process (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

Since change agent, has a role of identifying environmental opportunities and threats, considering organizational strengths and weaknesses, interpreting relevant information and formulating

and implementing strategic change (Mintzberg , 1979), their role provides the main link between an organization and its external environment in defining the "developments and events which have the potential to influence the organization's current or future strategy" (Dutton and Duncan, 1987: 280). Mostly, change agents chosen among the actors influencing strategic decisions (Dutton and Duncan, 1987) hence team's decision to introduce changes in strategy will be based on members' perceptions of opportunities and constraints (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985).

The ability of an organization to "anticipate" and "respond" to change is among the most crucial organizational feature to achieve competitiveness and viability. Organizations develop models and scholars depicted theories that both verbally and visually specify the important characteristics of an organizational change raising the organizational understanding of what happens and how it happens in planned change (French and Bell, 1999). For example Cummings and Worley (1993) mentioned there are five sets of activities that are necessary for an effective change management such as motivating change, creating a vision, developing a political support, managing the transition and sustaining momentum. On the other hand Kotter (1995), in his model of change, identified eight mistakes that caused many programmed changes to falter. These pitfalls are not establishing a sense of urgency, not creating a coalition, lack of developing a vision, ineffective communication, and lack of empowerment, disability of generating short term wins, declaring victory too soon and not anchoring changes into the organizational culture. Burke and Litwin argued that an effective organizational development can be achieved through first order and second order change but focusing broadly on second order, transformational change (Burke and Litwin, 1992). All these models and theories can be redoubled by giving examples from various scholars and studies however one common characteristic of all these change studies is that they explicitly or implicitly support Lewin's (1951) basic three-stage theory of change (Sonnenshein,2010). And furthermore all these theories also supply the ingredients of an effective strategic change management which are crucial to convince people that change is necessary and desirable (French and Bell, 1999). The success of an effective change can be achieved through proper flow of information and providing readiness of stakeholders that involved in the process (Barr et al,1992; Wheelen and Hunger, 2008; David, 2007).

2.2. Managing Strategically During and Organizational Change: Creating Readiness During Bologna Process

Managing an organizational change strategically requires identifying the initial position of the organization, determining the action plan for change and finally internalization of the change actions by all parties of the institution. All programs and initiatives within an organization have to be managed strategically to contour with the ongoing change program. Lewin's three stage model of change is a powerful tool for understanding the change situation as it emphasis the preparation and internalization of change and it is modified, improved and adopted by various scholars since its first development (Armenakis et al, 1993; French and Bell, 1999).

Since 1940s Kurt Lewin and his friends' ideas about change is dominating the majority of the text books and studies in the field of management (Schein,1987; French and Bell, 1999; Labianca, Gray, and Brass, 2000; Elrod and Tippett, 2002; Sonnenshein,2010). The first idea developed by Lewin was the idea that the present situation of any moment is the result of opposite forces pushing from opposing directions (French and Bell, 1999). The lateral idea proposed by him was a model of change process where there are three stages: “unfreezing” an existing state, moving to a new, desirable state, change process where there are three stages: “unfreezing” an existing state, moving to a new, desirable state, and then “refreezing” that new state (French and Bell, 1999; Sonnenshein,2010).

With the motivation of understanding Lewin's three stage model in depth and being aware of its drawbacks in creating readiness, Armenakis et al (1993;2001) have developed two interdependent model to explain creation of readiness and realization of institutionalization. Regardless of how well a change process rewarded, punished or coached, it will not be successful unless the readinensses of involved parties are achieved (Schein, 1979). During the three stages of Lewin's model, managers (change agents) should use effective communication methods both oral and written, create active participation of change targets and managed the information obtained from external environment in order to create the readiness for change (Armenakis et al, 1993). The interdependent institutionalization model on the other hand create the internalization with formalization activities, management of both internal and external information, active participation, effective communication, managing human resources, developing rites and diffusing practices (Armenakis et al, 2001).

The studies of Armenakis and his friends (1993;2001) have provide answer for the question of “how” to operate Lewin's three stage model -unfreeze, move and freeze- hence a planned organization change by creating readiness and institutionalization. Focusing principally on Lewin's model some studies somehow ignore the impact of external stakeholders that create information and fail to notice the responses of “change targets” (Sonnenshein,2010). Therefore, this study aims to answer “how a change is planned and managed strategically”, how to gain competitive advantage through strategic change such as Bologna Process”, “How a planned change-unfreezing, moving and freezing- in a Turkish Foundation university is managed” and “How the change agents use the stated tactics for creating readiness and institutionalization during this change process”.

2.3. *Planned Organizational Change: Bologna Process*

Today, Bologna Process unites higher education institutions of 47 countries, to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international cooperation and academic exchange. The predicted European Higher Education Area is targeting to: “*Facilitate mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff; prepare students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development and offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom.*”(Official Site of Bologna Process, b)

Regardless of their long history, the European universities have started to become the followers of USA higher education practices and lose their competitive advantage against their American colleagues (Dahrendorf, 2006). This was preliminary peak of Bologna Process which particularly looks at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The EU members find out that unity is an obligation to compete with the political and economics giants of the world: USA, China and Japan (Rowley and Sherman, 2010). For years the EU members have tried to achieve unity in trade, economy and politics, which in fact refers to the easier part, by the help of laws, regulations and agreements with the motivation of a very common idea that have been ruling nations for ages: economic well-being. However when the subject is the transfer of knowledge between different institutions, students, professors and programs within Europe, they faced with significant problems due to the diversity of university systems. Thus Bologna Process is aiming to generate universal systems that will internationalize higher education in Europe. The Bologna Process is focusing on four very basic points to reach its mission as:

1. A common credit system,
2. 4,1,3 study structure thus four years for undergraduate, one year for master and three years for doctoral degrees,
3. Attaining the easy transfer of students between countries by focusing on “English” as the language of education,
4. Improve quality,

The Bologna Process aims to establish an “European Higher Education Area” where students, graduates and higher education staff to benefit from free mobility and equality to high quality higher education. As a result; of common education language, mutual recognition of degrees, collective higher education qualifications, readable and comparable degrees and quality assurance; Europe will turn into a higher education arena where both staff and students can benefit from the chance of choosing the best alternative that suits their qualification and expectations about their careers and education. All these features of Bologna Process will automatically increase the competition among higher education institutions for both students and staff. Bologna Process will divide the higher education institutions into two: as *members* and *non-members* of “European Higher Education Area” who execute the rules of Bologna Process and prefer to run with existing systems successively. In the course of time member institutions will increase their competitive advantage over non-members as they are the ones who respond and anticipate the change by adopting their organizational strategies.

Today, we are living in the age of continuous change and there is no doubt that Bologna Process is a persistent change which has already started to create controversy among university administration (primary change agents), and faculty members(change targets)(Rowley and Sherman, 2010). This nature of the Bologna Process increases the importance of effective strategic change management for its sustainable success. Therefore creating readiness for the change process and internalization of the new equilibrium which is stated above become crucial factors in Bologna Process.

Turkey has been the member of this “European Higher Education Area” since 2001. “European Union and International Relations Office“ (ENIC-NARIC) of the “Council of Higher Education (YÖK)” is responsible for the maintenance of the Bologna principles in Turkey. The existing Turkish higher education system had already met the easily readable and comparable degrees so the committee should focus on other details such as:

1. Establishment of a system of credits, (ECTS)
2. Quality assurance,
3. Adaptation to “European Higher” education standards,
4. Promoting lifelong learning,
5. Promoting mobility of students and staff
6. Encourage participation of students and higher education institutions to Bologna Process

The initial step for promotion of mobility was started with Erasmus program, in 2003-2004 with the involvement of pilot universities in Turkey. Today lots of Turkish students and higher education staff are experiencing the chance of studying with their European colleagues and contrary. Moreover today, with the participant of public and private universities, Turkey has started to implement the principles of Bologna Process in its higher education institutions since 2010 (Adopted from National Reports of Participating Countries in Official Site of Bologna Process, c).

The proposed study is investigating the adaptation and implementation process of Bologna principle in a Turkish foundation university. The sample university was also one of the pilot institutions implementing institution of ERASMUS program since 2003 who considers “internationalization” as one of their strategic goal for competitive advantage. Therefore Bologna Process was a great chance for the university to reach and sustain one of their strategic goals. The university has formed “teams” to manage this change process among various administrative and faculty departments under the supervision of Head of Students Affair Office. Soon after the launch of procedural and course based changes for the adaptation of Bologna Process, each faculty formed their own internal teams in order to direct the extent of tasks assigned to their faculties during the implementation process.

3. Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research methods that allow researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the subject (Mariampolski, 2001). Qualitative methods help researcher by allowing respondents to express their thoughts and feelings without any restriction, even revealing those that are not on the surface (Levy 1982). Moreover, qualitative methods enable to explain the complex processes, deeper feelings and contradictions (Levy 2005). Thus it is appropriate to examine a complex change process such as Bologna, to figure out compulsive situations and deeper problems which are encountered by all participated parties.

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from a sample composed of various internal stakeholders (academicians, administrative staff and students) who have been involved in the change process. With open-ended questions, the interviews were semi structured with a protocol” to assist interviewer to recall the main themes. In addition to that interview protocol, follow-up questions were asked to get more depth responses and reach a deeper understanding of those responses (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). All interviews were recorded with the permissions of the informants, and it is ensured that any personal information will not be declared. Interview records were transcribed and coded to observe if it is required to revise the interview protocol.

It was challenging to warm up the informants, to make them feel relaxed and answer the questions about problems they have faced during change process. Questions about their problems and how informants feel about conflicts experienced. To ensure that informants felt comfortable during the interviews we conducted the interviews at the place and date that were most convenient for the participants. Most of the interviews were conducted in informants’ offices and none of the interviews had been interrupted by any other person. In addition to interviews, and as participant observers, some field notes of the daily conversations are taken.

Reaching sincere responses is the most important issue in interviews. We observed that professional dialogs make informants feel uncomfortable from questions about problems faced during change process, thus we tried to make the dialogs more like casual conversation thus informants felt themselves at ease and they responded more sincere to sensitive questions about conflicts experienced with superiors.

All data collected turned into transcript and coded into categories which then interpreted by researchers who has adequate knowledge about how to conduct a qualitative research.

4. Analyses and Results

As transcripts coded by the researchers, the findings indicated that the planned change which has been implicated in the university has various management problems. The preliminary results stated that majority of the stakeholders involved in this change process distressed because of the deficiency in the

flow information that cause same tasks repeated over and over. The findings also indicated that there was a lack of effective strategic management.

“...Actually I hated the rocky road. What makes the process so tough are the unnecessary details and repeating same duties for many times due to lack of information flow...”(Academician X)

“...They give different information about the process, applications and deadlines. E-mails about the process are not delivered to everyone or at least to ones who are primary responsible of the process...” (Academician Y)

When the transcripts of the interviews are coded and interpreted, it was obviously seen that there is a lack of information flow and coordination through the process. Even though Bologna process was a planned change, the agents taking place in the process were not well informed about the process and the steps they would go through. In addition, respondents cited that inadequate use of written documents and personal contacts turned the transformation process into a big chaos of information pollution. However, personal contacts, speeches and written documents are the vital elements of information flow and taken as the initial step of creating readiness for a strategic change (Armenakis et al, 2001). Both change agents and targets in the university should be well informed about the aim of the Bologna Process and how it serves for the creation of targeted international higher education area.

“I don’t want to talk about the process because everything is a big mess. There are still people who do not have a clue about what Bologna Process is. Information meetings about the process should be held every month to involve and inform new comers in the organization” (Academician, Z)

“Most of the time, research assistants handled the requirements asked for the process. Professors were not so willing to be involved in the process. For example, they did not attend the meetings. They required their assistants to participate in the meetings. In my opinion everyone should attend and participate in the meetings to enable coordination and consensus. Also, attendance to meetings is crucial for everyone to be informed about the process” (Administrative Staff, X)

According to our respondents, change agents were not successful in achieving the active participation of change targets. Since they did not manage to use effective communication methods both oral and written, create active participation of change targets and obtain information from external environment, they were not able to create the readiness for change as Armenakis et al (1993:2001) mentioned in their models. Active participation allows members of change targets to gather information first hand, decreases the level of resistance to change and lets the participants to be involved in the change process. Management should develop better participation strategies and may augment the relationship among change parties, strength in the credibility of the change agents and establish individual commitments to reinforce strategic organizational change (Pasmore and Fagans, 1992).

“All the departments should have initiated implementing regulations at the same time but instead each department started modifications when they wanted or when they need to meet the deadline.” (Academician, X)

As the respondents mentioned, being institutionalized would make change process easier and would create the readiness. During the adaptation of a change process, members should be provided by common time tables and adequate work flow charts in order to create the appropriate behavior of the change targets. Since administration has not planned the change properly, and change agents were not well informed about Bologna Process, some problems have been encountered in the moving stage of the change in Lewin’s model. This is a result of misinterpretation of external information about the aim and targets of the process. Information from both internal and external sources has specific control in reinforcing the message needed to institutionalize the change.

“ I know this process will help our university’s internationalization progress but sometimes I still think do we have to do all these things again and again” (Academician Y)

“ One thing that I certainly know about this process is it will be good for our university but I am curious about what benefits it will provide to me except work overloads” (Administrative staff Z)

Some of the respondents are aware of the benefits of Bologna Process, and they are sure that process would enable advantages and opportunities for the university. If target agents can achieve to manage the process, it would create competitive advantage and some of the respondents could foresee this result. Although, many of the respondents realized process as a strategic change, the advantages of the process should still be well defined for others to be involved in the process.

“...all the modifications were done in a hurry with the aim of meeting deadline. We did not have a chance to check with other departments” (Academician, W)

“...Bologna Process can create competitive advantage for our university...” (Administrative Staff, Y)

As cited in the above statement, change targets were not supplied with adequate time to make the required modifications for Bologna Process. In order to have efficient change outcomes during process, time lines and work flow charts should be determined for participants to have sufficient time to make proper modifications. The Bologna process is planned as a strategic change for university as indicated in its strategic plan. Therefore, it should be well organized in order to provide opportunities for university in the long term. Since it is one of the primary universities which Bologna process is taking place, this can enable many advantages for the university despite to the difficulties.

5. Conclusion

As stated above, this paper aimed to answer “how a strategic change is planned and managed”, how to gain competitive advantage through strategic change such as Bologna Process”, “How a planned change-unfreezing, moving and freezing- in a Turkish private university is managed” and “How the

change agents use the stated tactics for creating readiness and institutionalization during this change process”. In addition to answering the questions above, the research also made a contribution to strategic change literature by being one of the researches made in Turkey in this area. Most of the studies done so far in the literature were in accordance with Western Culture. Also, in the literature, there are not many studies done in this area especially by using qualitative approach.

In university’s strategic plan, one of the primary issues is internalization and Bologna Process. By being part of university’s strategic plan, Bologna Process as a strategic change has an important role in internalization of university. Although university has an opportunity to gain competitive advantage by being one of the pilot institutions which Bologna Process is applied, due to lack of information flow and notifications, it can easily miss this opportunity. It can be obviously seen that some problems are encountered in the planning and implementation stages of strategic change. As a result of the research, it is found out that readiness for change which is a necessity in implementing changes was skipped by university’s administration. Hence, there is a problem in unfreezing stage which refers to a period during which change agents should prepare organizations for the change and it is followed by the actual adaptation and implementation of the change by the change targets (Lewin,1951).

As mentioned above strategic change is defined as “an attempt to change current modes of cognition and action to enable organization to take advantage of important opportunities or to cope with consequential environmental threats (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). In this case, Bologna Process is a strategic change and an opportunity which university can benefit and gain competitive advantage. As being a pilot institution it has a first mover advantage as well. Hence, change agent, has a role of identifying environmental opportunities and threats, considering organizational strengths and weaknesses, interpreting relevant information and formulating and implementing strategic change (Mintzberg, 1979). In our sample it is observed that change agents are not successful in interpreting information and implementing strategic change. As mentioned in the interviews, most of the respondents claimed that there was lack of information about the process and its implementation and formulation stages. Mostly they indicated that process was not handled properly. University administration had a problem in management of the process strategically and efficiently according to respondents.

The findings indicated that the planned strategic change –Bologna Process- which has been implicated in the university had various management problems. The results stated that majority of the stakeholders involved in this change process distressed because of the deficiency in the flow information that cause same tasks repeated over and over. Many stages such as unfreeze; change of the process were complex and chaotic. The findings also pointed out that there was a lack of effective strategic management during the implementation of strategic change – Bologna Process.

As a result, this study presented the necessity of strategic management in implementation of a strategic change. In addition, it reflects the problems which can be encountered during strategic change process in a foundation university. The research showed that poor strategic management of a strategic change can cause many deficiencies in change process which could result with loosing opportunities and missing competitive advantage presented by strategic change process.

The process has not been completed yet; it should be assessed once more again when the process is completed to compare the results. The study consists of one university. The sample could be enlarged by involving other universities which have taken place in Bologna Process. Other universities' strategic plans and strategic change process should be observed.

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