Leadership, management and teams
A way of being successful.

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Abstract In a world faced with unforeseen developments, organisations need to respond adequately to an unknown future. But how to do this? In practice, the Adaptive Cycle of Resilience (ACoR) proves to offer tools to understand the unforeseen future(s) and to be able to shape it properly.

The ACoR model follows a cyclical development within four quadrants. The infinite cyclical process starts from an assumed 'Equilibrium' state, where relatively small disturbances appear. However, when external influences severely disrupt the equilibrium, like the current Coronavirus, the organisation switches to the 'Challenge' quadrant, where a search process starts for new solutions and appropriate competencies, skills, mindsets and attitudes of the management and teams. This leads to the 'New Combinations' quadrant, where awareness of leadership and governance is crucial. After determining several options, the most suitable solution must be chosen. The transition to the so-called 'Operationalisation' quadrant requires innovation capacity. It is the most challenging phase of the cycle for the management, because the final choices are often made without being sure of their successes.

The encountered problems within this cyclical process can be identified through the ACoR-stages. We distinguish Lock-in, when management does not see the crises or challenge coming; Poverty, when they lack creativity to come up with new solutions; Isolation, when they cannot convince the organisation to initiate the change; Rigidity, when there is resistance to change.

In the article, we examine the cycle, focusing on its nature and origin, the goal to be pursued, the process and the necessary competencies and capacities.

Dealing with challenges stands or falls with the organisation's ability to solve problems, both on short (dealing with the current issues) and on long term (assuring that it will not happen again), so our article shows that the *context* of the problem is just as important as the ability to deal with it. Besides, a relapse into old patterns is an identifiable risk to the organisation's innovation capacity.

Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order? This paper guides the Readers through answering this question.

Keywords: Leadership and Management, Human Resources Management, Change Management, Crisis Management, Adaptive Cycle of Resilience

1. How does your organisation deal with unforeseen challenges?

There is no doubt that our lives are full of unforeseen challenges - such as the Coronavirus in the first part of 2020 -, and organisations need to be able to respond adequately to them, otherwise, the increasing competition does not let us survive (Christensen, 1997; Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015; Taleb, 2010). There is a great deal of uncertainty about how organisations can deal with unknown and unexpected presents and futures. Which route or process should the organisations follow? The Adaptive Cycle of Resilience (ACoR) (Abcouwer & Parson, 2011; Abcouwer, Takács, & Banga, 2020) provides an efficient tool to understand the unforeseen future(s) and to prepare to shape it/them properly. So the main question we focus on is "***does your organisation have its innovation capacity in order?***"

The ACoR model follows a standard route, a cyclical development through which every organisation (from individuals to teams and from companies to collaborative chains) passes within the boundaries of the want-must-can dilemma (Heene, 2002). The change process is infinite, forming a continuum with multiple and repeating phases shown by the cycle. The ongoing process starts from an assumed equilibrium state (bottom left of the cycle: 'Equilibrium'), where relatively small disturbances occur, which are easily solved by previously proven successful interventions (top left quadrant 'Operationalisation'). However, when external influences
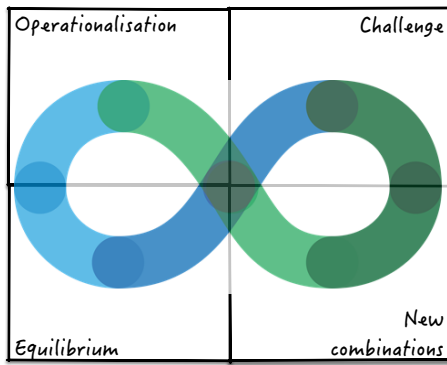
Figure 1 ACoR – Adaptive Cycle of Resilience

severely disrupt the equilibrium, the organisation switches to the so-called 'Challenge' quadrant, where a search process starts for new solutions and appropriate competencies, skills, mind states and attitudes. From here, the organisation moves to the so-called 'New Combinations' quadrant, where leadership and awareness are crucial and critical. Among the determined options, the most suitable solution must be chosen. The transition to the fourth 'Operationalisation' quadrant is the most difficult one, where often the 'final' choice has to be made without being sure of its success. Such a decision many times is based on intuition and gut feeling. In this phase, there is no longer a search for new initiatives, but all energy is put into gaining support. The operationalisation phase is about implementing and scaling up the chosen solution to a new equilibrium condition, which starts the next cycle.

Using this cyclical way of operation, the authors can provide organisations with the possibility for interpreting the developments of the specific phases from different perspectives. Depending on the phases of the adaptive cycle of resilience, there are four key aspects with crucial importance in the change process. Analysing how the organisation deal with unforeseen challenges, these next four questions need to be answered.

1.1 What is the nature and origin of the challenge or crisis?

The transitions between the four quadrants mentioned above are crucial during the whole process. When an organisation confronts with a challenge, there is a need to develop possible solutions, and the right change strategy can be chosen to operationalise it eventually. The cycle follows this route but developing and implementing real solutions require to know the nature and origin of the problem. When people can recognise which quadrant the organisation is at the moment, it can help take the right actions.

The encountered problems in the different stages can distinguish four traps that the organisation may fall in (Gunderson, Allen, & Holling, 2010; Walker & Salt, 2006):

- **Lock-in**, when people do not see the crises coming;
- **Poverty**, when they lack creativity to come up with new solutions;
- **Isolation**, when they cannot convince the organisation to initiate the change;
- **Rigidity**, when there is resistance to change.

These traps can be very harmful to the present and the future of the organisation. So first the organisation must be open and innovative enough to be able to face and admit the challenge itself (Abcouwer & Goense, 2015; Abcouwer, Takács, & Keményffy, 2018; Dervitsiotis, 2011; Norman & Verganti, 2014). Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?

1.2 Based on a challenge, what is the pursued objective for short and long terms?

Each of the current challenges or crises must be solved, which is not just about solving the problem but in many cases, the cause behind the problem as well. Solving the cause of the problem is necessary in the longer term in order to achieve a better future. Of course, this does not release the organisation from the obligation to solve the current problem. Sufficient attention must be paid to both aspects.

When we follow the routes of the adaptive cycle of resilience, there are some typical questions to be answered by various stakeholders of the organisation.

The following questions should be answered both short and long term, so the (unforeseen) challenges would not hit the organisation severely:

ACoR quadrant	Short / mid-term objectives	Long term goals
equilibrium	How to prevent problems to happen today and tomorrow?	How to prevent any problems to happen in the future?
challenge	Which option will help the organisation out of the actual problem/challenge?	Which options to choose to avoid future crises?
new combinations	How to choose the right strategy and actions to deal with the actual challenge?	How to choose the right strategy and actions to deal with the issue?
operationalisation	How to prepare for everyday challenges, which may arrive from anywhere?	How to prepare for any possible disturbances in the future?

So, secondly, the organisation must be prepared and innovative enough to be able to face and plan the management of the interventions. Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?

1.3 What process to follow for managing the challenge "right"?

Using the ACoR model, the organisation could recognise which stage (quadrant) they are in (see I.1) and so what short/mid-term objectives and long-term goals (see I.2) they have in their strategies. The developments of the adaptive cycle of resilience can be recognised and followed at different organisational levels within the same organisation. However, organisations that are part of a network structure also need to be aware and deal with multi-level challenges.

The dynamical moves in the ACoR with the angles identifying the change with the different objectives strived in the quadrants, as well as with the process bringing the organisation from quadrant to quadrant and the human factor with individual objectives in each phase show us the following (Fiksel, 2015; Tsoukas & Shepherd, 2004).

The Equilibrium quadrant is about rationalising. Efficiency and effectiveness form the base for preparing to the challenges and preventing to be hit by a crisis. The main focus of the process in the equilibrium state is on *preventing problems to happen*.

From Equilibrium to Challenge – Release

At a given moment, the complexity can become that high, - as a result of unthought and unexpected (in most of the cases external) developments with a significant impact, - that the organisation is no longer capable of dealing with them. As soon as the organisation becomes aware of the problem, a so-called Gestalt switch occurs, bringing the organisation from confidence to *insecurity*, which cannot be explained by the actual events. Therefore, the point that marks the challenge into being is mainly based on *perception*. In the ACoR model, the transition to the challenge quadrant is a fact. In literature, the term *Release* is used for this transition (Gunderson & Holling, 2001).

Release -> Lock in -> Fear for future

If the organisation is unable to break free from the old-way of operation, a *lock-in* situation is likely to arise. From a human point of view, f*ear from the unknown* is often the base for this trap. This setting is characterised by realising that the traditional way of problem-solving does not work any longer, and the management has to change the good old proven approaches in the operations. An intensive process of searching for an alternative and new way of working must start. Due to high performance in the past, where constant focus is on reaching more results and being more efficient, the system loses the resources for resilience and flexibility. In a lock-in situation, the management is not willing to change anything, and a natural tendency arises to stay what they are and where they are locked in. When the old way of working performs well, losing that certainty should be avoided.

In the **Challenge quadrant**, the organisation is facing a challenge or even a crisis, and there is an urging need for *creativity* to solve the problem. Focus should be on finding or developing the capability to find solutions for disruptive change. The main focus of the process in the challenge state is on thus *Designing new solutions.*

From challenge to new combinations – Reorganisation

If during the challenge the management's basic attitude is uncertainty, the creative powers, which came to fruition within the organisation, will create a situation where the future can be looked at with a nucleus of confidence. It leads to an optimistic and hopeful look towards the future. Because this should enable a far-reaching restructuring of the organisation, in literature, this phase is described with the term *Reorganisation* (Gunderson & Holling, 2001).

Reorganisation -> Poverty -> Lacking creativity

While facing disruptive developments, organisations are eager to prepare for dealing with them in the shortest possible timeframe and finding creative solutions. The process of being open to divergent thinking to broaden the view and initiate new insights and alternative interventions highly depend on the ability to be creative. But what if creativity is lacking? The literature identifies it as the *poverty trap*, which is in many cases caused by poor management for lacking the resources for renewal, making them vulnerable to change.

The New combinations quadrant, after having found a set of potential solutions, is about making and a choice towards operationalisation, often after analysing which combination deals best with the challenge. These actions require *leadership and awareness* of management issues. The main focus of the process in the new combination state is thus on *choosing the appropriate intervention*.

From new combinations to operationalisation – Exploitation

In terms of the perception of the situation, making a definitive choice means that being 'hopeful about the future' is replaced by having 'confidence in the future', believing that the right choice was made. Making this choice is not purely on rational grounds, but intuition and emotions play an important part in the process. Future success can hardly be proved. However, new initiatives are no longer sought, and one strives to promote solidarity within the organisation towards the chosen solution. In literature, the term *Exploitation* is used for this phase (Gunderson & Holling, 2001).

Exploitation -> Isolation -> Lacking courage and persuasiveness

In the new combination phase, among the different alternatives the choice to initiate the development towards a new equilibrium is made. If the organisation cannot be convinced to implement the proposed intervention, the *Isolation trap* might come into practice. This trap is characterised by the situation that a number of options are available, but we also see low connectivity with the organisation to implement one (or some) of them. Low resilience is the logical result, especially when those who developed the new options are lacking courage or are not able to persuade.

The Operationalising quadrant, after having chosen a preferred approach for dealing with the challenge, is about implementation. The chosen solution(s) require cooperation and involvement of different specialisms, and attention on management and optimisation based on leadership choices. The main focus of the process in the operationalisation state is thus on *Preparing* for implementation to deal with the challenges.

From operationalisation to equilibrium – Conservation

As soon as the choices are made, one needs to pay attention to their operationalisation and improvement. Rationalisation of processes, attention to efficiency and effectivity become important. The regaining of bureaucratic structures will be necessary to re-establish routines that result in the organisation ending up a new business-as-usual situation. At that stage, solidarity reaches a peak again, and the qualities and potential of those involved in the change process are optimally utilised. The state of mind of the manager is changed from conviction regarding the choice for the future into confidence in the present. It is important to acknowledge that the business-as-usual situation thus achieved is not the same as the old one. Gunderson and Holling (2001) argue that the organisation's successfulness is determined by the extent to which it can achieve a new, different, business-as-usual situation. In literature, the term *Conservation* is used for this phase (Gunderson & Holling, 2001).
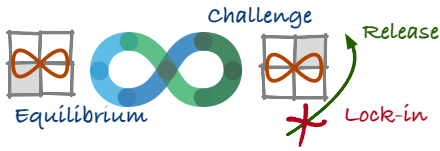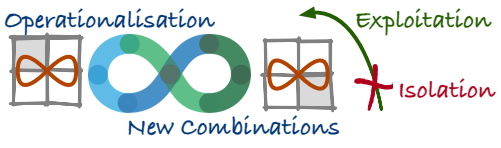
Conservation -> Rigidity -> Resistance against change

Upscaling the new approaches to optimise the effect of the newly developed problem-solving approaches will only be successful on the moment when the organisation is open for the change. However, many are facing an intensive command-and-control culture that brings the different kinds of forces and resistance against change into practice. In addition to the command-and-control culture (Holling, 1996), rigidity traps have other characteristics, including (1) avoidance of learning (from past mistakes), (2) lack of trust among management institutions and stakeholders, and (3) strong feedbacks that maintain core elements of the status quo. Successful Implementation of the newly developed ways of working is far from obvious.

Thirdly, the organisation must be sensitive, operative and innovative enough to be able to realise and manage right the change processes of the challenges. Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?

1.4 What competencies to have to facilitate or supervise change adequately?

Each phase in the approach, - both the quadrant and the transition between, - places different *demands* on the competencies of teams and managers. Competence management and specific learning pathways must ensure that the right competencies are available within the organisation.

ACOR state / phase	Human competences
EQUILIBRIUM -> CHALLENGE	Management - prevent problems to happen - confident in the past and the present - no fear for the future *trapped by lock-in:* - the old way of working performs well - keep away from changing anything - avoid losing the reached certainty
CHALLENGE -> NEW COMBINATIONS	Leadership - developing options to solve the challenge - insecure about the present, curious for the future - innovation capacity and creativity *trapped by poverty:* - lacking creativity - no resources for renewal - vulnerability to change
NEW COMBINATIONS -> OPERATIONALISATION	Leadership - choosing the intervention - hopeful about the future - courage and persuasiveness *trapped by isolation:* - low resilience - lacking courage - no ability to persuade
OPERATIONALISATION -> EQUILIBRIUM	Management - prepare for any challenge - confidence in the present and the future - no resistance against change *trapped by rigidity:* - command-and-control culture - avoidance of learning (from past mistakes) - lack of trust among management institutions and stakeholders - strong feedbacks maintain core elements of the status quo.

Finally, the organisation must be prepared and skilled to be able to be operative and innovative enough to realise and manage the change processes of the challenges right. Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?

In the next paragraph we try to find the answers for the four questions above and analysing if the organisation has the innovation capacity to deal with unforeseen challenges.

2. Innovation capacity in the different ACOR quadrants

After understanding the change process that organisations go through when dealing with challenges, - whether it concerns a quadrant or a transition between the quadrants (1.1), with a pursued objective for short or long-term (1.2), process for managing the challenge (1.3) and the different demands to the competencies of teams and managers (1.4), - we conclude the logics of reasoning and characteristics. It can be used to identify if the requirements for the innovation capacity of the organisation is in order to deal with the foreseeable and the unforeseeable challenges 'right'.

2.1 Equilibrium

Logic of the reasoning	Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?
Objective	How to prevent problem to happen
Focus	Efficiency, effectivity, rationality will work
Challenge	Dealing with future changes
Need for action	Release, because the old way of working no longer suffices
Trap/blockade	Lock-in, based on believe in the capabilities of the past
Origin of trap	Positive that may proof not to be true: 'remember', trust on the past and the current abilities Negative: No recognition of disruptive disturbances

2.2 Challenge

Logic of the reasoning	Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?
Objective	Which options do we have?
Focus	Searching a way out of the challenge
Challenge	Stimulating creativity
Need for action	Reorganisation, to develop new combinations
Trap/blockade	Poverty, based on lacking creativity
Origin of trap	Positive that may proof not to be true: the unrealistic belief that we can deal with every challenge Negative: Lacking creativity in the organisation

2.3 New combination

Logic of the reasoning	Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?
Objective	Which option should we choose?
Focus	Hopeful about the future
Challenge	Being persuasive to choose an intervention
Need for action	Exploitation, to determine which intervention is best
Trap/blockade	Isolation, based on lacking courage and persuasiveness to assure the choice will be made
Origin of trap	Positive that may proof not to be true: Believe in the innovative capabilities and commitment of the organisation Negative: persuasiveness and courage are not able to convince the organisation members; no burning platform

2.4 Operationalisation

Logic of the reasoning	Does your organisation have this innovation capacity in order?
Objective	How to prepare for implementation?
Focus	Confidence in the present and the future based on the developed creative new ideas
Challenge	Focus on rationality, standardisation and upscaling
Need for action	Conservation to implement the plans for the intervention
Trap/blockade	Rigidity, based on resistance to change
Origin of trap	Positive that may proof not to be true: The members of the organisation will cooperate and can be hold accountable Negative: Huge resistance to change.

The above guidelines describe a way of dealing with differences between stakeholders. The focus is on ensuring that one will not be surprised by developments that were not foreseeable. In that sense, it forms a logical last chord to better understand the business as well the world around organisations.

3. Human competencies for managing organisational challenges

We can state that the success of the organisation is in the hands of its human resources: the managers, the leaders and the professional teams (Abcouwer, Takács, & Banga, 2019). We make a distinction between the required competences to deal with the challenges in the different phases of the ACoR.

3.1 Management and leadership in the ACoR

We distinct the management skills and competencies that are more required on the left-hand side of the model and leadership, which is necessary on the tasks that arise on the right side (Agbor, 2008; Scharmer, 2007). Categorising them results in the following table of Lunenburg (2011).

| Category	Management	Leadership
Thinking process	focus on issues looking inward	focus on people looking outward
Goal setting	executing plans improving the present seeing the trees	articulating a vision creating the future seeing the forest
Employee Relations	controlling subordinates directing and coordinating	empowering colleagues trust and developing
Operations	doing the things right managing change serving super-ordinates	doing the right things creating change serving subordinates
Governance	uses authority avoids conflicts acts responsibly	uses influence uses conflict acts decisively
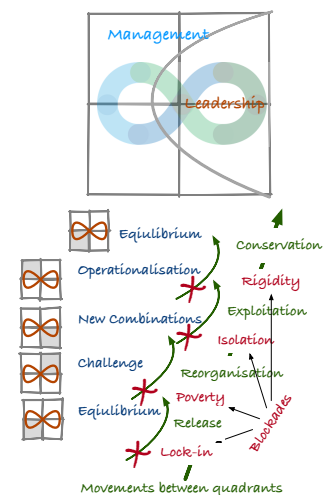
Figure 2 ACoR -> management or leadership

3.2 Teams

Working together, collaborating with partners and business units, as well as within teams, is an absolute must in order to survive in a rapidly changing society. Each team benefits from a mixture of available expertise and specialisms. In a fortunate case, teams can react fast to sudden changes. Teams also have a role in inspiring the members. Discussions, reflections and thinking together can help to find a solution for unforeseen challenges. So, two types of teams are recognised:

3.2.1 Teams based on cooperation

Collaboration and creativity are crucial both in the context of certainty and uncertainty. Successful co-creation strongly depends on the joint and diverse competencies of people, in one word on the 'teams' (Choo, 1998; Keidel, 1995; Ramaswamy, 2010).

3.2.2 Teams based on inspiration

In complex cases, all available knowledge, skills and experiences are needed to come up with solutions. However, group thinking can be a threat, especially when the company culture is closed (Abcouwer et al., 2019; Ciborra, 1996; Goodman & Loh, 2012). A complex change, therefore, benefits on the one hand from a focus on *cooperation* of the team to make use of the collective power. On the other hand, individuals who feel autonomous enough to come up with creative solutions in freedom can also be beneficial. The combined focus on cooperation and autonomy is therefore essential for modern organisations to be successful.

According to Lencioni Lencioni (2002), the team performance highly depends on finding a balance between five factors:

- Team members have to *trust* one another;
- engage in a positive *conflict* mode to stimulate the development of new ideas by exchanging knowledge and information;
- *commit* themselves to decisions and plans of action;
- hold one another *accountable* for delivering those plans;
- and focus on the achievement of collective *results*.

Figure 3 ACoR Leadership, management and teams

Depending on the type of team, balancing between these factors is different. A mismatch on one or more of these factors will lead to *dysfunctional teams*. In practice, teamwork is challenging because it requires levels of discipline and persistence that few teams can master.

To overcome the dysfunction of the *Absence of trust*, leaders must demonstrate vulnerability, so that subordinates will take the same responsibility themselves. Team leaders must create an environment that is built on trust, does not punish but appreciates vulnerability and truth.

It is difficult to protect members from harm and disagreements. Preventing team members from developing coping skills for dealing with conflict is a mistake. Protecting the team serves only to strain the relationships by depriving the participants of an opportunity to develop conflict management skills. It also leaves them hungry for a resolution that never occurs, so to overcome the dysfunction of the *Fear of Conflict* is vital. Leaders demonstrate restraint when their people engage in conflict and allow the solution to occur naturally. It is not failing in their jobs but the ability to personally model appropriate conflict behaviour.

To overcome the dysfunction of the *Lack of Commitment*, the leader must accept that the decision made sometimes turns out to be wrong. The leader cannot do, is place too high a premium on certainty or consensus.

To overcome the dysfunction of *Avoiding accountability* is about creating a culture of accountability on a team, where the leader is willing to serve as the ultimate arbiter of discipline when the team itself fails, which should be a rare occurrence. Shared team responsibility requires that the leader must be part of the team and step in when it is necessary.

The leader must set the tone for a focus on results. To overcome the dysfunction of the *Inattention to Results* requires that the leader does not value other issues, shows an example by being selfless and objective and reserve rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to the achievement of group goals.

Teamwork ultimately comes down to practising a small set of principles over a long period. Success is not a matter of mastering subtle, sophisticated theory, but instead of embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence. Ironically, teams succeed because they are exceedingly human. By acknowledging the imperfections of their humanity, members of functional teams overcome the natural tendencies that make trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and a focus on results elusive.

3.3 Human resources on the adaptive cycle of resilience

The way of thinking outlined makes it clear that the human factor is the most decisive one in a complex change operation. Leaders, managers, teams and employees are the ones, who

- do the analyses on the basis of their knowledge, experiences and feelings;
- design the possible solutions for the identified challenge (clearly define the problem definition);
- can decide what interventions are needed for a successful change response;
- are able to manage the necessary process in the right order of change.

If we look at the AcoR model with the four different quadrants and the transition phases, we need different roles of the manager each time. In order to be successful throughout the entire change process, i.e. to be able to go through the entire quadrant model properly, an excellent manager or leader is needed with teams who cooperate, support and add to the implementation. This is the only way to understand, know and be able to do the whole tour in the ACoR.
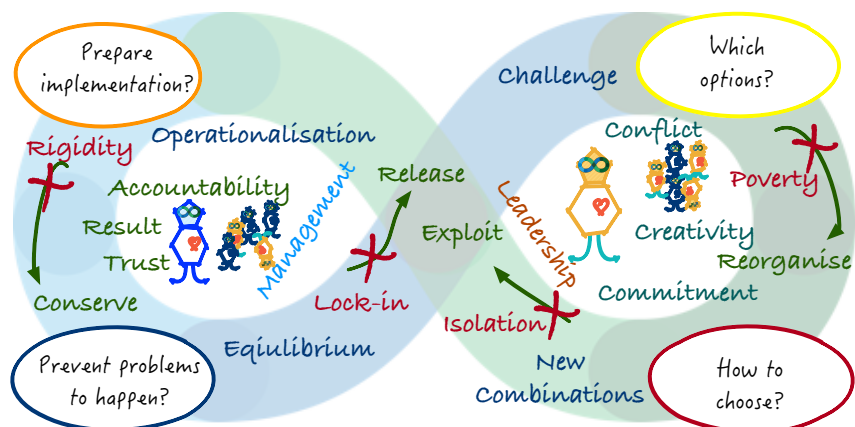
Figure 4 An integrated approach

4. Conclusion

It is our firm belief that with the 'welt-Anschauung' we described in this discussion-paper; we are better able to understand the developments as we will continuously face. Referring back to the central question of this article: "***does your organisation have its innovation capacity in order",*** by using the logic of reasoning as presented here, we cannot prove that all problems will disappear, but it helps us to increase our ability to deal with the challenges is a more structured way. The process makes clear that the requirements regarding management/leadership and the role teams are playing are different in the identified phases of the ACoR model. Making the distinction between the phases, helps to understand the characteristics and leads to more concious interventions in the change process. The human factor shows to be the most crucial in this respect.

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