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The Role of Dialogue Maps in Change Management

1. Why is it so difficult for your people to see the need for change?

"The customer pays our salary!" Organisations are not getting tired in telling their people that focussing on the customer's needs is key to the organisation's success. So, why does it not work very often?

- Employees are confused because they are also told that shareholders must be happy.
- Organisations TELL their people but do not make sure that they UNDERSTAND.
- If employees understand they are not given the information and the tools to act accordingly.

This diagnostic picture of most large organisations becomes even more critical in times when we are heading towards a knowledge-based society. Knowledge as a production factor will be a critical part of the economic value-added. The innovation time for new products becomes shorter and shorter. Therefore, the requirements for a company to adapt and learn quickly will increase.

The question of how companies can deal with these new challenges has been the topic of many recent studies. Considering these new challenges, the markets within a company play a very crucial role. Human resources management and relationship marketing seem to make a step to each other. Schlesinger/Heskett (1991) demand an integrated approach that recognizes employees as a very important source for the creation of new competitive advantages: 'After all, the success of all activities in strategy development depends on the quality and the willingness of the people who

implement them.' According to Payne (1991) the importance of internal marketing within the relationship management approach lies not only in a well functioning internal customer-supplier relationship but also in the fact that all employees act according to the goals and strategies of their company. Even though there is still relatively little empirical research in this field the biggest challenges for companies are said to be the creation of a vital internal communication, a feedback and responsibility culture, and an earmarked feeling of community (Wuerthner 1999). The empowerment of employees who have customer contact should be increased in order to enhance the quality of customer service (Schlesinger and Heskett 1991). Bowen and Lawler (1992) suggest that employees should be informed about the performance (data) and the success factors of their company as well as the fact that their salary is dependent on this performance. They also recommend that the employees should be provided with the necessary knowledge of how they can contribute to the success of the company and that they can receive appropriate decision-making empowerment. According to Wunderer (1994) the maturity level of employees would be increased if the development of employees were to be pushed to more entrepreneurial thinking and acting. Chan/Mauborgne (1997), for example, found out that employees are not only interested in the economic results of their company but also in the reasons and steps that lead to these results. Innovation management, according to them, does not happen at the very top of a company. There, it can only be made possible.

2. What dialogue map workshops can do in a change management process?

This paper wants to show what the airline branch of Lufthansa German Airlines (Deutsche Lufthansa AG) did to start a change management processe in order to increase the general business literacy of its employees, the organisation's speed of adaptation and its ability to learn. 'Dialogue Map Workshops' will be introduced as a possible instrument to visualize the complexity of an organisation's business and its environment and to encourage communication across groups and hierarchies in large organisations. This instrument is a modification of 'Learning Maps' which are primarily being used for training purposes (Rucci/Kirn/Quinn 1998; Mellor 1997; Sorge 1995).

In the following chapter, we will describe how Lufthansa has tried to visualise the needs of the three groups Customers, Employees, and Shareholders with a simple 'Stakeholder Model'. Afterwards, we will analyse the internal communication prior to Dialogue Maps. 3.3. and 3.4. will show the development of new instruments of internal communication using 'Dialogue Map Workshops' as an example and the necessary steps of planning and logistics. The feedback of the users, i.e. the employees, will be dealt with in 3.5. Finally, we will thoroughly evaluate the use of this instrument at Lufthansa and what lessons can be learned for further use in other organisations.

3. The Lufthansa Case: 'Dialogue Map Workshops'

3.1. Background

The deregulation of the European airline industry in three steps between 1990 and 1997 led to a massive increase in competition. From that time on airlines have had to concentrate more intensely on customers and their needs. In many training programmes and information days Lufthansa has tried to clarify to its employees the importance of each customer and to show how to satisfy them.

After 'customer focus' the internal discussion platform was dominated by the notion of 'shareholder value': Especially the last step towards privatisation of Lufthansa in October 1997 led internal communication temporarily towards a concentration on the interests of current and future shareholders.

Many employees and managers thought that this important focus on customers and shareholders went hand in hand with a neglect of the employee resource. In various - methodologically different - opinion polls about the satisfaction and motivation of employees the following observations were pivotal (Lufthansa German Airlines, 1998):

- 80 % of all employees feel they are poorly informed about management's decision making

- 74% are not content with the way they are involved in decision-making processes

- 52% know very little about neighbouring departments and their problems

The results of this poll among managers were somewhat better but the executive board still considered these results unsatisfactory. Furthermore, many managers complained that numerous 'obviously logical' management decisions that were 'decided upon for the good of the company' were not being understood by the employees and were in fact often rejected by them.

This experience led to the intensely discussed question in literature of the interdependencies between the interests of customers, employees, and shareholders[1]: Is a dominating focus on just one of these groups good or bad for the company? Does the successful integration of one group automatically lead to a high level of satisfaction among the other two? As benchmarks from other companies and the public discussion about the adequateness of higher profits show, this 'distribution conflict' presents an important communication task for companies. Lufthansa decided to call for an open debate on this topic and to support this debate in the entire company through the visualization of a simple version of the well-known stakeholder model (Freeman, 1984, and Achleitner, 1985).

In a brochure 'Our Plan 1998' (Lufthansa German Airlines, 1998) that was sent to all employees the 'Stakeholder Triangle' (see chart 1) was used as a discussion

framework in order to show with empirical data in which area the satisfaction level among customers, employees, and shareholders was high, in which area there was still room for improvement and which activities had been already undertaken or planned to reduce these deficits.
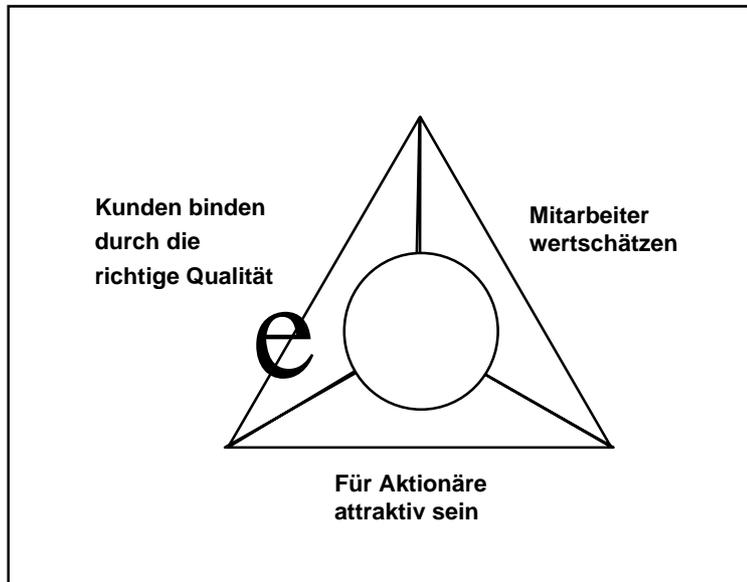
Chart 1: 'Stakeholder Triangle' (customer loyalty, value employees, be attractive for shareholders)

All important strategies and projects of Lufthansa Airlines[2] were listed, explained with graphics, and put into context in this brochure. By doing this, the reasons behind management decisions could be explained. Employees were supposed to get a better understanding of the connection between their complaints and the counter measures that management had already initiated to solve these problems.

3.2. Analysis of internal communication

The overall objective 'value employees' derived from the 'Stakeholder Triangle' combines - among others - the subordinate goals of improvement of cross-departmental and cross-hierarchical communication and the involvement of employees into the decision making process. The executive board considered both goals highly important for the improvement of employee motivation. A group of experts (complemented by employees with customer contact from different areas in the company) created a profile of requirements for internal communication media. Such a tool should

- be cross-departmental (but still focussed on the individual communication needs of different employee groups) in order to create a common discussion ground and avoid systematic miscommunication,

- be interactive so that it not only informs but makes two-way communication possible,

- visualise information[3],

- be cross-hierarchical. More often, all employees should be addressed by the executive board in order to make the decision making more transparent. Simultaneously, employees should get the opportunity to report their ideas for improvement directly to the executive board.
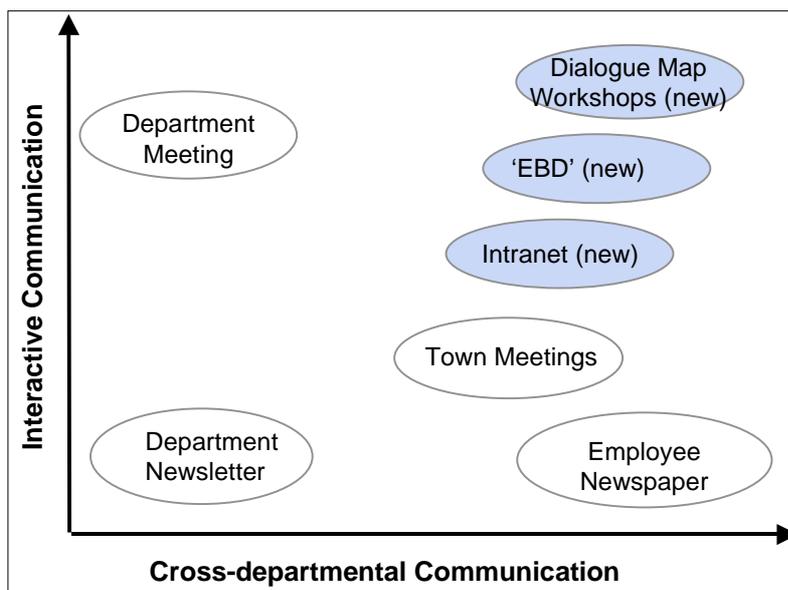

Chart 2: "Instruments of Internal Communication"

A simultaneously conducted analysis of internal communication instruments made clear that nobody in the company had a comprehensive knowledge of the communication media used in the company. Within their own departments, some managers had created their own communication tools and decided solely on the content. Very rarely was there agreement upon the communication policy of highly sensitive issues among the various departments.

Hardly one of the existing communication tools met the previously established standards: Information was hardly ever visualised. There was only irregular occurrence of cross-hierarchical top-down-communication and if so it was often reactive. Communication in the opposite direction was even more rare. However, almost all media met at least one of the remaining criteria (cross-departmental or interactive). A listing of all existing media in a chart with two axes[4] shows, however, that no communication tool was simultaneously cross-departmental *and* interactive (see chart 2). The employee newspaper for example can be read everywhere but it leaves little room for an interactive dialogue. In department meetings, this dialogue is obviously possible but only among colleagues who already know each other and not

across department borders. The 'town meetings' held by the CEO present an exception: They do fulfill both requirements but they take place among the employees of all business units at one location. Therefore, they cannot or only very superficially deal with subjects related to a specific business unit such as the airline.

3.3. One new instrument: Dialogue Map Workshops

"Context literacy is more important than content literacy."

The analysis suggested to make the existing Intranet instrument more accessible to all employee groups.[5] Moreover, the use of completely new instruments was tested: Members of the executive board met with interested employees from all hierarchy levels in "Employee Board Dialogue (EBD)" events on a regular basis.[6] Another instrument was called 'Dialogue Map Workshops' and was meant in the first step to provide an overview on complex business structures to all employees. Then, they should enable a cross-departmental information exchange and in a third step they should involve employees into decision making processes and potentially lead to implementation (see chart 3).
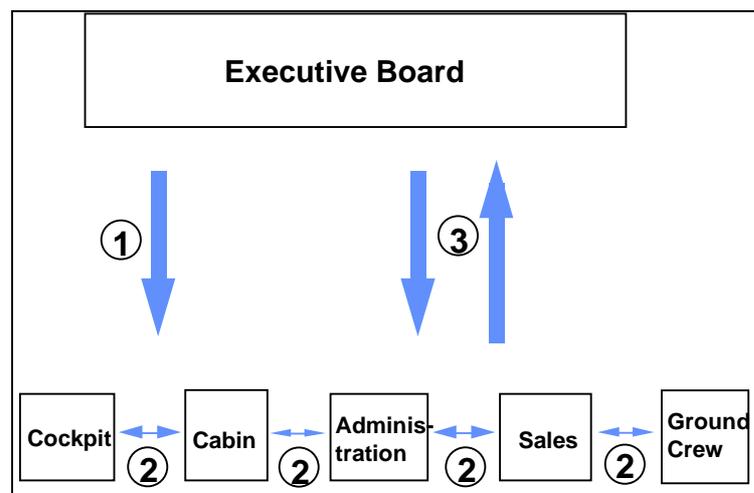

Chart 3: Communication Goals of Dialogue Map Workshops

'Dialogue Maps' are posters of roughly 1x2 meters that visualise the complex reality of an organisation with the help of figures and images (see chart 4). While traditional overhead transparencies can treat a topic only sequentially Dialogue Maps try to bring together different parts of the complex reality into one single picture. The viewer can get information from the organisation and its environment with the help of charts, diagrams, and statistics from market research and controlling. In the development process, the goal is to present this information as objectively as possible by using facts and figures. It is up to each viewer to decide which tactical and strategic answers the organisation should give to the challenges, opportunities and risks

presented. The idea is not to convey dogma but to process important information about the organisation and its environment in an understandable way so that in the end every employee can draw draw his/her own conclusions.

Dialogue Maps

1. The map 'Our World' intends to give a comprehensive overview of the market and the market environment of Lufthansa. Two basic possibilities to show the most important developments and influential factors in an industry are combined. The path from a regulated market with government subsidised airlines to a competition-driven, deregulated industry structure is visualised with the help of a runway. Lufthansa – together with its alliance partners - is taking off on this runway and flies towards a (hopefully) successful future. Along with this dynamic perspective the map shows market forces that affect Lufthansa like suppliers, customers, old competitors, new entrants, substitutes, and a regulatory environment (Porter 1980) with symbols taken from the airline world as well as relevant statistics and graphics. The overall message is that the industry has changed dramatically and that there are big and difficult challenges as well as risks and opportunities lying ahead.

2. The map 'Financial Literacy' shows the money flow within the company: a kind of an income statement is visualised through a baggage conveyor belt. The individual pieces of luggage symbolise the big cost blocks along the value chain. An operating profit remains at the end of the belt. This surplus is handed on to shareholders and lenders and in form of taxes to the government. Only a small portion remains for the company to grow, invest, and create new jobs. All viewers together try to bring small peripheral cards with percentage numbers to the right cost block until the facilitator reveals the actual cost structure to them. In addition, the increased importance of the capital market for a private company like Lufthansa is shown by letting the viewer act as a private investor being able to invest his money in various investments. A Lufthansa share competes with other shares (including shares from different industries and countries) as well as a saving accounts and fixed interest bonds. The value of this dialogue map can be described with an 'overall increase in financial literacy.'

3. In the map 'The Lufthansa Network' various industry-specific topics such as overbooking policies with its advantages and disadvantages and the importance of strategic alliances are discussed. The participants are led through Lufthansa's Hub-and-Spoke network and learn about planning a flight and a system-wide schedule.

4. 'Our Customer' shows the entire service chain from a customer perspective. The map displays the major service points ('moments of truth') every customer has to go through – from making a purchase decision to onboard service and finally to customer loyalty instruments in general. Some of the most important concepts in (service) marketing are integrated in one picture: Customer Satisfaction

> Measurement with competitor benchmarks, Customer Lifetime Value, Active Complaint Management to name only a few. The viewers can easily relate their own job experience to the facts of market research and discuss solutions with colleagues from other areas within the company.

Chart 4 : Dialogue Maps and their content

These four Dialogue Maps were developed together with many employees from all hierarchy levels.[7] The maps were to answer the questions most frequently asked by employees. At the same time, it was the intention to stay away from imposing opinions. In this iterative development process, cross-departmental test groups continuously checked the integration of their improvement ideas through a small development team. This strict bottom-up approach guaranteed that there was no doubt about the neutral presentation of facts with no ideological bias. Of course, the work councils and all managers were integrated in the same active way into this interactive process. The intensity of this consensual process had a positive influence on the credibility and the acceptance of the dialogue maps.

However, the physical maps are only one of five core parts of the 'Dialogue Map Workshops': For a whole day eight to twelve *employees from all departments of the organisation* and a *facilitator* meet in order to discuss the challenges of their organisation within its market environment based on the *Dialogue Maps* and a *dialogue* (structured questions). Small peripherals ('dialogue cards') with extra information are an additional element that enhances interaction.

A 'Dialogue Map Workshop' with four maps fills an entire day. Working with one map takes about one and a half hours. Each of the four segments ends with a short feedback session which are summarised in a one hour valuation feedback session at the end of the day. Several breaks allow the participants to informally talk among each other.

The facilitator takes over a role that many find unusual: Primarily, he is responsible for the process and not for the content of the Dialogue Maps. In no way is he a trainer and he should not actively lead the discussion. He is rather a host, explains the goals and the process of the workshop, motivates, pays attention to time, and tries to adjust the talking times of the participants. He only asks questions and – aside from organisational issues - does not give answers (Socratic Dialog). In the course of the discussion he does not draw conclusions or urges the group to find "the" solution. On the contrary, the group should realise that there are hardly ever right or wrong answers and that the group itself has a broad wealth of knowledge and experience.

In the recruitment of facilitators an already existing training experience was not required. Instead, Lufthansa's TQM moderators[8] and employees with good communicative skills from all hierarchy levels were invited to participate. From 150 candidates, 90 finally took part in a one and a half day training program and on average each of them 'hosted' one Dialogue Map Workshop per month.

3.4. Planning of logistics

'A good idea is worth nothing if you can't implement it!'

The goal to distribute 28.000 employees worldwide among equally mixed groups in a nine-months period required fine logistics planning by a project team that was exempted from work to do the planning. Industry specific features like complex work shift and rigid rotation plans and numerous wage agreements for the different employee groups as well as the absence of fixed workplaces for most employees turned this task into a big challenge: Since airline services are not storable and passengers expect a 24-hour service, leaving airplanes on the ground for workshops was not an option of course.

In the opinion of many employees within the past years various announced 'change programmes' were only carried out half-heartedly or in the worst case not at all. This is why people were very skeptical about the seriousness of the 'Dialogue Map Workshops.' In consequence, the executive board called for a 'quiet' announcement of the workshop goals in order not to fuel unrealistic expectations on immediate improvements. The board wanted to make clear that this was "only" a cross-departmental and cross-hierarchical communication platform having little value itself if the employees did not use it.

Between March and December 1998 more than 6,000 (i.e. 24 % of all) employees worldwide took part in more than 500 workshops. Despite the difficult planning conditions, a good mixture within the groups could be realised in Germany (see table 1).[9]

Table 1: Distribution of employee groups in the 'Dialogue Map Workshops'
in Germany, March – December 1998

Employee Groups	Real Distribution in Business Unit	Distribution in Workshops
Cabin	47 %	34 %
Cockpit	15 %	17 %
Ground Crew	24 %	23 %
Sales	7 %	13 %
Administration	7 %	13 %

3.5. Feedback of participants

A typical workshop evaluation measured the satisfaction level of participants and facilitators and whether the goals of information transfer and encouragement of a

cross-departmental dialogue were reached. The large majority of participants was content with the instrument 'Dialogue Map Workshop' as a whole (see table 2). It is interesting to notice that at the beginning of the workshops the facilitators had observed a positive or very positive atmosphere only in 42 per cent of the groups. At the end of the workshops this number increased to 82 per cent. These figures illustrate the skepticism towards change initiatives and at the same time indicate that the participants were convinced by the tool 'Dialogue Map Workshops'.

In order to integrate employees into decision making processes the 'Top Five' method was introduced: During the day-end feedback session the participants were asked which topics they would work on first if they - as a group - were to take over the role of the executive board. Also, they were asked to reduce their large number of improvement ideas to the five most important ones. Because of the heterogeneous mixture of the groups (being as such similar to the mixture of the executive board) it became clear to each participant that it is an entrepreneurial necessity to be ready for compromise if there are only limited resources. Moreover, this step enabled the project team to give the executive board a cross-departmental feedback. It was only in this 'Top Five' process that the facilitator took over the traditional role by actively helping the group to aggregate and prioritise the feedback cards of each participant. All participants also obtained forms to list all their unanswered *questions and ideas*. Even though this was not the primary goal of the workshops the company wanted to make use of the creative energy of the discussion and be able to pass ideas on to the corporate employee idea center. The number of new ideas was especially striking during the first months of the workshops.

Table 2: Evaluation of the 'Dialogue Map Workshops' by Participants
in Germany, March - October 1998

Instrument 'Dialogue Map Workshops' in general	90 %*
Novel aspect of the discussion environment	96 %*
Possibility to participate with own ideas	93 %*
Quality of facilitators	94 %*
Information level higher than at beginning of workshops	75 %+
Dialogue Maps should be used more often in the future	82 %+

* Evaluation „very good", „good" and „fair"
+ Evaluation „much more", „more" and „a little more"

The 'Top Five' process revealed that the majority of the workshop groups prioritised highly the subjects 'motivation of employees' and 'communication/information' and if they were to be the executive board these would be the tasks that they worked on first. The importance of these rather obvious results lies in the fact that participants from very different areas mentioned them as their primary goals. This could lead to a

pressure to act within the organisation and it could generate innovative ways for improvement.
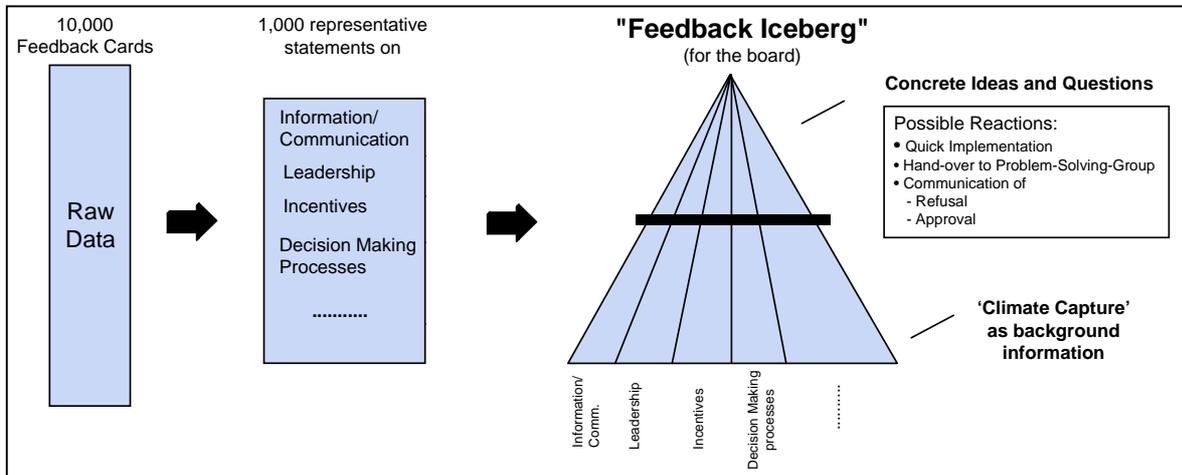

Chart 5: 'Feedback Iceberg'

In a second step, all feedback cards and the forms with open questions and ideas were analysed and clustered into representative statements that could be presented to the executive board in form of a 'feedback iceberg' (see chart 5). This iceberg shows an 'atmospheric painting' of the company that usually remains hidden to the executive board because of the natural filter function of the middle management. Empirical research shows that the observations of employees with direct customer contact are an absolutely essential addition to the work of the market research department (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). Besides this 'Climate Capture' the most concrete ideas and questions were put together: Some of these proposals can be directly implemented by the executive board, whereas in other cases an *open* communication of the board would be sufficient (even when rejecting suggestions). In some cases, the executive board can hand back the problem by asking a special front-line 'problem-solving-group' to come up with a concrete implementation idea.

4. Evaluation and lessons to be learned for a change management process

"A picture may be worth a thousand words, but involvement is worth a thousand pictures."

The 'Dialogue Map Workshops' were used as an instrument of internal communication and relationship management in the airline branch of Lufthansa German Airlines. According to the majority of the participants the primary goals (see chart 3) of bringing complex business structures closer to employees and enabling a cross-departmental information exchange were clearly reached. The first goal to 'visualise' these complex business structures 'comprehensively and in a more

attractive and understandable way than usually' (quote from a participant) was met without restrictions (see table 2). The value of cross-departmental exchange (second goal) was also approved by the workshop evaluation: 'Finally real information for employees and not just another service training!' (see table 2). Moreover, anecdotal experience[10] shows that in a company with a service chain that consists of many contacts between employees and customers the value of such an exchange cannot be appreciated enough.

In events like 'Dialogue Map Workshops' alternative information systems ('cross-unit learning'), communication channels and informal organisational structures are opened up and developed and common speech and socialising patterns are encouraged. Information loses its role as a means of power and information exchange on a dialogue basis is not reduced to intrigues (Sattelberger 1996). The discussion with a facilitator in the background enables the group to realise that its own knowledge is the core of the business and that there are not only right or wrong statements. In numerous traditional training programmes however, the omnipotent trainer embodies the infallibility of an anonymous organisation. In other cases, trainers and students form alliances against their 'evil' environment without a constructive or critical discussion taking place (Senge 1994). In the case of 'Dialogue Map Workshops' the exchange of knowledge led to a partly uncomfortable confrontation with internalised values, standards, and goals. This is a necessary prerequisite for an open discussion without reservation about the culture, structures, and the strategy of the organisation.

During the workshops, the third and fourth goal - the active integration of employees into decision making processes and open communication - turned out to be the decisive success factor in the opinion of facilitators and participants. For the organisation as well, the decision to let the strategy process be more than the 'work of a small elite' is the only way to form creative and truly new strategic options (Sattelberger 1996). Communication can only be meant seriously if corporate policies can be questioned in such forums (Lutz 1991). Probst/Raub (1998) call this an 'interplay between strategic intent and local implementation'. The effectiveness of business activities increases if the formulation of competitive strategies is based on the know-how of as many employees as possible and if dialogue-based planning strategies are introduced. Only an 'argumentative communication process' can develop a unifying corporate culture and identity (Zerfass 1996; Ghoshal/Bartlett 1996). Hamel (1996) even talks about the necessity to democratise the process of strategy formulation because of the 'intellectual incest' among top management. However, exactly the third and fourth goal of the 'Dialogue Map Workshops' require the most profound change in the organisation and as such it requires time and endearment. The linking of all other activities with similar goals will be extremely important in the future.

With the instrument 'Dialogue Map Workshops' Lufthansa has certainly just advanced one possible step in the right direction. The difficult path towards a service company that uses internal knowledge efficiently and that can react dynamically to changes in competition remains to be pursued. The momentum reached can help to get closer to

the goal of a learning organisation that balances the legitimate demands of its customers, employees, and shareholders on an every day basis.

Almost as a by-product, the development, planning, and implementation of these workshops has brought to surface several internal weaknesses that can complicate the introduction of a modern communication infrastructure. One example is the existence of different "department realities" fostered by very different collective bargaining processes of employee groups within the same company. This will remain one of the biggest challenges of Lufthansa in the future.

The positive experience of other large companies with such maps (e.g. Mercedes Benz, Siemens Nixdorf, Pepsi, Boeing, Sears) can, in principle, be confirmed for the case of Lufthansa. However, the focus on the communicative and not the learning aspect of the 'Dialogue Maps' presents a fundamental difference between the Lufthansa approach and that of other companies. Six critical success factors can be identified:

- Credibility and consequence of the executive board
- Heterogeneous workshop groups
- Committed facilitators
- 'Quiet' but self-confident and target-group-oriented communication ('Do something good first and then talk about it!')
- Quick reaction of the executive board to the participants' feedback
- Close interaction with other projects of change

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6.   Endnotes

[1] See Hahn (1994), Fritz (1995) and Kreikebaum (1997) for a thorough discussion on the goals of a company as a social institution and its contact with various stakeholders.

[2] The creation of the business unit 'Lufthansa Airlines' in April 1997 had led to an improvement of the previously shown communication deficits between the traditionally very independent departments and between upper and lower hierarchy levels. For the first time in the history of Lufthansa, this business unit was organisationally independent: Still being the biggest and most important subsidiary of Lufthansa Group it was only one among many others. Since then, all employees of this business unit deal with the same customers, the same aircraft, the same distribution channels, the same suppliers, the same competitors, and many common challenges.

[3] On average, human beings remember only 10 per cent of what they read. However, when reading *and* seeing at the same time the number increases to 50 per cent. Up to 90 per cent can be reached when they talk while they are doing something (see Meyer 1996 for a detailed list of literature about the importance of a visualisation in management).

[4] 15 experts were asked to place the individual communication instruments into a scale with two axes. Because the results were highly consistent a further quantitative verification of the estimated portfolio in chart 2 was not carried out.

[5] Most employees do not have an office with a PC. Flight attendants, pilots, and ground crew at the airport should be able to use Intranet-Cafes and get an easier access to the Intranet from their homes.

[6] Six times a year the executive board invites 25 employees for a two day seminar. The employees can apply and then get chosen according to the quota of their departments. Each time four board members give a short speech and are then available for open discussions in several workshops, during informal breaks and at the end of the day.

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[7] 'Dialogue Maps' are based on the concept of 'Learnegy Maps©' by Root Learning, Inc., Perrysburg, USA. However, Lufthansa has changed this concept and further developed 'Dialogue Maps' with an emphasis on internal communication.

[8] Many Lufthansa employees had already been trained in the basics of Total Quality Management (TQM) and in the techniques of facilitating.

[9] The significantly varying feedback to the invitation by the executive board is a clear indicator for the immense difference between the various cultures between departments of the company.

[10] One ground staff participant wrote on her feedback form: 'One day we had one of these difficult discussions with our passengers again about the question of how many pieces of hand luggage they could carry on. The situation was about to escalate when several customers spurred on. In that moment the captain of our flight came to the gate, placed himself in front of the angry passengers and calmly explained to them the high security relevance of our carry-on regulations. The authority of his words made them check-in their luggage without further comment. Surprised about this incident, I asked him why his colleagues had never done anything like this before. He smilingly answered: 'I, too, have learned something from the 'Dialogue Map Workshops.''