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THE ROLE OF TOP MANAGEMENT ON LEADING STRATEGIC CHANGE

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Abstract

In today's dynamic work contexts, the adaptation capacity is vital for sustainable organizational life. Being effective and fast in transformation processes is crucial in order to gain competitive advantage. In any case, internal and external factors force organizations to be more flexible and to develop their turnaround capabilities. This paper analyses the role of the strategic management team in managing the change process. To do that, it is important to understand why organizations need to change and elaborate the factors that direct managers to start change efforts. The current study will also examine how organizations change their working processes, the role of senior management in the strategic transformation process, and how they should use a complementary approach when managing organizational change. In today's fast moving global business environment change has to be considered by the organizations when it is necessary. When the internal or external forces push companies to change, strategic management departments should critically analyse the company's situation in the market and drive their rotas to the new rivals through their mission.

Keywords: *Strategic Management, Internal and External Forces, Organizational Change.*

ÜST YÖNETİMİN STRATEJİK DEĞİŞİMİN ÖNÜNDEKİ ROLÜ

Öz

Günümüzün sürekli değişime tabi çalışma ortamlarında örgütlerin adaptasyon kapasiteleri varlıklarını sürdürebilmeleri için hayati önem arz etmektedir. Değişim süreçlerinin etkin ve hızlı bir şekilde yönetilmesi örgütlerin rekabet avantajı yakalamalarında çok etkili olmaktadır. Her hâlükârda örgütsel çevredeki iç ve dış unsurlar örgütleri daha çevik olmaya ve değişebilme kapasitelerini geliştirmeye zorlamaktadır. Bu çalışma stratejik yönetim ekibinin değişim sürecinin

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yönetilmesindeki rolünü irdelemektedir. Bu irdelemeyi gerçekleştirebilmek için örgütlerin neden değişime ihtiyaç duyduklarını ve örgütleri değişime iten içsel ve dışsal faktörleri anlamak gerekmektedir. Mevcut çalışmada ayrıca örgütlerin çalışma süreçlerini nasıl değiştirdiklerini, üst yönetimin stratejik dönüşüm sürecindeki rolünü ve örgütsel değişimi yönetirken tamamlayıcı yaklaşımı nasıl kullanmaları gerektiği incelenecektir. Günümüzün hızla değişen küresel iş ortamında değişim, gerektiğinde kuruluşlar tarafından dikkate alınmalıdır. İç veya dış güçler şirketleri değişime zorladığında, stratejik yönetim departmanları şirketin pazardaki durumunu eleştirel bir şekilde analiz etmeli ve misyonları aracılığıyla rotalarını yeni rakiplere yönlendirmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Stratejik Yönetim, İçsel ve Dışsal Değişim Faktörleri, Örgütsel Değişim.*

Introduction

Considering the fast developing, millennium era, evolution, or rather revolution, of the business environment is beyond the control of individual business entities. No businesses can avoid demanding change programs in the context of a fast-moving environment (Pendlebury, Grouard, and Meston, 1998). A globalized economy, which is driven by a broad and powerful set of forces associated with technological change, social and political issues force firms to make dramatic improvements (Kotter, 1996).

As a system approach, almost all of the organizations are open systems. In other words, they take inputs such as materials and other resources from the environment and transform them into outputs which are received back into the environment by customers and clients (Senior, 1996). Therefore, it is clear that environmental factors are crucial for organizations to survive, and strategic departments have to analyse the environment and adapt the company to sustain, compete and develop. In addition, when dynamics are changing in the market or competitors start to steal customers, companies have to answer and create new strategies to compete for the next level. In such situations, change is very difficult for organizations but also critically important. Although some executives may insist on their way to success and argue that change is not needed, many stories in the past prove otherwise. That is, lots of companies disappear or lose their power as a result of ignoring new environmental developments and critical forces (Burke, 2002). Therefore, it is argued in this work that change is indispensable for many companies due to the driving forces and many are forced to respond to changes in the environment. Besides this paper focuses on strategic management departments and their key role to decide, support and implement transformation instead of resisting change in the organization.

1. Why Organizations Need to Change

Companies face transformation constantly in volatile environments (Thompson, 1997). Some transformation efforts are reactions to environmental changes while others are proactive attempts to be successful in the market.

Before explaining why companies need to change, it is necessary to give the definition of organizational change. According to W. Warner Burke, "organizational change is turning the organization in another direction, to fundamentally modify the "way we do things" to overhaul the structure, the design of the organization for decision making and accountability and to provide organizational members with a whole new vision for the future" (Burke, 2008:11).

Technologies rapidly became copyable, product lives are getting shorter and innovation strategies drive competition (Pendlebury et al, 1998). Therefore, organizations should seek to obtain and maintain the harmony among their environment, workers, culture and assets, to start transformations. When its necessary, the key people, generally top managers, should decide the need for change. There can be several reasons behind such decisions. Low performance of the organization, threats from the other competitors in the same market or efforts to make the company stronger in the market.

As can be understood businesses cannot avoid the need to change because of the reasons mentioned above. However, drivers may either help companies convince themselves to change or they can be forced to undergo it. In other words, these change efforts can be voluntary or involuntary (Pendlebury, et al, 1998). For instance, some companies, generally market leaders, do not want to lose their market share so change could be considered voluntarily while still performing sufficiently. On the other hand, considerable amounts of effort by executives to transform their organizations result in failure. These kinds of efforts to transform are obligatory in nature, so people in these organizations respond the change process involuntary (Burke, 2002).

2. The Driving Forces for Strategic Change

Apart from the monopoly markets, every business may face change and there are some forces which make change inevitable. Change efforts have been a part of business life in the last decades. Since every company has different needs and imperatives, every type of change attempt is unique. Nonetheless, the initiatives can have some common triggers, and these are divided as external and internal triggers (Pendlebury et al, 1998). Such forces push organizational efforts to change in order to regain congruence between the environment and the organization.

2.1. External Forces

These forces arise outside the organizations yet have a significant impact on them. Compared to internal forces, external forces are generally more effective to force entities to change. Some common components are; challenger companies in the market, consumers, technological developments, political, societal and economic trends etc. (Pendlebury et al, 1998). Here, such forces are covered by elaborating Michael Porter's (2008) "five forces approach" and "PEST (political, economical, societal and technological) factors".

2.1.1. Michael Porter's Five Forces

According to Porter there are five forces outside of the organization which can affect the strength of the firm itself, the nature of the market and the product so that the company can be forced to change.

Potential entrants: These are the new companies which are trying to launch their products or services in the market. Their impact significantly moderated by the entry barriers within the environment (i.e. necessity of huge investments, competitional difficulties, human capital scarcity, difficulty in accessing distribution channels). The abundance of the entry barriers aggravates the entrance attempts (Porter, 2008). However, the successful entrants may shake the industry and change the competitional balances. They threaten the firms which are already in the market (Harding & Long, 1998).

Buyers: Buyers are the customers which are interested in companies' products or services (Harding & Long, 1998). Their decisions can affect the companies and their strategies. A substantial number of companies involve their customers' ideas when they are designing a product or developing a new competitive strategy. Therefore, they can build long lasting relationships with their customers. Otherwise, customers move on to the competitors within the environment and threaten companies' profitability. There are several factors that influence the connection between the parties: quantity of the products, level of market information of the buyers, number of attracting competitors within the market, price and quality of the products or services, the impact of brand on customers (Eren, 2010).

Substitutes: These are the alternative (competitive) products or services that are supplied by the competitors (Harding & Long, 1998). In our time many companies focus on innovating new products and services so that they can obtain a competitive advantage in the market. In addition, substitutes produced by the competitor can even convince the loyal customers of the company. This can be a salient threat for the existing organizations and may exacerbate the competition among the rivals. There are several factors that particularly determine the level of threat of the competitor product. First, the price advantage of the substitute refers to having the same price but with an additional value (quality, design, features etc.). Second, conversion cost that means the customers can easily move on to the alternative product without any cost and problems. Third, customer propensity to substitute products or services attract attention and cause more buyer migration (Porter, 1980). As a result, organizations need to be sure about at least having the same innovative speed and performance with the competitors thus market reading capability of the strategists is crucial.

*Suppliers**:*** Suppliers are the firms that supply the company to produce the product or service needed by the customers (Johnson et al, 2008). Suppliers are the essential factors for the company which can increase companies' competitive strengths and productivity. In fact, in today's world not only the organizations but also their supply chains are competing, and suppliers are the crucial members of such chains. Therefore, it's important to manage relationships with suppliers effectively. Nevertheless, suppliers may have some bargaining power on the organizations. Particularly, when it's costly and difficult to find another supplier within the environment. In such cases suppliers may determine the direction of the mutual relationships and may have stringent demands on the dependent firm. Therefore, organizations need to develop strategies to hold the bargaining power in their hands while sustaining fruitful relationships with their suppliers.

Industry Competitors: Competitors compete in the same market and act as rivals to the organization (Harding & Long, 1998). Companies have to observe the other firms in the market and their way of doing things while developing new strategies or making innovations. Otherwise, competitors can seize their market share.

2.1.2. External Environment Analysis (PEST Factors)

The key drivers for change are environmental components which may have a considerable positive or negative effect on strategy. Typical drivers may vary in different industries or sectors. For example, a computer manufacturer may concern with technological developments (Johnson et al, 2008). Therefore, the PEST (political, economic, social, technological) factors which are really critical and they must be addressed when analysing the organization (Thompson and Strickland, 1999; Korkmaz and Messner, 2008).

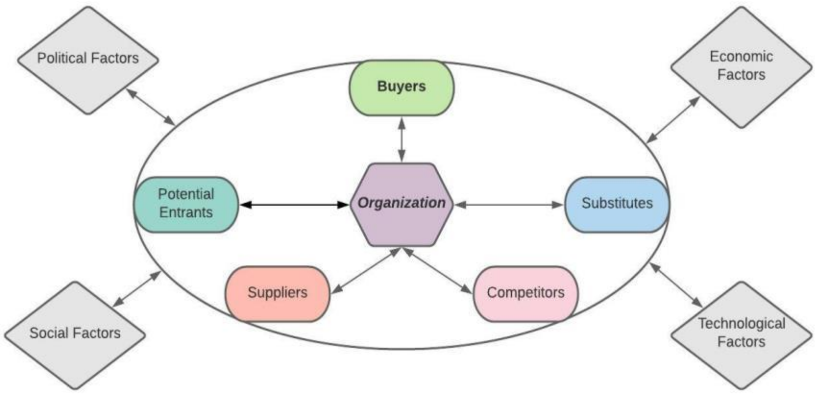
Political Events: A considerable number of the change pressures will stem from outside the organization; nevertheless, companies will be expected to respond. In addition, governments' beliefs and societal needs may affect the companies' strategic rotas (Thompson, 1993). For instance, Renault Co had been planning to invest in Turkey. But the French President Nicholas Sarkozy claimed that carmakers who produce abroad, lose their nationality and he held a meeting with the Renault's Chief Executive Officer Carlos Ghosn and warned him to produce in France (Vandore, 2010)

Economic Factors: It is crucial for organizations to understand new economic developments which are shaped by globalization and triggered by political, sociological and technological factors. Whilst the globalization effect is creating lots of opportunities and new ways to expand for some of the companies, the others are being forced to respond to changing competitive conditions (Johnson et al, 2008). Many companies use joint ventures, mergers, strategic alliances and licensing techniques to find the opportunities to grow internationally (Thompson, 1993). According to Morden, particularly large organizations should determine the economic conditions of the countries and systematically and continuously analyse the economies in which they operate. Further, he argues that such conditions may bring some limitations and advantages and companies should also scan those and take a position accordingly (Morden, 1993). As a result, top managers have to seize the economic trends in the environment and use the results in favour of the organization. The companies need to increase their economic sources in order to survive, compete and grow (Arabacı, 2009).

Social Factors: The social environment of the organization consist of social attitudes, desires, expectations, education, intellectual level and traditions of the society in which they operate. The organizations that are keen to social responsibility, can reflect social norms and values in their actions (Weihrich ve Koontz, 1993). The culture of the healthier organization conform with the social dynamics and values of the society and this may assist the company's effectiveness. Therefore, managers should predict the social dynamics in the society and their effect on the organization in order to adapt and function effectively (Arabacı, 2009).

Technological Factors: Technological developments which are both the cause and the result of globalization affect countries, markets and organizations. Technological transformation pressures may come from outside of the organization. For instance, competitors' new technological developments and their accessibility to fresh technologies may activate technological innovation efforts. On the other hand, internal efforts such as research or innovative ideas can generate technical transformations inside the organizations and have an influence on the market (Thompson, 1993). Technology can become obsolete after a while. Thus, it is crucial for organizations to innovate new ones or effectively adapt new technologies so that they can increase their competitive capability (Alkan, 2004; Arabacı, 2009). In this regard, top management has a big role to decide on investing new technologies and such investments need to end up with positive incomes.

Figure 1. Environmental Factors that force organizations to change



***Source**: Korkmaz & Messner, 2008.*

Organizations need to take strategic actions in order to react to changes in their volatile environment. First, decision makers need to focus on the opportunities in the environment. For instance, new product development efforts or creating innovative strategies help organizations to utilize such opportunities and additional values. Secondly, sometimes the resources needed for effective adaptivity can be outside of the organization. In such cases, skills based on creation of collaborative solutions (alliances, mergers, joint ventures etc.) or building new networks can help organizations to remain compatible within the environment. Thirdly, strategists within the organization may need to read trends and developments within the environment. In this regard, chasing competitors' investments and making strategic decisions based on the direction of the rival can be vital to sustain existence within the environment (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). As a result, being flexible and developing such adaptive strategies for effective change is crucial for organizations in order to survive in today's dynamic environments.

2.2. Internal Forces

Besides the external factors, there are also internal factors which force the organizations to be flexible and to change. These forces generally take root from a new vision of the top managers that requires some sort of evolution (Pendlebury et al, 1998). The need for change may also arise from problems mostly related with decision making or communication within the organization. For instance, serious declines in decision making quality or communication and knowledge dissemination issues among employees can be salient signals for necessity of change within the organization.

Organizations consist of interrelated internal factors such as employees, technology, structure, purpose etc. and if some of them change the other factors also need to change for effectiveness of the whole organization (Helvacı, 2005).

Changes in organizational targets automatically force the other factors to change. Targets mostly change because of the changes in managerial perspective or external factors within the environment. For instance, when new managerial techniques are developed, managers should chase such advancements and adapt themselves when necessary. Secondly, external actors within the market may force organizations to change. For example, organization may target to become more innovative because of the competitive product threats of the new entrants in the market.

Structural change can also lead changes within organizational dynamics. Transformation in structure will automatically affects the communication flow, hierarchical relationships, internal networks, power issues and culture. In other words, structural change may affect the whole organization.

Today, continuous technological advancements push organizations to follow and invest in them in order to gain competitive advantage. When organizations adapt to a new technology, job designs also change. In this regard, change in job designs requires the improvement in skills of the employees, and this causes a rise in the expected working standards. As a result, organizations may need to revisit human resource interventions (Özmen, 1999).

When it comes to change in human resources, it becomes the most important effort as employees are the vital sources of the organization. If organizations aim to adapt themselves to the speed of the dynamic markets, they need to nurture human capital through creating a continuous learning environment so that employees can also adapt themselves to the changing conditions.

Finally, change is inevitable for organizations that have grown by reaching a certain size since their establishment. Otherwise, organizations may not accomplish the expected results. Organizational structure, communication channels, work styles and responsibilities of the employees may also change with the growth of the organization. In other words, when organizations grow, they may need more complex and developed communication and technological systems and such systems may also require transformation in both formal and informal structure of the organization.

The internal factors aforementioned are the main ones that necessitate change efforts within the organizations. Apart from those, acquisitions, change in top managerial positions, adaptation of new functional strategies may also directly or indirectly trigger change.

3.1. The Transformation Process

Companies that are planning to start change, need to be aware that transformation process ought to be planned and evolutionary, and these plans should be implemented carefully. In this process, old behaviours, beliefs and way of doing things are questioned and the chosen ones are changed by the new ones (Thompson, 1993). Below, change process will be elaborated.

3.1.1. Resistance to change

Generally, companies can encounter some resistance when they try to make transformation happen. Although usually it is very tough to prevent resistance to change, companies have to break the barriers with support of senior managers. They should stress the importance of change and communicate with the employees through key leaders in the organization. And it is essential to convince workers to recognize the need for change, the profits and the external threats from not changing (Thompson, 1993).

3.2. The implementation of strategic change

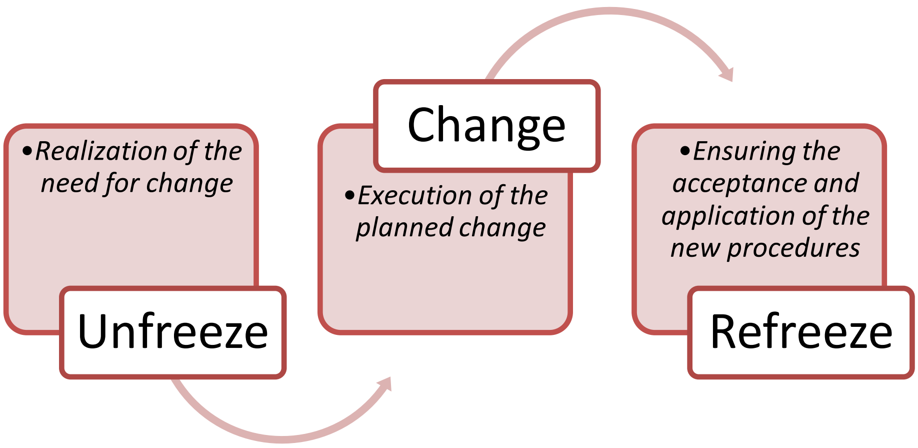
As we mentioned before, the change process must be planned and the implementation process consists of applying these plans to make transformation happen in the company. Lewin (1951) pointed out a change model which is most general and collapses all the change process. According to Lewin change process consist of three phases;

3.2.1. Unfreezing: In this phase, organizations need to be ready to realise the need for change. That is why organizations should prepare the right conditions and provide convincing information with regard to change to improve people's willingness and awareness. Normally this phase needs a trigger or the threat of closure or acquisition (Thompson, 1993; Lynch, 2003).

3.2.2. Change: Occurs when people are ready to change and understand the concept of implementation processes. In this phase, top management needs to call for change coupled with clear discussion of what is needed. Then views gathered and the organization benefit from the ideas to find key solutions. Finally, the organization experiments on the solutions founded (Thompson, 1993; Lynch, 2003).

3.2.3. Refreezing: When the people accept new rules it means refreezing has already started. In this phase the new rules accepted by employees are followed willingly. In addition, new approaches become a part of organizational culture. The organization should reassure the affected people and encourage them by showing that a new solution is working (Thompson, 1993; Lynch, 2003). Throughout the transformation process it is crucial that employees are aware of why the company needs to change. The key activities to make change happen are participation, involvement and commitment.

Figure 2: Lewin's Model of Change



Source: *Lewin,1951*

3.3. The Importance of Culture on Managing Change

"Organisational culture is the name given to the collection of basic assumptions, values, norms and artefacts that are shared by and influence the behaviour of an organization's members" (Burnes, 2009). Culture plays an important role in the life of organizations, especially when the organizations need to change. According to Johnson, the management of strategic change is "essentially cultural and cognitive phenomenon rather than an analytical, rational exercise" (Johnson, 1993:64 cited in Burnes, 2009). Moreover, Cummings and Worley claim that culture can slow down the speed of change, especially when the change is really needed. Therefore, in such cases it is essential to challenge mechanisms that encourage the old or inappropriate behaviours in all areas where resistance probably occurs. In addition, if the executives have some suspicion about the future benefits of transformation effort, it is unlikely to create an atmosphere where the employees are enthusiastic about undertaking change. (Cummings and Worley, 2001 cited in Burnes, 2009).

4. Strategic Management and Change

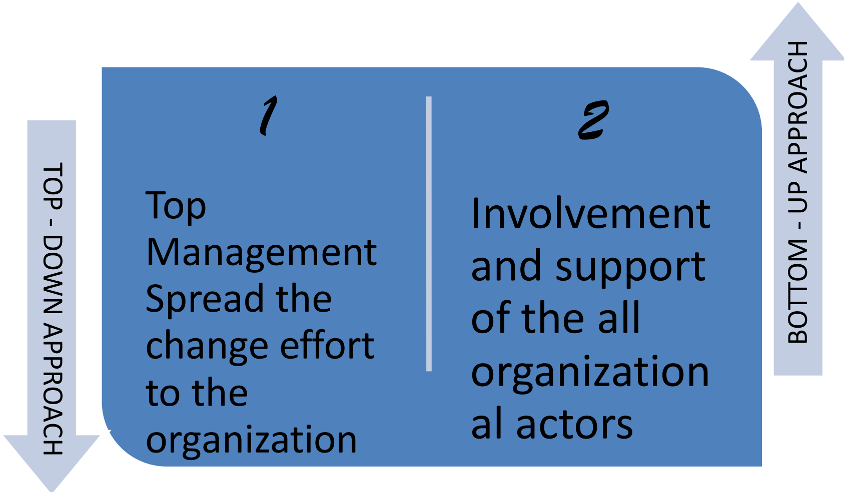
It is believed that the term 'strategy' was first used by the ancient Greeks. In 1980 Bracker claimed that the word strategy comes from the Greek "stratego". It means planning the destruction of enemies through the effective use of resources. Yet, they changed the concept in relation to the successful pursuit of victory in battles. Until the 1900's the term kept the military meaning then it was used in the business world, although most business experts in that time believed that the process of strategy was untraceable. After that, in 1962 Chandler pointed out a new perspective of the strategy in business world by claiming that in organizational life the strategy can be emerged by being aware of the opportunities and need. Chandler also argued that strategy making process involves changing population, income and technology and also employing resources more effectively (cited in Burnes, 2009).

In 1996 strategy guru Michael Porter made the definition of business strategy. According to Porter, "business strategy is the creation of a unique and valuable position involving a different set of activities" (Porter, 1996:8). Strategic Management departments concern themselves with implementing business strategy. From this point of view, strategic management is the process that involves determination of organizational purpose and desired levels of attainment. Through strategic management, organizations determine their way of achieving targets in an appropriate time-scale, implement the determined actions and examine their progress (Thompson, 1993).

According to some researchers' top-down view, strategic management departments of the companies are generally responsible for observing the environmental changes (Daft, 2007) as the top management team has the power and the best position to manage change (Sminia, Nistelrooi 2010; Conger, 2000). On the other hand, the bottom-up approach underlines the importance of organizational involvement as a whole in order to implement change effectively (Beer, 2000; Bennis, 2000). In either case, support and will of the strategic top management is salient in order for successful transformation. However, the generally accepted view is that only top management's effort for change may not be sufficient (Conger, 2000; Coram Burnes, 2001, O'Brien, 2002). As a result, organizations need reinforcement and contribution of both top management and at least the related members.

When it comes to organizational change, researchers stress the problem of using bottom-up and top – down change approaches alternatively through time. They claim that such a transformation strategy may cause confusion and delays. Furthermore, alternating such opposite strategies may harm the process of change and organizations suffer from disadvantages rather than the advantages of both change strategies. Instead, they advise starting with a top-down strategic management method to spread the change effort to the organization as a whole and start a powerful turnaround. Then this method should be followed by a bottom-up change agenda. Important notice from researchers is that starting a change programme other way around may end in a disaster. In other words, starting with a bottom – up approach and building a change programme on it may be destroyed by a top management transformation strategy. In fact they argue that such a strategy may possibly leave organizations with a significant level of attachment, trust and cultural problems (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Beer, 2001). After all, the researchers advise managers to gain a complementary view of change effort using both top-down (first) and bottom-up (second) transformation approaches rather than using such change strategies alternatively or simultaneously (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Beer, 2000). The figure below shows how top strategic management should handle the change process within an organization that is directed for turnaround by internal or external forces.

Figure 3: Complementary Approach of Strategic Change



Source: *Beer and Nohria, 2000; Beer, 2001*

In order to manage strategic transformation with a complementary approach, there are some issues that top leaders need to consider in order for successful change. Firstly, change leaders need to ensure that top – down and bottom-up targets are explicitly confronted by the organization. Secondly, the turnaround effort needs to be led from the top and the members of the organization engage and support the process. Thirdly, managers should approach both sides of the change process with the same understanding and sensitivity. Fourth, in order to manage change effectively, leaders of the transformation need to take account of both informal and formal cultural and structural dynamics of the organization. Finally, the transformation process is dynamic. Thus, strategic management should determine the route of change but at the same time should be open to new updates (Sminia and Van Nistelrooij, 2006; Beer, 2000).

Conclusion

In conclusion, in today's fast Moving global business environment change has to be considered by the organizations when it is necessary. When the internal or external forces push companies to change, strategic management departments should critically analyse the company's situation in the market and drive their rotas to the new rivals through their mission. To do that, strategic management departments convince and motivate all the employees to transform through the key leaders in the organization then they make a clear strategic movement plan including not only new tasks and roles but also new beliefs and perspectives. After doing these, the implementation process can be started voluntarily by all members of the organization and the company will be ready to compete for the next level with the new and accepted changes inside and outside the organization.

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