

Urgency and anticipation: time framing in organizational transformation with information technology

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Abstract:

Organizational transformation with information technology (IT) is often motivated by a crisis. Crises force organizations to question long-held beliefs and take action. However, crises also limit the actions organizations can take and undermine their ability to change by creating fear. This paper examines how organizations can tackle this challenge. Specifically, we report how change champions within a Swedish city worked from within a state of crisis to spark enough excitement to finally see change through. By tracing the change process from 2000 until 2014, we show how the champions used urgency and anticipation to set change in motion and seize the momentum to implement and make increasingly radical use of IT, ultimately necessitating the city's governance structure to be adapted. Our longitudinal case suggests that a crisis and the associated sense of urgency may initially only lead to superficial changes in the organization, rather than the desired deep transformation. However, long-term, the crisis can provide the foundation for anticipation – a condition for the organization to seize opportunities at the right time later down the road. Our contribution lies in unpacking the effects of urgency and anticipation on the success of organizational transformation with IT.