

# Mindful Dialogue Is the Key!

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**Abstract** Organisational change processes cause uncertainties and fears on part of the employees. This, in turn, can block new developments. Dialogue processes may create certainty and trust, increase transparency, and foster knowledge and learning ability. Therefore, the dialogue may contribute to ease the implementation of organizational changes and make the process successful. To achieve this, the dialogue at eye level considering all groups affected by the changes must be the key issue within the organisational communication. But beware of regarding the dialogue as an immediate available and effective panacea for building confidence in general: against the background of negative experiences in the past, the process of establishing trust will continue to be difficult.

**Keywords** Dialogue • Change Management • Participation • Mindfulness • Organisational Trust

## 1 Introduction

Organisational change processes can cause uncertainty for the employees and the middle management. There is often uncertainty as to where the company's journey will lead and how the future career will be

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affected<sup>1</sup>: What effects will the change process have on the own position in the company and the work requirements? Will the working relationship between the colleagues change? How safe are the jobs (see Mohr 1997, 2000 and Weiss and Udriș 2001) and the income? Furthermore, it is often unclear whether and how (the employees) will be engaged in the change processes and whether the own expectations towards the setting up of the process and the results are considered. These uncertainties on both sides (the employees and the middle management) can strongly affect the capability for changes in companies. The employees are not prepared to expose themselves to an uncertain future. This is especially the case where change processes are exacerbated by past negative experiences.

For many companies, a lack of readiness to changes of the employees can result in a major problem. Especially the companies that often have to initiate and implement change processes as a result of dynamic environments are affected.<sup>2</sup> The lower the readiness to changes of the employees and the middle management is in these companies the higher is the internal potential for conflict and the more likely are suboptimal change results or even the failure of change projects. Changes that are necessary to adapt to external requirements, but that are not successfully feasible increase the pressure on the companies to realise further changes very quickly. Consequently, the series of changes is increasing as much as the repeated risk of failure. Hence, companies can spiral into a vicious circle of the need for change and the failure of the change (see Hatch and Schultz 2004; Becke 2005). The continued failure of such projects turns to be a collective organisational experience, the so called “organisational cultural trauma” (Alexander 2004) which casts dark shadows over the ability for development. The capacity for innovation of the company is at stake then.

Therefore, companies urgently have to attend to the readiness to changes of their employees and the middle management. The key point in this issue is to deal constructively with the permanent uncertainties of all groups in the company to an extent that allows changes. Once an organisation has already created a series of less successful change projects, the resounding success cannot be expected overnight, no matter what steps are taken. But perhaps it might be possible to brighten the shadows of past negative experiences in such a way, that all groups also can recognise their opportunities related to the changes. This implies that the companies learn how to deal with the uncertainties, to understand this to be a continuous task and to organise themselves in such a way that the readiness and the possibility to be engaged in the process is not the exception, but rather the rule.

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<sup>1</sup> Our empirical results show, that in particular the fear of not receiving appropriate professional standards play a decisive role in the employees' engagement in change processes. On the one hand this fear can lead to the willingness to take an active part, on the other hand the feared restriction of the professional standards can result in withdrawal and frustration.

<sup>2</sup> For example due to the ongoing change of political framework conditions in the field of personal services, such as supporting or caring for people.

The (design) concept of “Organisational Mindfulness” (see Becke 2013) can help companies to adopt a position that creates and strengthens their ability to change. Our empirical experiences with the realisation of the concept of “Organisational Mindfulness” in four partner companies in different sectors and contexts show that the dialogue is of great significance for the company’s ability to change. The dialogue is important for both sides: for the decision-makers as well as for those who cannot (always) participate in the decisions. Dialogue provides knowledge regarding the background of decisions as well as views and expertise of the other, plus it reduces uncertainties. We want to show, that dialogue is the core of a developed and systemic practised organisational communication that has been adapted to the specific expectations of all groups. Without such a dialogue the concept of organisational mindfulness would be ineffective. But, the dialogue has to fulfil certain requirements to be useful.

Based on our empirical results<sup>3</sup> we will discuss the following questions:

- What basic types of organisational communication are existing (2.)?
- How significant is the dialogue as a specifically demanding way of organisational communication for mindful organisational change and trust – that is why we speak of the “mindful dialogue” (3.)?
- Which conditions are needed and how has the dialogue to be created to really foster mindfulness and trust in companies (4.)?
- How can dialogue be concretely implemented within a systemic developed organisational communication (5.)?
- What are the possibilities and limits of the dialogue related to company’s innovation strategies (6.)?

## 2 Organisational Communication

We understand organisational communication (to communicate means to inform) to be the generic term for all signals provided by individuals or groups in a company. Communication can be referred to the exchange in concrete work processes. Without this communication co-operation in the work process would not be possible. But this must be distinguished from communication *about* work processes, work co-operation, work situations, work organisation, company development etc., which is of interest for us related to dialogue (see 3).

This can be a uni-lateral, bi-lateral or multilateral communication. The one-way communication does not aim at a direct response. The communicator hopes to achieve effects, but does not expect to be informed about how the other perceives the way of receiving the signal and the signal itself. Therefore, the one-way

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<sup>3</sup> Our empirical results are mostly synthesized, which means that we do not consider individual examples, but using the experiences made with requirements, forms of implementation and limits of the dialogue across company borders.

communication does not intend direct response.<sup>4</sup> Typical examples for this kind of organisational communication are newsletters or posting notices including messages released by the management for all groups in the company or messages via intranet. It could also be said, that one-way communication is just giving pure information to a person or group that in turn cannot, should not, or does not need to comment this information.

All forms of mutual communication deviate from this pattern.<sup>5</sup> Mutual communication does not only mean, that the “sender” informs the “receiver”, but allows subsequently to response directly or shortly afterwards. Moreover, mutual communication does not only allow reactions, but ensures that reactions or repeated exchange are really made possible. Typical examples for mutual communication are employee reviews, team meetings, department meetings, project reviews etc.

In general there is no difference regarding the significance of one-way or mutual communication, but depending on the different occasions and intentions they are more or less suitable. The one-way communication is for example especially suitable to inform the staff about the economical development of the company in past periods. On the other hand, if the communication refers to issues that can only be discussed discursively (such as problems in the co-operation between persons or teams), a mutual communication structure is more suitable.

However, one-way and mutual communication structures are often closely and reciprocally related. For example, all persons or groups that want to or shall exchange views mutually need to be sufficiently informed about the communication topics to take part in the discussion as equal partners. This information can be provided using one-way communication patterns.

Generally companies combine different one-way and mutual communication tools in a more or less established or more or less systematically practised organisational communication. In the course of this article we will show which way of organisational communication is reasonable in a mindful created organisational change. Furthermore, it is shown how one-way and particularly mutual communication tools are mutually supportive so that an exchange of views between different groups will be “at eye level” and meet the expectations of all participants (5.). But first, we want to show the importance of mutual communication for mindful change organisation provided that the communication is created in the form of a “mindful dialogue” (3.) and which (operational) requirements have to be considered for a corresponding communication in dialogue form (4.).

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<sup>4</sup> Although a one-way communication can become a mutual communication due to a response of the “receiver” this response is not the original intention.

<sup>5</sup> In this context we consider communication as a mutual process to communicate a concrete meaning (see Burkart 2002 and Beck 2007).

### 3 The Significance of the Dialogue for Mindful Change Organisation

Actors and actor groups in companies (such as employees, middle managers, employees' representatives, management) may be very different regarding their expectations towards organisational change processes and the way they experience these processes. This is related to past experiences with change processes, the extent to which persons or groups were involved, their position and how the person or group was affected by these change processes. Involved groups can consider themselves either as loser or winner, either being involved in the process or feeling helpless – but a single view on change processes is unlikely. The basis for creating a mindful organisational change is to visualise the multiple perspectives and to bring them together. This is the only way to use the perspective diversity as a productive source in the change process.

Furthermore, the visualisation of the multiple operational perspectives has a positive effect on concrete knowledge gain. With the exchange of different views opportunities and risks can be identified. Perhaps ideas of change or requirements for change can even only be realised within these exchange processes. These are, for example, ideas or requirements that have not been in the focus before as the decision-makers did not have enough knowledge on this issue. Especially with respect to specialised activities, larger companies and personal services appropriate decisions are only possible when considering the knowledge of the experts in the field. There you will often find cumulated knowledge as a result of longterm experiences which is often insufficiently opened up for innovation projects of companies.

To realise and use the view and the knowledge of the other a systematically created exchange is needed. In our opinion this exchange should be created as a “mindful dialogue” focussing on an exchange “at eye level” in order to initiate processes of individual and collective learning<sup>6</sup> in the company. The dialogue<sup>7</sup> is the key concept of practise-oriented action research. The understanding of the term goes beyond the everyday understanding of the term dialogue, because certain normative requirements are demanded.

On the one hand the dialogue is used in the action research as a basic concept within research and development projects to characterise mutual learning in research and practise.

Here, the action research uses a completely different concept than the mainstream social research. The mainstream social research aims to create distance from the practise in order to ensure the analytical approach without distorting the results. In Contrast the action research aims to experience the analytical and the set up processes in order to learn from real-life situations. The role of the “experts” is

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<sup>6</sup>For detailed explanations concerning dialogue processes as a basis for learning between individuals and from organisations see Hartkemeyer et al. 2001.

<sup>7</sup>Regarding dialogue approach in the action research see Fricke 2012; Becke/Senghaas-Knobloch 2010.

therefore considered differently: whereas the mainstream social research considers itself to be the expert who gives recommendations to the practise the action research considers the operational experts as equal partners and aims to exchange and develop relevant knowledge “at eye level”.

On the other hand, the dialogue is also an approach to set up exchange relations in companies. Here, the dialogue is used as a tool in groups to mutually explain their expectations and to analyse problems and develop approaches in co-operation.

Within the concept of “Organisational mindfulness” the “mindful” dialogue creates spaces for the different perspectives which are considered as a resource for the organisational change. The dialogue is the central focus of a “mindful” process of company development. Here, mindfulness means the concrete understanding of organisation and especially organisational development. The company that is always mindful towards itself and all its elements is in the focus. This company is informed about the opportunities for and obstacles to development, the organisational consequences and the impacts on the different groups by constantly undergoing self-analysis and communication processes (see Becke 2013 for details).

The dialogue fosters trust, as those who are not continuously involved in the decision process know that they keep being informed and that their views will be considered. The inclusion of the dialogue leads directly to participation of groups involved and has also positive effects on the readiness to change in the company. Therefore, the dialogue as an integral part of the concept of ‘Organisational change’ fosters the ability to self-analysis and self-reflection in companies. Furthermore, unintended consequences of planned changes, as for example loss of trust, are early recognised, confidence in the organisation is ensured and so far unknown development opportunities are realised. All this leads to an overall considerable increase of the innovation potentials of companies (see Becke 2013).

## 4 Requirements for Mindful Dialogue in Companies

The realisation of a well developed dialogue on an equal footing often fails in companies because organisational groups involving employees and managers do not mutually trust each other or do not have enough confidence in the other’s abilities. Additionally, there is often a lack of opportunities or willingness to participate.<sup>8</sup> Apart from negative past experiences in change processes the decisive reasons for this are often structural deficits and the attitude of individuals. Which requirements are needed to realise a “mindful” dialogue?

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to the possibilities of participating directly and indirectly within organisational changes or innovation processes see Ziegler et al. 2010; Schwarz-Kocher et al. 2011; Dörre et al. 1993. Considering the discussions on the direct participation of employees carried out already in the seventies it can be noted that this is not a basically new perspective (Vilmar 1971).

A dialogue which is realised within the concept of ‘Organisational mindfulness’ requires from the management the basic willingness to not only allow a direct and indirect participation of their employees, but also to explicitly foster their involvement. Instead of using directive management decisions top-down the companies choose discursive negotiation processes, forms of communication involving all groups and decentralised decision-making structures (Blees 2012). This in turn requires that the company management recognises the value of an overall participation of the employees. Such participation processes must be realised more than once to (plausibly) establish those processes in the organisation. They must become an integral part of the organisation and the change management.

To participate in the dialogue as equal partners, all groups in the company should have the same level of information to make a meaningful participation process possible. Therefore, the dialogue has to be embedded in an organisational communication system that provides all groups in the company continuously with the information needed for participation.

A further requirement for the mindful organisation of changes is that dialogue processes should not only be initiated when changes have already been decided by the management. Dialogue should rather be realised when changes are planned. This in turn requires an extensive transparency regarding corporate development and decisions (see Meyerhuber 2001). However, many companies consider this process to be risky as change plans themselves already cause uncertainties for the groups involved. To deal with and withstand these uncertainties is quite demanding for managers and employees. Our empirical results show that creating *process* reliability can ease the situation as long as there are still no reliable *results* available. Therefore it should be made clear which decision has to be made by which deadline. Binding regulations and processes for the organisation of changes as well as the opportunities to participate should also be clearly communicated to create certainty in uncertain times. To withhold relevant information on the current state of the change process until decisions are finalised can result in emerging rumours and cause further uncertainties in change processes. In the view of the employees it appears to be unreliable when the dialogue processes are initiated too late, when it is initiated without taking the results seriously or when the dialogue is broken off. This will consequently impede rather than enable the participation in change processes or even only in further dialogue processes.

What does the implementation of the dialogue requires – from the employees, the employee representatives and the middle management? First, the willingness to participate is important. First of all negative past experiences often need to be overcome to engage oneself into the dialogue.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a kind of basic willingness or rather trust is needed. Those who want to join in and play an active part must also be prepared to seek information. It is not only the company which is obliged to provide information, it is also the employees ‘and all other groups’ responsibility to

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<sup>9</sup>To discuss the “shadows of the past” the concept of “safe dialogue spaces” is suitable as a tool for research analysis and dialogue for the practise (see Behrens 2011).

seek information. In the operational analyses we have noticed repeatedly, that there is a lack of readiness on the part of the employees to gather available information. There are many reasons for this (involving past disappointments with participation on own-initiative) which are difficult to recognise. Often, the participators themselves are not aware of the reasons. In this case, the reasons for their (self-)chosen restraint have to be found out before addressing the willingness to participate.

The attitude and the engagement of employees' representatives (see Kotthoff 1995; Ziegler et al. 2010) and the middle management might be of great significance for the dialogue. On the one hand they can take an intermediary role in the organisational dialogue and participate as role models and multiplier. On the other hand they can ensure compliance with the rules and make sure that all groups are involved in the process. This implies, that employees' representatives and middle managers agree to new decision-making structures without having a prominent position in the company for the benefit of a direct participation of the employees. There is no alternative for these organisational groups which are naturally more involved than the "normal" employees: in case of poorly implemented or failed change processes it is not only the management that is held responsible, but also the middle management and employees' representatives, as works councils (see Bleses 2013).

Finally, it is important to mutually clarify the expectations so that the dialogue can correspond with those expectations of the different organisational groups. If the dialogue and the rules are determined one-sided by top-management, this will not be useful for the readiness to participate. By doing so, they would send the wrong signal already before the dialogue begins. In a first step, it is important that the expectations of the different organisational groups towards a "successful" dialogue within a "successful" organisational communication are specified. In this process, the expectations of the employees, the managers at all levels and possibly the employees' representatives towards a successful communication have to be identified and brought together.

It is not possible to meet every single expectation or idea. But, in the sense of a constructive exchange any refusal should be reasoned. Moreover, the established "mindful" dialogue should not be inflexible but modifiable as a consequence of modified organisational expectations (see Becke et al. 2010b).

## **5 Concrete Implementation of the Dialogue Within Communication Processes in Companies**

The planning and implementation of the dialogue should be realised by a control committee which also supports the testing of the communication tools used (Becke et al. 2012). If there is already a control committee established which deals with organisational issues, the dialogue can be integrated as a new topic. It is important that the control committee is focused on a participative approach. It should consist



of managers at all levels, representatives of all groups and, if existing, employees representatives. If there are further experts dealing with organisational management in the company (as for example experts in the field of internal organisational development or in staff positions), they should also be involved.

In the control committee all participants are equal partners representing the different groups and levels of the company. The control committee must be authorized to take decisions. Once established, the control committee itself is a central tool that is visible to the public and where the issue of the organisational communication will be discussed on a “meta communication level”. In this context the transparency of the discussions and the results is important. This has to be ensured by making the results visible in the form of minutes (for details regarding the establishment of a control committee see Bleses 2013).

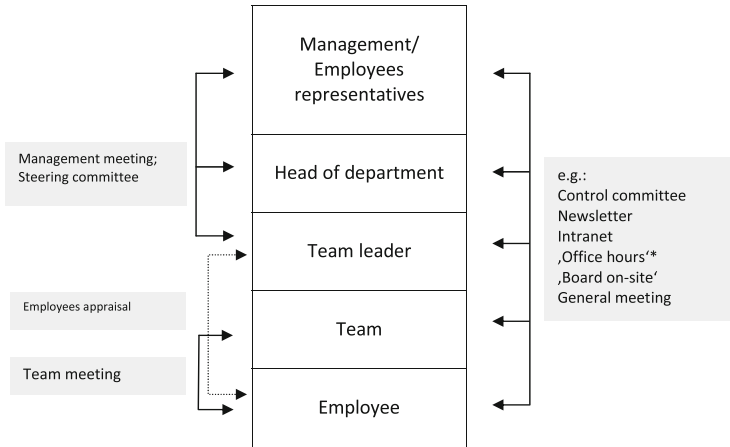
The control committee, however, plans the implementation of the dialogue in the organisational communication system roughly and related to the general tools. The detailed planning of the applied tools should be left up to the different units (departments, teams, etc.) because they can implement the tools according to their specific needs. Furthermore, the supervision and further development of the tools can also be done by the units themselves. However, feedback concerning the procedure and the experiences should be given to the central control committee in order to gather information about the applied tools and if needed to share the experiences gained with other divisions.

In addition, any problems certain departments may encounter with the creation of the dialogue are recognizable.

In the following we will outline two forms of dialogue which can be implemented in companies. The first one describes the dialogue in the day-to-day operations in companies with permanently implemented dialogue tools within the organisational communication (5.1). The second one describes the use of specific dialogue tools in periods of turbulences, such as obvious erosion of organisational trust or in the run-up to major organisational change processes (5.2).

### ***5.1 The Dialogue in the Day-to-Day Operations in Companies***

A basic requirement concerning the dialogue is to systematically establish it in the day-to-day operations of a company. As already explained above, there are different one-way and mutual communication tools which mutually influence each other, build on one another or only have positive effects when they are combined. A systemic analysis of the dialogue means to co-ordinate the different tools within a system of multi-level-communication (see the following picture): which tools are used at which level with which content? Thus, it can be avoided to present conflicting information and hence to increase uncertainties for the participants especially in change processes (Fig. 7.1).



**Fig. 7.1** Multi-level communication in companies (Own elaboration based on case studies in the research project 8iNNO (cf. Becke et al. 2011))

(1) We have two examples from the practise which illustrate the variety of the implemented tools: The “open office hours” are organised by the managers who are not that often in direct contact with the employees “from the basic level”. On a quarterly basis these employees may come to a date which was previously announced in the public. During the appointment the employees can ask the managers about any topic of interest. The aim is to establish an open culture of discussion. (2) The “gossip factory” is organised on the team level. It is an integral part in team meetings on a regular basis and offers the opportunity to address issues which have been heard, feared, or hoped for – even if this may seem to be far-fetched. The middle managers clarify issues, take questions into the higher level of the hierarchy and give again feedback in the team meetings. The aim is to foster the exchange about fears and rumours, as they could impede an open culture of discussion, especially against the background of an organisational cultural trauma. Under cover of past disappointed expectations and in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy fears can make the implementation of agreed measurements difficult. The “mindful dialogue” contributes to a meaningful exchange of those barriers to discussion and implementation.

The combination of different communication tools is particularly useful when different contents should be distributed (such as the company newsletter for all information which are not confidential, contrary to the employees meeting where the staff is informed about highly sensitive company data). Furthermore, different tools are useful for different kinds of information and for different occasions, levels and participants in the communication process. For example, it might be a good choice to use the employee appraisal to set up an exchange between superior management and individual employees “across the hierarchies”. The team meeting is useful for the (mainly) non-hierarchical exchange. Basically, it is important to determine the most useful tool to distribute certain information and the most

reasonable timing to co-ordinate the distribution of the information. Otherwise there is a threat of diverse or repeated conflicting operational communication which could do more harm than good referring to the trust relations.

Key condition for increasing trust in companies through communication processes is the reliability of expectations within the communication. This includes reliable rules about:

- The specific date where information is provided (at regular intervals; additionally on important occasions)
- Who provides the information (“sender”)
- Who gets the information (“recipient”)
- The engagement of all involved groups in the communication process

To support trust in the communication process communication loops should be set up in such a way that the “sender” and the “recipient” change their position regularly that means a change from the one-way into the mutual communication. For example, there could be the possibility for the employees to give feedback to the management information (in office hours or intranet panels etc.). Decentralised discussion groups (as for example in teams or departments) offer a good possibility to get information from the basic level which can be given to the management either by minutes in an anonymous way or through the representatives of different departments, teams etc. which are members of the control committee.

Such feedback loops illustrate the effects of the presented information. Moreover, they show the possible need for change within communication processes in the course of time (which tools are useful and which have to be modified?) Feedback loops can provide the management with information about obstacles related to organisational change processes and ensure that the employees are heard.

## ***5.2 The Dialogue as a Tool for Analysis and Development***

In contrast to the “routine application” of dialogue tools in the organisational communication the dialogue can also be used in “extraordinary” occasions. In this case, however, procedures are needed that are less useful in the day-to-day operations in companies as those procedures are complex and require external personnel. Examples for extraordinary occasions are an obvious crisis of confidence in the company, a deterioration of the work climate or major organisational change processes.

In this context it might be useful to create “specific spaces” where dialogue can be realised and presented in organisational groups and/or between organisational groups in different phases. Regarding these specific organisational situation the aim is to realise the perspective diversity in the company and to co-ordinate the different views in a mutual exchange.

A moderated two-step dialogue process has proven to be recommendable to organise the perspective diversity in change processes (see Becke and Senghaas-Knobloch 2010). First, “safe organisational dialogue spaces” are realised in small groups which are on the same level in the hierarchy, if possible,

to establish a basis of trust. Organisational dialogue spaces can be realised with managers and employees from different departments separately. Change processes and their (un)intended effects are analysed at this stage. What is said and worked out in these organisational dialogue spaces remains in the “safe spaces” at first. Central lines of discussion are written in minutes in an anonymous way and only be used after their release for the organisational public by the participants.

The realisation of psychologically safe organisational dialogue spaces (Edmondson 1999) is followed by an evaluation- and development conference in which the employees (in larger companies according to the principle of representative delegates), the middle management, the management and the employees’ representatives participate. The so called “dialogue conferences” enables the mutual exchange on the expectations to the change processes. Furthermore, joint solutions will be developed, discussed, and agreed upon in a concrete work programme in order to be realised in the following implementation stage. The following implementation of concrete solutions can also be supported by dialogue processes. Thus, it can be verified in which way the agreed measurements have been developed according to the participants. Supporting dialogue processes can easily be integrated in the above described day-to-day operations in companies by utilizing the already existing communication routines (involving project-, team- or division meetings) (“piggyback” procedure).<sup>10</sup> Following the two-step analysis and development process the following process principles should be acknowledged: the voluntary participation, the willingness of all participants to acknowledge the equal significance of all expectations, the permission of communication “at eye level” and the approval to recognise and review the joint solutions developed as a result of the process. In addition the confidentiality in the safe organisational dialogue spaces should be recognised by the authorization of the results. The (repeated) disregard of those process principles can destroy the trust for years instead of establishing trust. Trust is therefore a precondition and a (possible) result of organisational dialogue processes at the same time.

Our empirical analyses show that the implementation of dialogue processes can support a sustainable ability to change by including the experts in the field and their specialised knowledge “on-site”. As a consequence of the organised exchange of views and the joint problem analysis and problem solving the systemic understanding of the problems is fostered and the learning ability of the organisation is increased (see Ritter 2003). The recognition of the perspective diversity in the sense of communication “at eye level” and an equal valuation of the different expectation statements can support the establishment of an “informed culture” (see Weick/Suttcliffe 2007, 124 pp.): in an established culture of trust with the ability to change the fear of negative consequences when errors made are admitted

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<sup>10</sup> The “piggyback” procedure has been developed using the organisational health promotion as an example and aims to reduce the efforts in the context of the implementation of new goals in the work and organisational structuring. The idea is to use already existing processes and tools instead of implementing a new tool for each new goal (cf. Becke et al. 2010a).

can then give way for the attitude to learn from mistakes of the past (see Becke 2011).

To realise the safe organisational dialogue spaces it can be helpful to employ external moderators at first as they are perceived by the organisational groups as to be impartial or even neutral. There are less problems of trust compared to using internal moderators which are possibly pursuing their own interests. In larger companies it is also possible to use internal moderators who were for example qualified by external experts and work as multipliers in their organisations. Internal moderators should generally be confidants in their organisation in order to increase the recognition of their new role and to increase the trust in the dialogue processes. Another module on the way to a sustainable implementation of dialogue processes in organisations is to establish a control committee (as already described above) which takes over the tasks of the internal organisational co-ordination, the support, evaluation and communication of the dialogue spaces or rather the whole change process. The control committee allows the participation in the organisation of change processes across hierarchies, ensures the decision-making broad-based, creates transparency and is finally useful for conflict management. Especially, in change processes which requires a systematic, reliable and transparent communication for a successful process the control committee can take over the task to review communication processes on a meta-level and work on the revealed problems or delegate them into an appropriate committee.

## 6 Opportunities and Limits

By recognising and using the perspective diversity in companies the dialogue can contribute to a mindful organisational change through the support of a developing culture of trust with the ability to change. In our opinion there is no alternative to the dialogue for companies in which profound or repeated changes are organised.

With dialogue processes the perspective diversity in companies can be analysed. The initial point is to realise the different perspectives, expectations and interests which results in the recognition of this diversity. The recognition of the perspective diversity is not only to be considered as a purely intellectual process. To accept other views without sharing those ideas also requires empathy on part of the individual. An exchange “at eye level” and dealing constructively with partly conflicting expectations to change processes is a process of both, individual and collective learning.

Our experiences with the implementation of the organisational dialogue show, however, also limits. Establishing the dialogue in companies where change processes are initiated regularly can be a great challenge. Hidden obstacles such as organisational cultural traumas partly affect the process and can counteract the establishment and positive effects of dialogue processes.

Particularly in the beginning, patience is needed. At first, the dialogue is a method to reveal problems. The analysis of the past can lead to the emergence of

hidden and unsolved problems, to the hardening of attitudes or to the refusal of the participants. It can be a slow process to use the analysis of the present situation for finding solutions.

The dialogue cannot be the band-aid solution for past negative experiences. Especially organisations who look back at a considerable number of radical change processes in which many involved individuals saw themselves as the “losers” or where the participation was faked have to realise the “long shadows of the past” and work on it mindfully. This can be a “long-distance-run” and requires patience.

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