

INTRODUCTION



The circumstances in which contemporary organizations operate are constantly changing and the changes are quick and often difficult for organizations to predict, even if they use sophisticated analysis tools and systems. Such changes result from the process of globalization, which can be noticed in every part of organizational life. Opening borders makes capital flow freely around the globe, so competition may arise and disappear unexpectedly and quickly. Information flow, which is fostered by media of every type, influences customers' needs and expectations on a daily basis (Brol, 1997, p. 45). Customers themselves are changing their characteristics, as they transition from a well-known, predictable and modernistic profile towards a changeable postmodern one that is more difficult to predict.

New technology and access to information, helped by huge amounts of surplus money at the disposal of international companies makes it more and more difficult to work out a competitive advantage and sustain a leading position over a long period of time (Chomiak-Orsa, Flieger, 2011b, p. 32). Today, organizations need to search for their competitive advantages not only among their traditional resources of a physical nature. It becomes common to look for competitive advantages in areas such as knowledge of organizations, information access and management, the nature of HR, client-organization relations, management and organizational structure.

The problem is that the speed of changes, on the one hand, and the ways of developing new areas of competitive advantage, on the other, are not even the same – changes occur much faster and take place in increasingly unpredictable areas, which makes it difficult for organizations to come up with new ideas for creating their competitive advantages again and again.

One of the newest concepts allowing organizations to make a huge improvement in their effectiveness and hence become more competitive is the consistency concept. The basis of the consistency concept is systems theory.

Consistency is connected with the fact that when we change one element of an organization we probably have to also change other elements to adjust to the change. According to systems theory the change in one element of the system influences other elements and hence the functioning of whole system changes.

Moreover, when we think about consistency, we need to remember that the optimization of one element of the system may have the effects on the whole system. Thus, adopting the point of view of systems theory is the basis for the effective creation of consistency. When we change one element (a consistency platform) we will probably have to adjust other platforms which correspond with the first one. The question of how to implement this in an organization is addressed in the main goals of this monograph, which are outlined below.

Considering organizational consistency from a system viewpoint, we look at an organization as a system. The conclusions from systems theory have a key meaning for organizational harmonization and optimization – which is a core of consistency. When we optimize an organization by implementing continual changes (as in a process organization, for example) we need to see and analyze it as one system and to look in different directions, which means searching for possible effects of changes in various areas of an organization's functioning. Possible effects may also appear in areas that are remote from each other. Here, consistency platforms offer a perspective to search and analyze the effects of changes and to identify possible needs for adjustments.

When we analyze consistency and systems theory as such, we come to the conclusion that these phenomena are fully understandable and leave no room for misunderstanding. However, problems arise when we try to operationalize these assumptions in practice, which means when we try to explain in detail what consistency actually means and what elements it actually contains. To be able to define consistency in a way that is helpful for managers, we need to identify the main areas in which they should look for consistency and show the interaction between the main elements constituting these areas. Thus, once having defined management areas for analysis, we need to show various consistency perspectives, platforms and subsystems characteristic to these areas. Thus, we will be able to identify how possible changes in one subsystem influence other subsystems. In this way, the process of harmonization, adjusting and consistency building among different organizational elements will be identified, which will allow the concept to be implemented in practice. This will make the consistency concept more applicable and will finally lead to an increase in organizational effectiveness and competitiveness.

Taking the above issues into consideration, an international team embarked on the project: *Consistency concept in management: consistency perspec-*

tives, platforms and measures identification. This book is an outcome of the project, with scientific purposes and hypotheses giving it a final structure.

The main purpose of the book is the operationalization of the consistency concept for different areas of organization management. To be able to operationalize the concept, four specific purposes were identified:

1. The identification of consistency platforms in given management areas.
2. The identification, description and analysis of the subsystems of the identified platforms.
3. The exemplification of consistency and inconsistency in the identified platforms and subsystems (with special attention paid to the consequences of inconsistency).
4. The attempt to establish consistency measures for the identified consistency platforms and subsystems in each management area.

What needs to be emphasized at this point is the fact that such purposes fill a knowledge gap in management theory and have a great application value for managers in every kind of organization. The consistency concept is a new concept in management and this is the first attempt to operationalize it. The novelty of the problem makes it a challenge for the authors, but at the same time the value of the subject for management knowledge and for practitioners is considerable.

The above purposes are supported with corresponding hypotheses. The main hypothesis of the research states that it is possible to operationalize the consistency concept by identifying consistency platforms and subsystems in different management areas. Also, specific hypotheses were identified:

1. The platforms identified for each management area may be described and analyzed in detail.
2. Consistency in each identified platform is crucial for organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
3. Inconsistency in the identified platforms may be a source of serious organizational dysfunctions.
4. It is possible to set coherent measures for identified consistency platforms.

The project was realized by an international team of management scientists from different management areas. The areas were divided as follows: organization functions (finance, logistics, sales and other), the kind of organization (virtual, process), or according to the kind of resources analyzed (HR, IT, knowledge management). In each area, the members of the team were responsible for operationalizing the consistency concept (the general purpose of the project) using the specific purposes of the project (1-4) as the research guidelines. Treating the purposes as research guidelines also allowed the hypothesis listed above to be verified.

With regard to technical aspects of the project's realization, each member of the team led their research on the subject according to project purposes and hypotheses and wrote one chapter of the book (in some cases, chapters were written by co-authors). Team members were guided, supervised and assisted by the team leader who was responsible for the final outcome of the research. Finally, the book consists of eight chapters, each one representing separate consistency analysis for a given management area.

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