

# The Art of Travelling

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## Creating a shift towards a resilient organization

The ability to »travel« is crucial in order to develop organizations that are fit for the future. Travelers have to be able to manage surprises, to cope with complexity and volatility. These are also the very skills needed to create a resilient organization.



Every journey has its challenges.

### Go onboard for a joint journey

The ability and readiness to »travel« is crucial: to co-explore the territory and co-create the future – together with the people. Not to formally insist on strategies, structures and functions – using nouns that promise stability – but to accept what is happening continuously: to strategize, organize and work. To have a joint vision and passion to tackle mile by mile, milestone by milestone, even if knowing and accepting that there won't be a final destination anymore. To be proud of having joined the expedition.

Many smart strategies are elaborated but don't penetrate the company. Processes are designed and audited, but people work their own way. Management structures are designed, but social constellations are stronger. The more sophisticated the blueprint, the stronger the staff resistance. The more we promise new stability, the more people recall past change trauma. Let us be honest! Before blueprints penetrate the company, the reality will have moved on. That is why one future key capability is travelling. Because it requires trust in our attentiveness, awareness and openness to face the challenges and in our ability to decide on the direction of the journey at any point.

Travelling with our staff through a volatile business world means coping with uncertainties and ambiguities. At the same time, digital technologies enable more and quicker information, networking and collaboration. Both aspects match with the next generation's principles such as trust, loyalty and mutual support.

That's the stuff needed to go onboard, and keep a joint journey going.

### Manage key situations

Travelers need the ability to manage key situations during the journey and – in business jargon – within the processes. A sales process in a department store might be designed perfectly – and fails if the sales person is not always able to help. A strategy may have been developed over months – and fails if the key meeting with the shareholders is a disaster here and now.

Instead of designing perfect organizations, we can start with situations, which are the relevant »touch points« to our company, where strategy should become real. Discussing such situations will produce a large collection of issues described very practically: How to apply our partnership strategy with a key supplier that doesn't supply on time? How to advance our participative leadership culture with managers that just called it rubbish during our latest meeting? How to build customer loyalty with staff members who are reluctant to support a customer who wants to return a newly purchased TV and claims a money refund? Many months' development can be undone or confirmed within ten seconds of practice.

People become more involved if they get to discuss such situations instead of abstractions. The feeling, the joy and fear, satisfaction or frustration is emerging in situations, here and now. We either succeed in this moment, or we let the situation slip. We train such situ-

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ations via role plays or action learning. But how is all this backed by our strategizing, organizing, tooling? Here is why we have to reinterpret processes as a sequence of interactions, with the people being both, immediate sensors and influencers. For now, they are involved in the volatile world, its pacing and rhythm, its information flow and co-feeling. This is the moment of truth but also a learning opportunity: Where and how to develop further the skills, processes, tools?

### **Empower and enable self-management**

The thousands of possible situations cannot be coordinated centrally. Even risk management has its economic limits. Without the huge richness of people's motivation and capabilities – waiting to be revealed, we won't be able to cope with the complexity and volatility of the world around us. We need to blend experience and creativity, to mix talents and experts, to unfold the power of senior staff and digital natives.

We cannot anticipate nor coordinate all possible situations. That is why complex organizations perform better if they enable and empower the self-management of their staff, supported via process or project management methodology such as Kanban or Scrum. Get the energy flowing rather than limit motivation, competencies and talents in square boxes; remember the enthusiasm in spin-offs or pioneer organizations. Reinterpret the blueprints of strategies, structures and systems as momentary snapshots of an organization that is always on the road.

### **How this works in practice**

There is, for instance, the mail order company with a strictly hierarchical structure, which introduced teamwork in one of their divisions. From the beginning, the teams made a significant difference and started their self-organization with a reflection on working situations and a commitment to good collaboration: »We discuss and commit to our daily work organization; each of us is responsible for efficiency, quality and documentation; we address trouble and conflicts immediately; we respect each other and give feedback; we rotate the facilitator role; we review and update these principles regularly.« Based upon such principles, they further developed their processes, became a success story and a role-model for the company's further development.

Another example is the chemical company where the Head of Controlling practiced a specific kind of onboarding for new staff members. She asked them to spend some weeks in an expedition – to go and talk to people in the company, to get a first feeling of the culture, to understand working processes, to see what was relevant, to grab expectations and imagine the best place to contribute their own expertise. Then she asked them what that very place was and how they would like to work. Her experience: the answers fitted perfectly. In addition, the new staff member also learned about self-determination aligned to the company's needs and opportunities. The department is well-known for the motivation and performance of its staff. ●