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**Quality in the Public Sector:
The Employees' Perspective**

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Quality in the Public Sector: The Employees' Perspective

Christian Korunka¹, Dieter Scharitzer², François Sainfort³,
Pascale Carayon⁴

Abstract

Most of the research dealing with the implementation of quality management principles in public service organizations emphasizes organizational aspects of the organizational change. The goal of this study is to investigate the effects of the implementation of quality (New Public Management, NPM) in a public service organization on employees' strain and satisfaction. The study is designed as an empirical examination of the 'context-dependent approach' (Edwards, Collinson, & Rees, 1998), suggesting that effects of organizational change depend on the context of the implementation, with organizational aspects (i.e. implementation strategies), job content and job context dimensions as main predictors.

The study is realized in a single-case longitudinal design. The case consists of a large municipal service unit responsible for the area's public housing system. Organizational changes include a comprehensive organizational restructuring process, the development of a new and consequently customer-centered orientation, and a general process- and quality orientation. The sample consists of 217 employees. Measurements were taken before the organizational change, and in two stages of the change process.

While the implementation of NPM was an organizational success (increase in customer satisfaction), it was accompanied by increases in job strain, and, at the same time, mixed results in job satisfaction. Lower qualified employees mainly responsible for the customer interface experienced the organizational change most negatively. By means of structural equation modeling, the context-dependent approach could be empirically confirmed.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, total quality management, originally stemming from the manufacturing sector, has greatly influenced not only the private, but also the public service sector. Often referred to as New Public Management (NPM), typical TQM-related changes, which put a strong emphasis on customer orientation, process orientation and continuous improvement, are being implemented in an increasing number of public service organizations (Edwards et al., 1998). Most of the studies published so far emphasize the organizational aspects of NPM, like the organizational change processes and organizational outcomes. Although it is widely accepted that changes are more difficult to implement in the public sector (e.g. Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995) and that quality-related changes put high demands on the employees (e.g. Hackman & Wageman, 1995), there are very few empirical studies focussing on employees' reactions to the NPM implementation. The goal of this study is to evaluate employees' reactions (in particular, strain and job satisfaction) related to the introduction of NPM in a public service organization. Potential job and organizational resources to cope with the organizational change are analyzed. The study is designed and realized as a single-case longitudinal design.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In most of the Western countries there is a growing need to change the goals and the organizational structure of public service organizations. The organizations have to become more flexible and innovative with a stronger emphasis on their customers' expectations (e.g., Drucker, 1988). As a result, many public service organizations experience significant organizational changes. NPM includes a strong customer orientation, but other characteristics are also similar to TQM-related changes (Dankowski & Precht, 1995). For instance, Haldemann (1997) describes the use of management techniques (e.g., task decentralization and delegation of competencies), quality and process control methods, and the introduction of market elements, like competition and contest, as elements characterizing New Public Management.

Compared to private organizations, public service organizations are not primarily driven by the market or by consumer preferences, but also by a variety of constituent groups. The "TQM-language" of "customers" and "profitability" does not easily transfer to public service organizations which have a long history of centralized authority and bureaucratic procedures. This cultural legacy is one of

distinct 'lack of staff empowerment' (Moon & Swaffin-Smith, 1998), which could make the process of establishing TQM very difficult (Bendell, Boultner, & Kelly, 1994). Public organizations are subject to a great range of rules, regulations, and procedures. Also, the political nature of the public arena influences organizational processes in public organizations. Typical barriers to TQM include strong stakeholder influences (e.g., Unions) and an organizational culture resistant to organizational changes (Norgaard Madsen, 1995). Compared to the private sector, changes in the public sector are therefore more difficult to implement (Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995).

Regarding the potential effects of New Public Management initiatives on employees, models and experiences from TQM can be used as general guidelines. Connor (1997) notes that "...despite Demings's call to the contrary, TQM is remarkable silent on the people aspect of quality. [...] TQM enthusiasts really just do not care about the people who do the work – they care about customers, they care about process improvement, they care about cycle time, they care about performance, but people are only a means to an end." Similarly, Moon & Swaffin-Smith (1998) state that "customers, processes and employees are the three legs of the TQM stool, but the employees leg is the one most weakly addressed."

According to Edwards, Collinson & Rees (1998), three different approaches to potential employee responses in the context of TQM implementations can be distinguished. A common feature of these approaches is that they are mainly theoretically based, with only few empirical tests.

The first approach, mainly in line with the theoretical assumptions of the 'TQM-gurus' (having in common that they made only very general comments about employee effects, (Thomas & Tymon Jr., 1997)), emphasizes the potential for positive effects on employees. TQM should lead to an increase in empowerment, more responsibility for each employee, and therefore also to a higher organizational commitment and increases in job satisfaction.

The second approach supposes mainly negative outcomes for the employees. The empowerment could in fact tighten managerial control, with an increase in work intensification as a resulting effect (McArdle, Rowlinson, Hassard, & Forrester, 1995). From that point of view, TQM is not a break from bureaucracy and control, but reinforces them, with negative consequences for the employees (Webb, 1996).

An intermediate position, labeled by Edwards et al. (1998) as 'context-dependent approach', characterizes the third approach. From that point of view, neither general positive

effects (like an increase of empowerment), or general negative effects (e.g., increase in work load) can necessarily be expected from TQM implementations. Instead, the potential effects on the employees depend on the context of the implementation, with organizational aspects (e.g., implementation strategies, training) and job dimensions (job contents and job contexts) as the main predictors (Rosenthal, Hill, & Riccardo, 1997). If one transfers this position to the public sector, with the generally more difficult implementation of quality management initiatives, it could be supposed that contextual factors of the implementations are of even greater importance for employee outcomes.

Most of the empirical studies regarding effects of the implementation of NPM emphasize organizational outcomes and/or are realized in a cross-sectional design. Mani (1995) for example describes the introduction of Total Quality Management in parts of the Internal Revenue System (IRS). The introduction showed no significant improvement in single indicators of productivity; however, the agency was able to achieve significant improvements as to the internal costs during the monitoring period. Mani (1995) also mentions the increased amount of integrative measures and possibilities as having a positive effect on the staff.

Poister and Harris (1997) give a similar description of a TQM implementation at a road administration office. The organizational change brought about an improvement in performance as well as an increase in job satisfaction and work motivation. It is particularly interesting for the present study that according to a path-analytical model these improvement result from training.

Both Rago (1996) and Connor (1997) come to the conclusion that management personnel and staff are especially important in regard to the far-reaching changes of organizational culture in the public sector, which are necessary for the successful implementation of quality measurements. It is only through a comprehensive and adequate implementation of integrative measures, through concepts to increase motivation and adequate training measures that the success of organizational changes in the public sector could be achieved in both cases.

Robertson and Seneviratne (1995) published what is probably the first meta-analysis in this field. The authors tried to integrate all studies on organizational changes in the public and the private sector published until then in regard to various success indicators. They confirm that organizational changes in the public sector are particularly difficult to implement, and will, however, result in higher efficiency once successfully implemented. It is further noticeable that not a single study about public services included in this

meta-analysis recorded data about the quality of working life of the employees!

Edwards et al. (1998) investigated the determinants of employee responses to TQM in six case studies, one of them a public service organization. In terms of attitudes towards quality and perceived change, the most negative results were found in this organization.

In a single case study, Rosenthal et al. (1997) found only minor general changes in employee reactions to the introduction of quality measures in an organization. Training related to the implementation was found to be one of the most important predictors of employee outcomes.

The study presented here is, to our knowledge, the first empirical longitudinal approach to investigate employee' reactions to the implementation of NPM in an organization. The study is based on the context-dependent model as mentioned above, suggesting that employee reactions to the introduction of NPM are determined mainly by the organizational context of the implementation and by job contents and job context variables as well. As employee reactions to the organizational change, strain and job satisfaction are investigated in this study. As an indicator of the organizational success of the implementation, customer satisfaction is evaluated.

Since the change process itself is expected to be a massive stressor imposing strong adaptational demands on employees (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1985), an increase in strain is expected at least as a short-term effect of the change process. Long-term strain effects are expected to depend on the context of the organizational change and its perceived success, as well as the impact of the change on job and organizational characteristics.

Job satisfaction is an important dimension of employees well-being in its own right. In relation to NPM it is also one of the desired indicators of organizational success. A vast amount of the service quality literature confirms the existence of strong links between customer satisfaction (one of the most important success dimensions in TQM-related changes) and job satisfaction, with perceived service quality as the connecting element (e.g. Hallowell, Schlesinger, & Zornitsky, 1996; Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994; Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Furthermore, increases in job satisfaction are expected with increased employee empowerment (e.g. Cotton, 1996). Therefore, if an increase in customer satisfaction is observable, we also expect an increase in job satisfaction, which is further influenced by the context of the organizational change.

Since employee strain and satisfaction are investigated, an emphasis is given on *resources* (Frese & Zapf, 1988) used in the context of the NPM implementation. The resources include dimensions of the organizational change process, job content and job context variables. Resources can be thought of as the elements of the job and/or the organization that help to mediate or moderate the impact of work and organizational changes on the individual. These resources are the positive elements of the job and/or the organization that, according to the Balance Theory (Smith & Carayon-Saintfort, 1989), can help to compensate or balance out the negative elements.

Resources of the organizational change process include passive and active participation measures, the perceived quality of training, and the perceived quality of the project organization of the implementation process.

Employee participation, although hardly ever explicitly mentioned by the TQM pioneers, is highly compatible with TQM concepts (Hackman & Wageman, 1995). It facilitates enhanced control and is one of the most important organizational resources (e.g. Frese, 1991). Employee participation was also found to be a relevant organizational resource in our earlier longitudinal studies (Korunka, Weiss, Karetta, & Huemer, 1995). Following earlier studies, we differentiate 'active' participation, i.e., the inclusion in decisions regarding the implementation, from 'passive' participation, i.e., receiving information about the change process.

Training is also to be regarded as an important resource of organizational change (e.g. Kolb, 1984) and plays a prominent part in the context of TQM implementations (Hackman & Wageman, 1995).

The perceived quality of the project organization was found in our earlier studies to be a further resource of organizational change (Korunka, Weiss, & Karetta, 1993). Perceiving the organizational change as well organized increases the trust employees place in the change process and therefore the change itself.

Regarding job content dimensions, task identity and job control are widely accepted as important resources. Task identity is one of the core dimensions in the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and a widely accepted dimension in the German tradition of work psychology (e.g. Hacker, 1997). Job control was found in a number of studies as a particularly important job content resource (e.g. Carayon, Jarvenpää, & Hajnal, 1993). Finally, regarding job context resources, role clarity and social support at work are included in the research model. Both dimensions are well-known potential stressors and/or resources of the

job context (e.g. Cooper & Marshall, 1976). Figure 1 shows the research model as investigated in this study.

We expect that potential change in employees' strain and job satisfaction be widely determined by the organizational context, job content, and context factors of the NPM implementation investigated.

2 METHOD

2.1 THE RESEARCH CASE

The organization investigated is a municipal service unit of a city in Austria. The unit is responsible for the area's public housing system. Originating from a 'typical' hierarchical public organization with detached and bureaucratic contacts to their customers, the organization is on its way to quality management. Changes include a comprehensive organizational restructuring process, the development of a new and consequently customer-centered orientation, autonomous budget responsibility, team leadership, an incentive system and a general quality orientation. Within three years, nine 'customer service centers', each with autonomous responsibility for a specific geographical area,

will be opened. This results in nine project parts to be carried out in rapid succession.

At project take-off the organization in its initial state can be described by the following characteristics:

- The organizational structure is strictly hierarchical, thus reflecting the general nature of public administrative authorities in Austria.
- Several contacts are in charge of tenant care. There are customer representatives dealing with the problems of tenants in the public housing estates on site. They are supported by a large back office rendering both technical and administrative services. At the point of departure the relationship between centralized and decentralized administration conveys an impression of slightly inefficient and sometimes ineffective problem-handling and problem-solving;
- There are no clear-cut divisions of competencies in decision-making, and awkward problem-solving processes result from the separation of the administrative and technical units;
- The municipal property management unit is experiencing the growing general pressure on the public

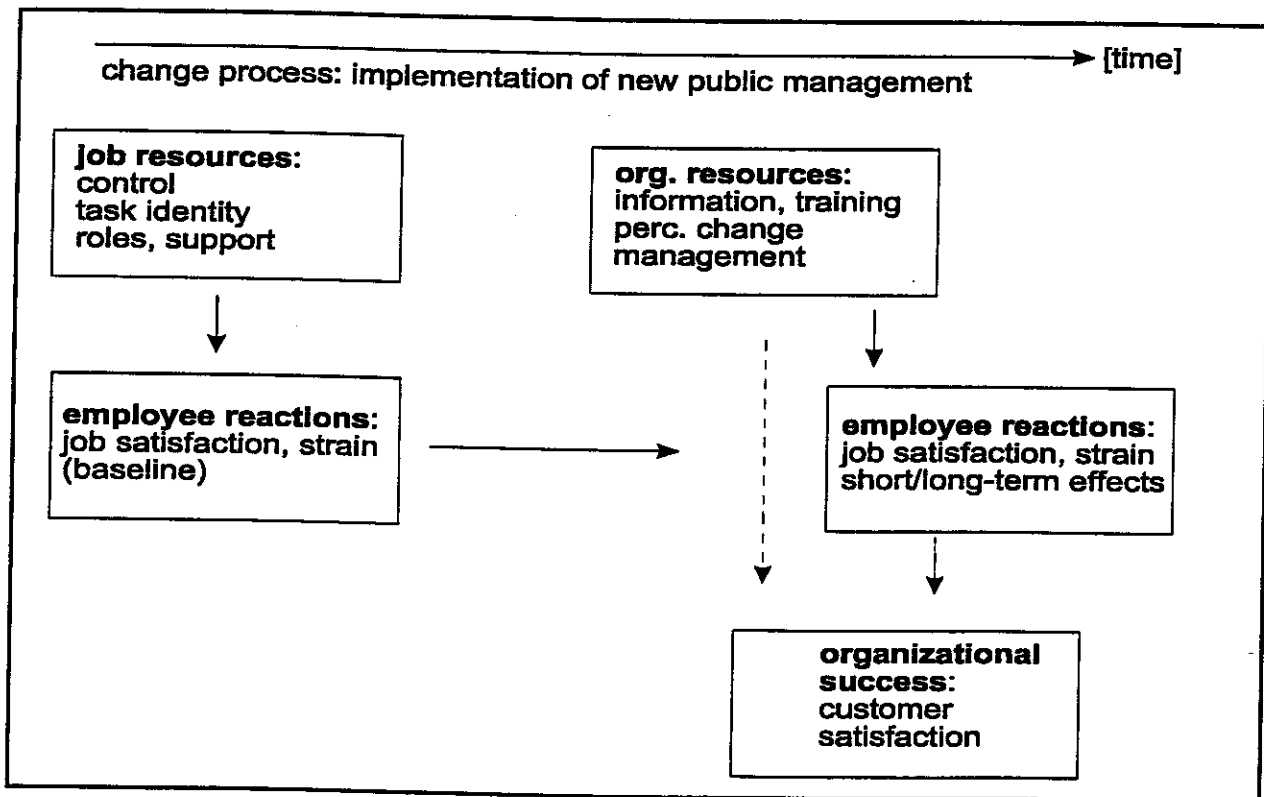


Figure 1: Research model for the longitudinal study (context-dependent approach)

sector: greater market orientation (reflection of true costs, a service-centered approach, citizen-oriented attitudes) is called for;

- Dissatisfaction among tenants of public housing estates is increasing visibly as citizens who benefit from a variety of services rendered by profit-oriented enterprises demand similar performance on the part of the public sector;
- Moreover, political intervention on the community level is rising because politicians are interested in improving the poor image of the public sector in public opinion.

After an exhaustive analysis and diagnosis of the basic situation, elected decision-makers and project managers formulated clear expectations which the change management process was to live up to. The primary goals linked with the new structure in the municipal property management unit can be summarized as follows:

- A more customer-centered approach in the administration; to monitor the quality of service perceived by tenants, appropriate indicators were to be determined by means of customer-satisfaction research.
- An acceleration of processes; expedient, competent and adequate solutions were to be provided when handling requests of tenants or applicants for apartments under the public housing program.
- An improvement of internal cooperation in the customer service center, especially between the management, administration, technical support and customer care units, with continuous further improvement measures.
- More efficient deployment of human resources.
- Formerly decentralized services are brought together in a joint location from which all activities are coordinated. The customer service center is at the same time designed to serve as a contact point for tenants so that the division of spaces and furniture were planned in such a way as to meet the requirements of customer access.
- An additional change for employees was the introduction of a new information technology system. Therefore, comprehensive software training was necessary for most of the staff, especially in the service unit, where the work had been carried out without the assistance of a computer in the past.

All things considered, it can be stated that the restructuring of organizational build-up and work-flows as exemplified in the municipal property management unit is a massive intervention in existing organizational structures.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was realized as a single case study in a longitudinal research design. Measurements were taken at three points in time:

baseline (t0): At least 1 month before the onset of the organizational change; At this stage employees were only informed, but widely unaffected in their daily work by the planned organizational changes.

First change measurement (t1): Data were collected about two months after the opening of the new customer service centers; This measurement reflects therefore short- to medium-term effects of the organizational change.

Second change measurement (t2): For this measurement data collection occurred about one year after the organizational change. Therefore the measurement reflects long-term effects of the organizational change.

At each of the three measurements, employees were asked to fill out questionnaires at their working places. To guarantee confidentiality, a code number was used to link the three measurements of each employee together.

In addition to the employee measurements, 'objective' characteristics of the change management were evaluated by observations and interviews based on our experience in earlier studies (e.g. Korunka, Zauchner, & Weiss, 1997b). Interview partners were the managers responsible for the change project and employee representatives.

Customer satisfaction measurements were carried out at about the same time as the second change measurement in each customer service center.

2.3 SAMPLE

The research sample for this study consists of all 224 employees from the first four customer service centers, which were opened over an 18 months period. Each center is responsible for public housing matters of a defined area and consists of 50-60 employees. While study participation was strictly voluntary, only seven employees refused to participate in the study. Therefore, the sample at the onset of the study (t0) consisted of 217 employees. The sample was reduced to 206 employees at measurement t1 and 183 employees at measurement t2. Reasons for the sample reduction were internal transfers and retirements. A total of 185 complete data sets at t1 and 161 complete data sets at t2 were available for statistical analysis.

Based on the interviews, observations, and written information about the organizational structure, the following four job categories are clearly distinguishable in the organization:

Management functions (n=30): These employees carry out administrative tasks within the office. Leadership responsibilities and a certain amount of decision authority are part of the job profiles. With regard to the organizational change these employees have a high level of expectation because they were selected for future leadership functions and therefore expect an enhancement of their status.

Administration (n=64): 'Typical' clerical jobs on middle levels of qualification are performed by these employees. Included are administrative tasks, correspondence, accountancy and customer contacts.

Technicians (n=68): These employees perform technical tasks, mostly outside of the office. Qualification levels are similar to the employees with administrative tasks.

Customer representatives (n=44): Compared to the previous groups, these employees have the lowest levels of qualifications. Job duties include on-site customer contacts and some administrative work. A strong effect of the organizational change on this group of employees has to be expected: Apart from stronger integration in the organizational processes and thus more external control over their work, considerable changes in job demands (e.g., first-time computer use, new forms of collaboration) are expected. For customer satisfaction measurements we collected data from all customers who visited the service unit within a period of two weeks time (180-200 customers in each customer service center).

2.4 INSTRUMENTS

Strain and job satisfaction were measured with instruments already used and proven to be useful in our earlier studies (Korunka et al., 1993; Korunka et al., 1995):

Perceived strain is measured with a German-language questionnaire (Weyer, Hodapp, & Neuhäuser, 1980, 1982; subscales, "subjective stress", "relaxation deficits") and an emotional state questionnaire, developed in our earlier studies (subscales: emotional strain, tiredness). The job satisfaction measurement is based on an instrument developed by Neuberger (1976). For the following analysis, the job satisfaction dimensions "satisfaction with job contents", "satisfaction with working conditions" and "satisfaction with the organization" are included.

Perceived job resources (content: 'task identity' and 'job control'; context: 'role clarity' and 'social support at work' were measured using the German-language translation of a questionnaire developed by Sainfort et al. (submitted) and employed in similar studies in the United States (e.g. Carayon, Schmitz, & Newman, 1998)).

Perceived organizational resources were measured with an instrument developed for this study. The instrument is based on an interview guideline developed in one of our earlier studies (Korunka, Weiss, & Zauchner, 1997a) and consists of the dimensions 'active participation in the organizational change', 'passive participation in the organizational change (information)', 'perceived quality of training', and 'perceived quality orientation of the organization' (see table 1).

All the measurement scales had adequate reliability scores, ranging from .73 for the scale of social support to .92 for the scale of tiredness (see table 1).

Customer satisfaction was measured by a multidimensional approach developed by Scharitzer (1994). The questionnaire includes items covering the over-all ratings of customer satisfaction and perceived service quality, and single items covering different service quality dimensions as experienced by the customers in concrete service encounters.

3 RESULTS

To evaluate general effects of the organizational change, MANOVAs were performed (Independent factor: job categories; repeated measurement: time). Because job satisfaction, strain, and customer satisfaction are independent measures, separate MANOVAs were calculated. These analyses were conducted with the complete data sets available at the second change measurement.

To evaluate the effects of organizational and job resources on the changes of job satisfaction and employee's strain by the organizational change, structural equation modeling (SEM) was chosen as an appropriate tool for statistical analysis. This approach allows a comprehensive test of the model as shown in figure 1. All computations were performed using LISREL 8.14 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993b), with covariance matrices as input and using maximum likelihood estimations. Parametric assumptions were mostly fulfilled. Because longitudinal data are used for these analyses, a determination of 'true' causal relationships is possible (temporal asymmetry). To evaluate effects of job/organizational resources for the potential maximum of employee reactions, SEM analyses were performed with the data available at measurement t1. This has a further advantage of a larger data base and a smaller number of relations analyzed, thereby improving the degrees of freedom.

3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND JOB CATEGORIES

The professional quality of project organization of the organizational change has to be categorized as relatively

scale/ dimension	number of items	Measured at	Alpha	Mean	S.D.	Source
JOB STRAIN						
perceived job stress	16	t0/t1/t2	.78	47.23 ^a	25.30	Weyer et al., 1980
relaxation deficits	10	t0/t1/t2	.82	25.80 ^a	23.32	Weyer et al., 1980
emotional strain	8	t0/t1/t2	.91	37.71 ^a	16.47	Korunka & Wolf, 1993
tiredness	8	t0/t1/t2	.92	30.41 ^a	15.93	Korunka & Wolf, 1993
JOB SATISFACTION						
job contents	1	t0/t1/t2	-	77.00 ^a	20.86	Neuberger, 1976
working conditions	1	t0/t1/t2	-	56.71 ^a	26.94	Neuberger, 1976
organization	1	t0/t1/t2	-	56.32 ^a	23.53	Neuberger, 1976
RESSOURCES: JOB						
role clarity	4	t0/t2	.80	74.04	15.35	Sainfort, 1997
job control	14	t0/t2	.82	53.42	13.50	Sainfort, 1997
identification	4	t0/t2	.88	71.43	19.00	Sainfort, 1997
social support	4	t0/t2	.73	74.67	16.59	Sainfort, 1997
RESSOURCES: ORGANIZATION						
active participation	1	t1	-	17.84	18.34	development
passive participation (information)	1	t1	-	68.49	27.81	development
perceived quality of change management	1	t1	-	59.72	15.49	development
perceived quality of training	5	t1	.83	64.94	17.31	development
perceived quality orientation of the org.	3	t1	.82	67.83	15.50	Sainfort, 1997

Remarks:

a...Means and Standard Deviations at t0

Table 1: Scales and dimensions used for statistical analyses

low. Beside simple phase schedules and rough time outlines, no appropriate project tools (e.g., responsibility matrices, definition of project milestones) are used. In addition, project steering measures were hardly used.

Efforts were made to inform the employees about the organizational change (e.g., written information was given in a booklet published regularly, i.e. every 2 months), but the employees had almost no opportunities to actively participate in the change process. The elements and the time schedule of the change process (e.g., new work organization, training contents and training dates) were almost completely designed by the project managers in charge.

Training programs during the first phase of the change process consisted of a three-day team development training, followed by a two- to three-day software training. The team development training consisted of 'typical' elements of a quality-related training, e.g., an active-learning process with a strong emphasis on teamwork and on customer values.

Figure 2 shows the evaluation of job resources (t0) and organizational resources (t1) of the employees in the four job categories. A significant interaction was found between job categories and the evaluation of job/organizational resources (MANOVA; interaction job categories x job/organizational resources: $F=1.73$, $p=.021$).

Data show similar patterns of resources experienced by the employees in the four job categories. The most positive evaluations were in the job dimensions, except job control and to a lesser extent role clarity, compared to the evaluation of organizational resources. As expected from the interview and observation data, active participation measures were scarcely perceived by the employees.

In most of the indicators, the management perceived higher resources, compared to the administration and service representatives groups. Significant differences between the four groups were only found in the evaluations of job resources.

A comparison of the evaluations of job resources at t0 and t2 showed a statistical trend towards a decrease over time, ($F=2.34$, $p=.06$). Post-hoc analyses (linear contrasts) showed significant decreases in all indicators in the group of service representatives and also in 'task identity' in the group of administrative workers, whereas both management and technicians showed widely unaffected job resources over time.

3.2 OUTCOMES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: EMPLOYEES

The correlations across job categories between job strain indicators and job satisfaction indicators are in a range of -.06 and -.39, confirming therefore to a great extent an independence between these two groups of indicators. Figure 3 shows the results of the strain measurements in the four job categories.

The MANOVA indicated no effect of job category ($F=1.02$, $p=.38$), significant effects of time ($F=4.20$, $p=.015$) and strain

measurement ($F=66.6$, $p=.000$), and a significant interaction between job category and time ($F=3.02$, $p=.007$), only.

Post-hoc-analyses (Spjotvoll-Stoline tests) revealed a significant increase in strain over time between t0/t1 and t0/t2. Linear contrasts showed that this increase is based on significant increases in the job category of service representatives in all strain indicators between t0/t1, and also in perceived stress, emotional strain and tiredness between t0/t2; and an increase in tiredness for the administration job category between t0/t1 and t0/t2.

As expected, the organizational change was accompanied by an increase in job strain. Since there is no return to the baseline (pre-change) values observable at t2, this increase may not be just an effect of the organizational change itself, but also an effect of permanent changes in job and organizational characteristics.

Figure 4 outlines the changes in the three job satisfaction indicators over the observed time period.

The MANOVA indicates a statistical trend for differences between job categories ($F=2.64$, $p=.051$), a significant effect of time ($F=5.06$, $p=.006$), a significant effect of job satisfaction measurement ($F=80.41$, $p=.000$), and significant interactions between job category and time ($F=3.17$, $p=.004$), between time and job satisfaction measurement ($F=13.32$, $p=.000$), and between job category, time, and job satisfaction measurement ($F=2.14$, $p=.012$).

The post-hoc analyses (Spjotvoll-Stoline tests) confirm a general increase in job satisfaction from t0 to t1, a significant difference between the job categories 'management'

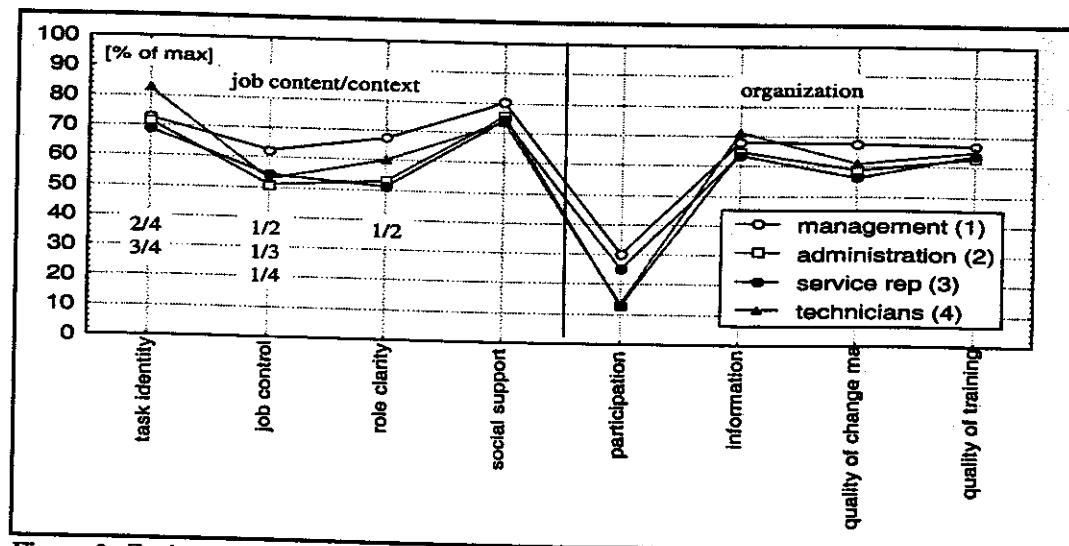


Figure 2: Evaluation of job resources (t0) and organizational resources (t1) by the employees in the four job categories. Numbers indicate significant differences in post-hoc comparisons (Spjotvoll-Stoline-tests, $p<.05$). All scales are transformed to a range 0-100.

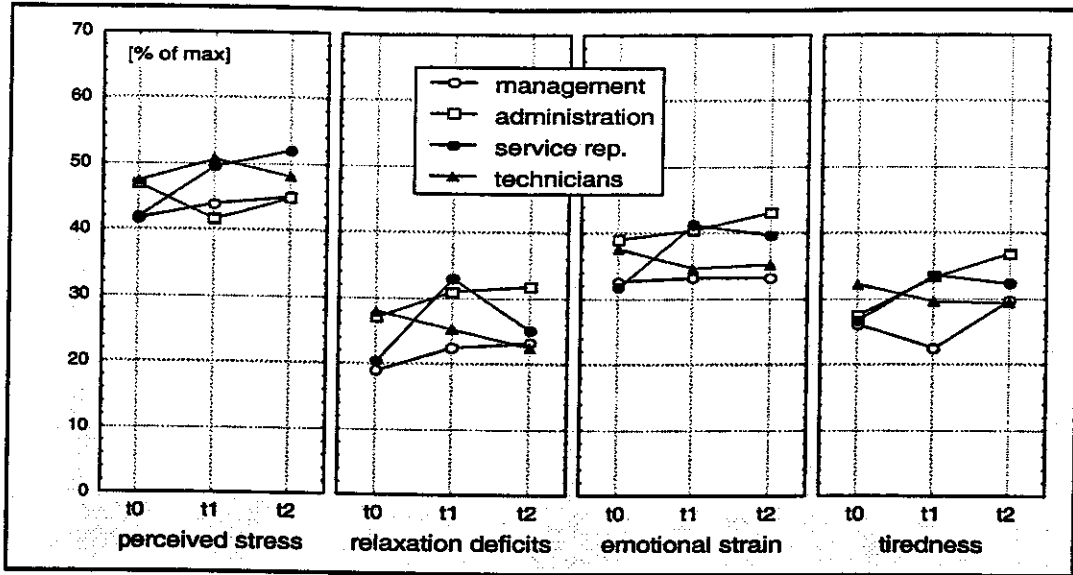


Figure 3: Changes in the job strain indicators, separated for the four job categories. All scales are transformed to a range 0-10

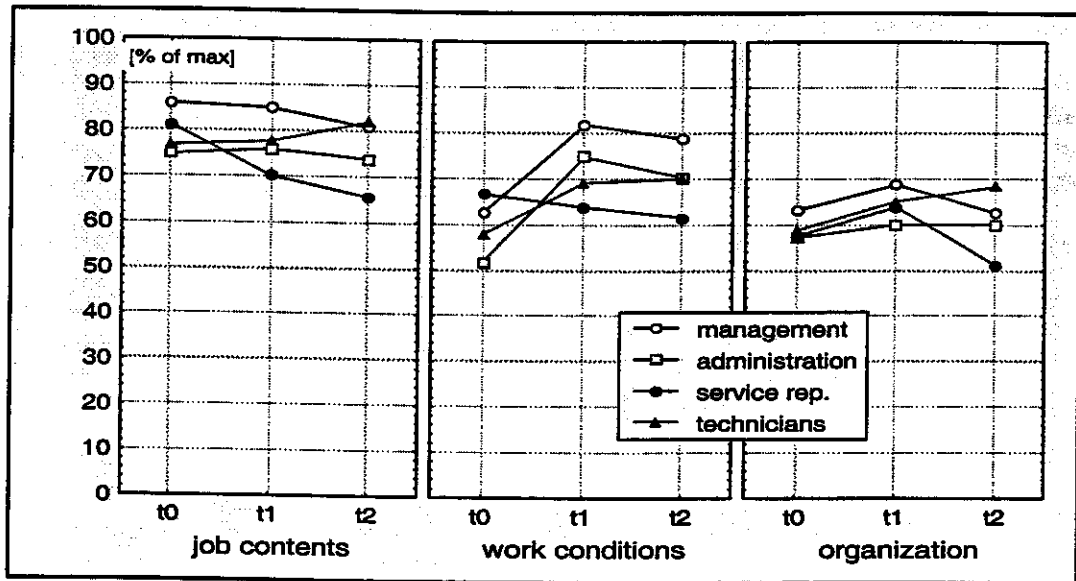


Figure 4: Changes in the job satisfaction indicators, separated for the four job categories. All scales are transformed to a range 0-100.

and 'service representatives' (lower values in the group of service representatives), and significant differences between the job satisfaction indicators (highest job satisfaction with the job contents, lowest job satisfaction with the organization).

Linear contrast analyses revealed an increase in satisfaction with working conditions in all job categories except the service representatives between t0/t1 and t0/t2, an increase in satisfaction with the organization in the group of

technicians between t0/t1 and t0/t2, a decrease in satisfaction with job contents in the group of service representatives between t0/t1 and t0/t2, and a decrease in satisfaction with the organization for this group as well between t1/t2.

Since the organizational change led to a noticeable increase in customer satisfaction, a general increase in job satisfaction was expected.

However, in the job category of service representatives the organizational success was not accompanied by the expected increase in job satisfaction. Actually, significant decreases were observed in this group of employees in the job satisfaction indicators.

3.3 JOB AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEES' STRAIN AND SATISFACTION

To evaluate the effects of job and organizational resources for changes in employee's strain and satisfaction, the research model (fig. 1) was tested using structural equation modeling, separately for strain and for job satisfaction. Since the strongest effects in employee outcomes were observed in both groups of dependent variables at t1 (with no or little changes between t1 and t2), the models were calculated for the t0/t1 data. Because of the low level of active participation, this variable was excluded from the analyses.

Model 1 (Job strain): Figure 5 shows a graphic representation of this model with the completely standardized parameter estimates (all *t*-values are significant at $p < .05$).

To optimize model fit, some theoretically meaningful residual correlations were freed (positive correlation of the residuals of the two job stress scales and the two psychological state-scales and furthermore, a positive correlation of the residuals of the four strain indicators over time, which is a typical pattern for repeated-measures models (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993a)). The model provides a reasonable fit to the data:

$\text{Chi}^2(78, n=185)=94.38$ ($p=.10$);
GFI=0.94, NFI=0.91, CFI=0.98, SRMR=0.05.

Therefore, for job strain, the proposed contextual model of NPM-changes could be confirmed: Job strain of employees was affected by their job resources, with role clarity and job control as the most important single dimensions. Job strain related to the organizational change was affected by the 'baseline' of job strain (before the organizational change), and organizational resources of the organizational change process, with passive participation (information) as the most important single resource.

Model 2 (job satisfaction): Figure 6 shows a graphic representation of the job satisfaction model (all *t*-values were significant except the path between the two latent job satisfaction dimensions). Again, to optimize model fit, some meaningful residual correlations were freed (a positive correlation between job satisfaction with the job content and the organization, positive correlation of the residuals of the three job satisfaction indicators over time).

This model shows a lesser but still satisfying model fit:

$\text{Chi}^2(56, n=185)=59.94$ ($p=.33$); GFI=0.95, NFI=0.91, CFI=0.99, SRMR=0.045.

Since the *t*-value between job satisfaction at t0 and job satisfaction at t1 is not significant, the proposed model could only be partially confirmed: Job satisfaction before the organizational change was influenced by job resources, again with role clarity and job control as the most important single dimensions. Although, job satisfaction after the opening of the customer service centers seemed to be mainly affected by organizational resources, again with passive participation as the most important single dimension.

3.4 THE SUCCESS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

To evaluate the success of the change management process from the customers point of view, we computed satisfaction ratings for each customer service center. In addition, an importance-performance analysis was done to give management feedback about priorities for future steps to improve quality in the customer service centers.

Results from these analyses proved the change management process to be a success at the customers side. Customers of the service centers gave highly positive ratings for the service provided by the employees. Ratings on the overall quality questions and indicators indicated a significant increase in loyalty to the municipal service provider. A further prove for the successful implementation of a more customer focused service strategy was that most of the customers perceived positive effects of the organizational change with regard to their specific service needs.

4 DISCUSSION

As expected, the introduction of new public management was accompanied by an increase in employee strain. Since this increase was observable also at the second change measurement, it seemed not only to be an effect of the adaptational processes required by the organizational change, but also a longer-lasting effect of the introduction on NPM in this organization. An increase was also observable at least partly in job satisfaction, confirming the expected relation between customer satisfaction and job satisfaction. The structural equation models confirmed a 'context-dependent' view of NPM with regard to employee outcomes (Edwards et al., 1998): both changes in strain and job satisfaction seemed to be dependent on contextual factors of the organizational change.

The customer satisfaction data indicated a clear success of the organizational redesign. Therefore, it can be concluded that the municipal service unit under scrutiny is on

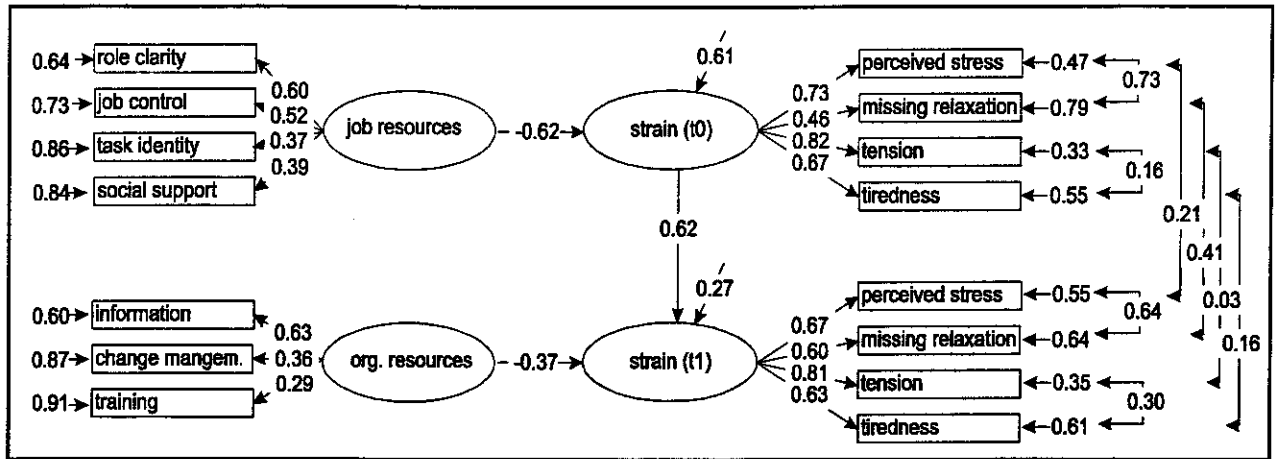


Figure 5: Job strain model (SEM). Structural and measurement models with their standardized parameter

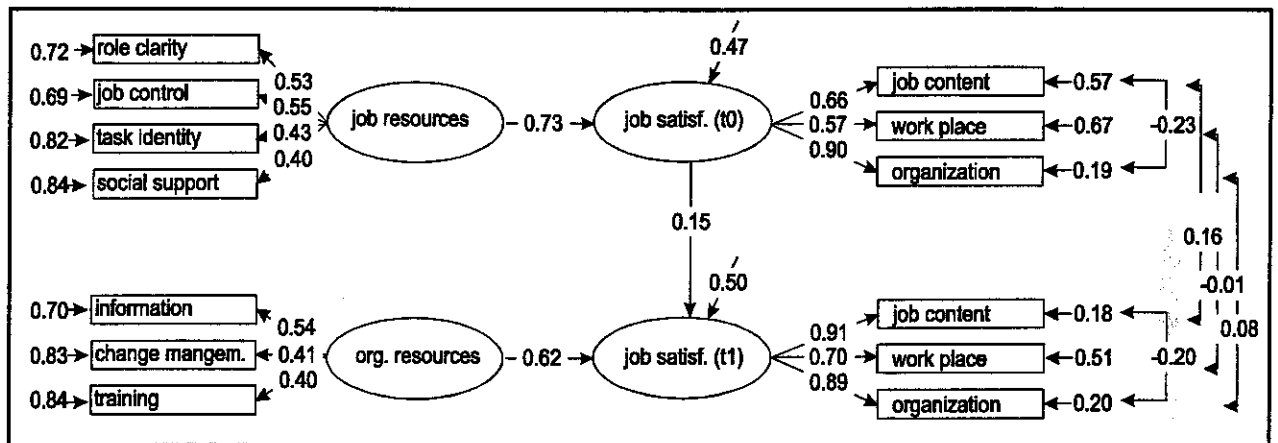


Figure 6: Job satisfaction model (SEM). Structural and measurement models with their standardized parameter estimates

its right way to a more customer oriented service organization.

Before discussing the results in more detail some methodological remarks need to be made. First of all, since a single-case longitudinal approach was used in this study, one has to bear in mind the advantages and disadvantages of such a research strategy. The four customer service centers were opened within an 18 months period, with more than a year observation time in each of the four centers. As a consequence a large number of contacts with the research site were necessary to collect the longitudinal data with numerous interviews, informal talks and observations on a regular basis as a side-effect. We think that this approach allows a more in-depth understanding of the observations. However, at the same time, one has to bear in mind the potential threats to internal validity from this research strategy. Particularly, one has to be very careful to generalize results based on a single-case study. The fact that study participation was nearly 100% and the variety of measurements and observations allows for a comprehensive de-

scription of the organizational change and its outcomes for the particular organization, with strong restrictions in generalizing the results. On the other hand, the job contents of the employees in the organization represent a range of 'typical' job profiles in a public service organization. The organizational change itself could be described as a 'typical' and comprehensive case of organizational redesign in a public organization. Furthermore, we tried to take other potential threats to internal validity into account by the selection of instruments appropriate for longitudinal measurements, the selection of the measurements intervals, and the careful control of external influences. Therefore, at least some cautious generalizations of the results should be possible.

If one compares the previous status-quo of the organization with the far-reaching goals of the organizational redesign, from an 'objective' point of view the organizational change has to be described as a massive organizational intervention. Therefore, a more well-managed change management should have been desirable. However, compared

to private services, public service organizations can be described by an organizational culture characterized by a great range of rules, regulations and fixed procedures (Rainey, 1983), rigid bureaucratic structures that can inhibit organizational change (Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995), and generally less organizational changes. One can suspect therefore that the poor professional quality of the organizational redesign is an outcome of the limited experience with organizational change processes in a public service organization. However, with regard to the inflexible organizational structures in public organizations, there is an especially strong need for a highly professional change management.

Active participation, by definition an element of a quality-related change processes, was in fact nonexistent in this organization. This provides further evidence that public service organizations can be typically found at the very beginning of a long process of organizational redesign. From the employees' perspective, active participation is not only an element of NPM to reach organizational goals, but also a strong resource to prevent potential negative outcomes of an organizational change (Korunka et al., 1995). There were at least observable attempts for passive participation, i.e. to inform the employees about the organizational changes. From an 'objective' perspective, these attempts should have been sufficient to inform the employees comprehensively about the planned changes, although the perceived degree of information did not indicate that the employees felt sufficiently informed. Again, this sign of mistrust in top management from the employees' perspective, is a further indicator of an organizational culture often found in public service organizations, therefore making the implementation of such organizational changes difficult.

The significant nature of organizational change is also reflected in the training needs of the employees, which included not only quality-related aspects, but also the acquisition of skills related to a new information technology (IT) system. For some of the employees this was the first use of an IT system.

The members of the four job categories perceived the characteristics of the organizational change in a similar matter. As noted above, both the 'objectively' sufficient information and the 'objectively' weak quality of change management were perceived similarly and both only slightly positive, indicating a general negative perception of the change process (which was also confirmed by numerous informal discussions).

Both management functions and administration are typical job categories found in most public organizations. The job

category of technicians is specific for a public housing agency with a task profile defined by the needs of the maintenance of apartment buildings. The most important category in this organizational change is the group of service representatives, characterized by frequent and intense customer contacts and a comparatively low qualification profile. Compared to the other groups the service representatives showed the most unfavorable perception of job content and job context dimensions with a further decrease as a result of the NPM introduction. The service representatives showed not only the most negative job characteristics, but also the highest increases in job strain and, compared to the other job categories, decreases in job satisfaction due to the NPM introduction. Therefore, the service representatives could be described as the "losers" of the organizational change. If one takes into consideration the fact that the service representatives are responsible for most of the customer contacts in the organization, the negative outcome in terms of employee reactions in this group could also endanger, at least in the long run, the organizational success of the NPM implementation. It has to be noted that with regard to the massive planned changes at the customer interface of the organization it was predictable already *before* the organizational changes that the customer representatives had the most massive changes to expect.

A cautious generalization of this result would lead to the conclusion that those employees with a high number of direct customer contacts in public service organizations are a group whose needs should be especially taken into consideration when planning and realizing a quality-related organizational change.

As expected, an increase in job strain was observable as an effect of the organizational change. This increase seems to result from the implementation as well as from the organizational change itself, and it is accompanied by a partial increase in job satisfaction. Thus, one could speculate that an increase in job strain is the 'price' to pay for the successful introduction of quality management in a public service organization, at least when the change process itself is not realized in a highly professional way.

Since the organizational change led to substantial positive effects on customer satisfaction, the observed increase in job satisfaction was expected. A deeper look on the job satisfaction indicators shows that the increase in job satisfaction is composed of a strong increase in the satisfaction with working conditions, at least a slight increase in satisfaction with the organization, and no changes in the satisfaction with job contents. The latter was expected since the organizational change led to some changes in the job contexts (e.g., more teamwork), but only marginal changes

in the job contents of the employees. Reasons for the comparatively strong increase in satisfaction with the work conditions could be the improved conditions in the new customer service centers, but at least partly also the improvements in customer interactions. Furthermore, the slight increase in satisfaction with the organization could have been triggered by improved customer relations. Since the increase in job satisfaction seemed to be stronger in short-time effects of the organizational change, and at the same time the increase in job strain seemed to be a longer-lasting effect, one could speculate that an extension of the observation period could show a return of job satisfaction to baseline values and therefore in the long run jeopardize the organizational success.

If one summarizes the results discussed so far, a picture of a fragile organizational success pattern emerges, with potential decreases in employee well-being as a threat for a longer-lasting and stable organizational success. A deeper look at the contextual resources of the organizational change could therefore help identify resource patterns which may lead to a longer-lasting organizational success.

At least for employees' strain the contextual resource model could be confirmed. The SEM fit indices suggest a nice fit of the data with the proposed model, with all observed *t*-values significant and all relationships in the expected directions. Therefore, resources in job content and job context and organizational change dimensions could help reduce the increase in job strain induced by the organizational change. It could be again confirmed that job control seems to be an especially important job content dimension (see also Carayon, 1995). Data indicate further that, compared to social support at work, role clarity is the more important job context resource with regard to job strain in the case of NPM changes. It is interesting to note that changes in the management of public organizations put forward the issue of role clarity, instead of social support. The occupational stress literature has consistently identified social support as an important resource. Our study suggests that role clarity can be even more important than social support as a resource that employees can use to deal with organizational changes, such as NPM. NPM challenges the structure of public organizations and the roles of organizational members. In this context, clarifying the roles of the different employees is very important.

As noted above, active participation measures were missing in this case of organizational change. Besides active participation, which is obviously not only an effective organizational resource related to organizational change and should be part of any quality-related organizational change, data confirmed also the important function of passive participation (i.e. information) as an organizational resource. However, in the observed organization it seemed that suf-

ficient information was provided by top management, but not adequately received by the employees. Therefore, it is not only important to provide information, but to guarantee and check that the information is perceived by the employees as initially intended.

Although satisfying fit indices emerged, the contextual resource model regarding job satisfaction could only be partially confirmed, because of the insignificant *t*-value in the path from baseline job satisfaction to job satisfaction at *t*1. This somewhat unexpected result suggests an independence of two consecutive latent job satisfaction dimensions, or, in other words, strong and independent influences of organizational and job resources on job satisfaction at different points in time. Similar to the previous model, the most important resource dimensions were job control, role clarity, and information. Compared to the job strain model, the organizational resources seem to have an even stronger effect on job satisfaction after the organizational change.

All in all data indicate a confirmation of the context dependent approach (Edwards et al., 1998). Quality-related organizational changes in public service organizations do not necessarily lead to only positive employee effects (empowerment) or only negative effects (work intensification). Rather, the directions and magnitudes of the effects seemed to be influenced by both job and organizational contexts of the organizational change. Our data suggest further that the long-term organizational success is highly dependent on employee effects which in turn are influenced by contextual dimensions. The results are concordant with Robertson and Seneviratne (1995) suggestions that it is more difficult to implement changes in public organizations, but organizational performance (i.e., increase in customer satisfaction) can be improved more readily in these organizations.

A cautious generalization and summary of the results of our single-case longitudinal study leads to the following recommendations for the introduction of NPM in public services:

It is important to carefully monitor employees reactions to the organizational change. The employees' reactions are not only important indicators of quality of working life, but they are also indicators of organizational success and can be used early warning signs of potential organizational failures.

It seems that in public service organizations there is a good chance to find an unfortunate combination of low-qualified employees in poorly designed jobs who are mainly in charge of direct interactions with the customers of the or-

ganization. Special attention should be given to these groups of employees. If necessary, in addition to general training programs for all employees, specific training measures could be designed for employees in need of re-skilling.

If contextual dimensions of the organizational change are taken into consideration adequately, a successful implementation of NPM should be accompanied by increases in job satisfaction and only temporary increases in job strain during the earlier phases of the organizational change.

The well-known job contents and job context dimensions are potential predictors of changes in employees reactions related to NPM introductions. In organizational context, besides adequate and high quality training measures and a professional change management, employee participation is a key variable for success of NPM implementations. Employee participation means not only active participation in decision processes, but also adequate, timely and comprehensive information about the planned changes.

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