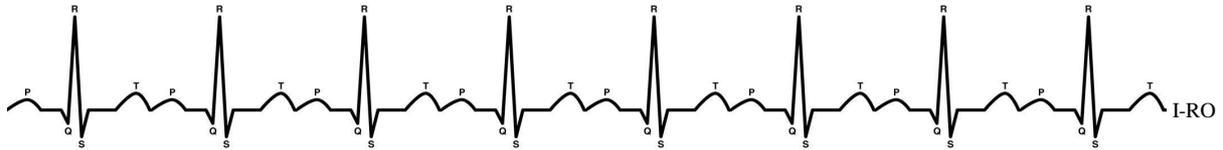I-RO

INNOVATION PLATFORM
RHYTHMICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
(I-RO)

White Paper No. 2

Themes of Organizational Rhythmics and the Results of the Survey on Organizational Rhythmic

Foundation Rhythmics of Organizational Change
27th October 2009

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WHITE PAPER NO. 2

To show times of rushing and delays, silence and commotion, turbulence and relaxation of organizational change can be used to answer the questions: what is the rhythm of change of an organization and what are the consequences thereof for the employees. Information about organizational rhythmic can contribute to successful progress and results of organizational change.
The intention of the Innovation Platform Rhythmics of Organizational Change (I-RO) is to make organizational changes more effective.

To reach this aim, there are several organizations working together in the I-RO Platform. The members of the platform are top managers for the ICT and HR departments within their organizations. Some of the organizations included in this platform are, for instance, Shell, Aercap, RIVM, ING Lease, TNO, IBM, UWV and Ordina. A conference takes place twice a year for the platform members to debate organizational change and organizational rhythmic.

At one of these conferences that took place on 27th October 2009, Prof. Dr. Paul Verweel (Universiteit Utrecht) discussed the theme 'effectiveness and meaning' or rather 'achievements with pleasure'. Afterwards the members discussed the themes of rhythmic of organizational change within their own organizations.
In advance of and in preparation for this conference, the members completed a survey on organizational rhythm. The results of the survey were presented at the conference and are included in this white paper.

The subjects that are included in this white paper are:
- Themes of Organizational Rhythm
- Results of the Survey on Organizational Rhythm

1. THEMES OF ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHMICS

The themes of organizational rhythmics in the practice of the participating organizations are discussed for the themes 'rhythm emphasis' and 'rhythm pace'. Rhythm emphasis is the regular movement in a process of organisational change to inform, deliberate, intervene, make decisions, contacts, etc., whereby the speed of the enactment and the speed of the subsequent acts are central. In addition, it is necessary to discuss the short and long timeframes, acceleration, deceleration and interruptions in the rhythm.

Rhythm pace also concerns the situation of regular movement in a change process focusing on information, deliberation, intervention, decision-making, contacts, etc., in which the emphasis and pressure, the silence and disturbance are the central issues.
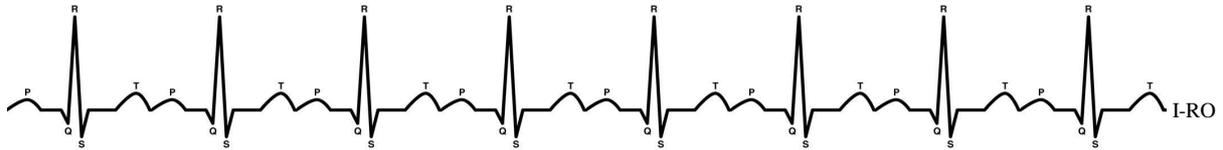
Themes of rhythm concern the effects experienced by the employees in the organizations.[1]

1.1 Pace

Theorem: "The pace regularly ensured by the desired result and not by the employees' absorption of organizational change ."

All organizations change. It leads to a number of questions. What gives us the desired results? How can you influence the results? Which short-term changes give sustainable results? What is the effect of projects to the desired results?
The observation is that the effect of organizational changes are small. What results of organizational change are realistically reached? The speed in which results are reached are mostly slow.

There are a number of comments about the speed of change. This is shown in figure 1: the speed of organizational change is affected by various internal and external surroundings that course differing results.
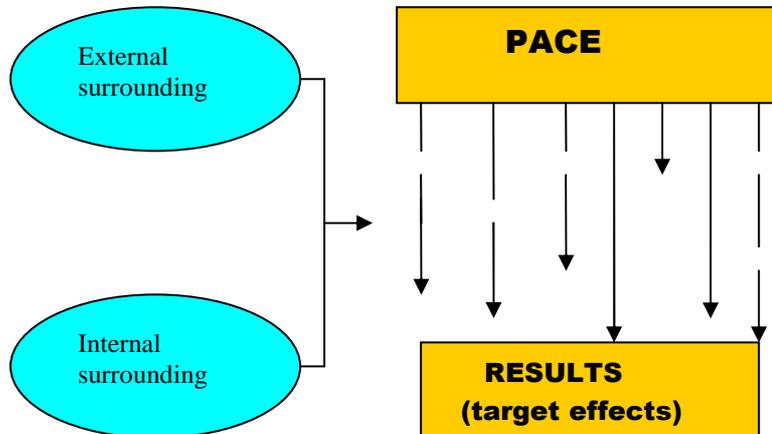
Figure 1: Pace (Rhythm-pace) in Relation to Results

With high speed arises the problem that employees cannot understand the organizational change and as a consequence the results are under pressure stressed. Most of the changes know a target (a finish line). On the other hand, the timeline is defined by the time pressure which is affected by the surroundings, for example, by the purchase of another organization or by the increase of pressure by the shareholders.

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[1] Ritmiek van organisatieverandering, Poels, 2006

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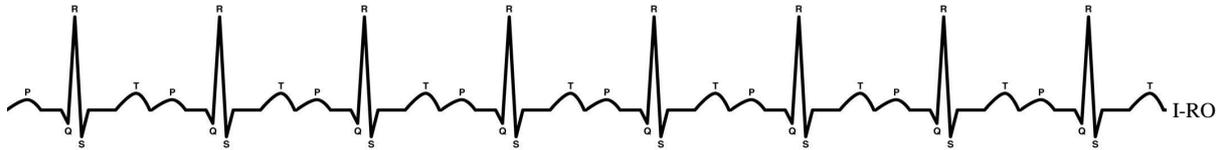
Many times the situation arises that there is a decrease in quality due to multiple changes and timelines occurring simultaneously. The pressure of the aforementioned is not understood by the majority of employees. However, some 'absorption' by employees inadvertently happens. In the end, the 'absorption' by employees will reach its maximum.

It can be particularly difficult for employees to experience organizational change while continuing their current work, especially in cases where they are expected to change the way they work or when new work is introduced into the organization. The question that remains for the employees is what results are expected of them.
It is expected that radical change will have a panic effect on employees.

Three conclusions on rhythm pace are recognised as a result of the conference:
1. a faster pace mostly comes from pressure from the external surroundings of the organization;
2. acceleration of organizational change is possible if employees are involved in the change process;
3. the velocity of change is determined by time.

First conclusion: A faster pace mostly comes from pressure from the external surroundings of the organization

During organizational change, the employees are swept up in the pace of acceleration. Through explaining and informing employees, they will pay attention the to changes and therefore become more involved. This situation can happen as a process or can occur all of a sudden.

Second conclusion: Acceleration of organizational change is possible if employees are involved in the change process

The question that arises is how you can accelerate the process of organizational change. From various experiences it can be told that good and clear communication of the changing situation will help to create a sense of urgency amongst the employees. It is important that they have an opportunity to make actively comment about the change or of the ways things are done. If necessary, the input and ideas from the employees and the results of an intermediate evaluation of the implementation can lead to a redefinition of the situation.

Often, management is afraid to explain the organizational change to their employees, because of the remarks that employees will make. Also important is that explaining and talking about the upcoming changes has to end at some point. Implementing the changes have to begin, because otherwise the effect of the implementation and empowerment amongst the employees will decrease.

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Fact is that employees need to feel that their thoughts about the upcoming changes are taken serious. Managers need to listen carefully, because the employees' feedback can also tell them that all these organizational changes are too much for them or that they can not handle all these changes.

Implementing organizational change can be successful if the employees council[2] is well informed and involved during this phase. The involvement of the employees council and the employee as an individual, can be crucial not only for the effects and meaning of the organizational change, but also for the working atmosphere within the company. This applies small (50-500 employees) and larger companies (10.000 and more employees).

The willingness of the employees to accept organizational changes is unlimited, when meaning of these changes are clear to them. It is important that the reason for change is explained to them. When the change is unavoidable because of influences from outside the organization, management has to prevent that employees create their own interpretation of the change. If the communication of the most important effects of the change has been taken care of, the involvement of the employees to this way of changing probably will increase.

Third conclusion: The velocity of organizational changes is determined by time

Time is an important element in organizational changes. Due to the velocity of organizational change, time is precious. Informing employees about the approach is often done after the organizational change is implemented. A huge risk of this way of implementation is that the sense of involvement among the employees decreases. They do not feel empowered with this approach.

1.2   Emphasis

Theorem "in a continuously changing organization the employees will experience these changes as restless and not any more as a single disturbance." The conclusions below will focus on the parameter 'Emphasis' (mentioned as 'moments of rest and restless in periods of organizational change):
1. the employee experiences an organizational change as a disturbance in his/her work,
2. the phase of preparation of the implementation of changes is different by 'executive organizations' compared to 'scientific organizations',
3. the cyclicity during organizational changes will lead to different phases of awareness of the effects of these changes.

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[2] A council of employees with jurisdiction in terms of employment. In The Netherlands, this council is legally required since June 7th , 1950 for organizations of 50 employees or more.

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First conclusion: The employee experiences an organizational change as a disturbance in his/her work

The hypothesis that employees will not experience the constantly changes within the organization as a disturbance is not endorsed by the participating organizations of the platform. Often employees feel all these changes as disturbance in the workplace. Fact is that the energy level of employees is limited when it comes to adjusting to all of these types of changes.

Taking into account that when pressure form the environment (stakeholders, legislation) leads to unavoidable organizational changes, these changes still can be implemented in a way that employees can feel comfortable.
An additional risk when the pressure from the environment on changes increases, is that it will often lead to a decrease of quality of the products or services. As a negative effect of the decreasing quality, the reliability of the product or service for the customers, society or government will also decrease.

An increase of pressure can also lead to exceed the boundaries of the capacity to change of the employees. Employees will not participate any more because of a lack of motivation. In the worst case employees do not recognize (or even deny) the pressure of the environment. This can result in negative effects on the implementation of the organizational change.

Second conclusion: The phase of preparing the implementation of changes is different by 'executive organizations' compared to 'scientific organizations'

Organizations have different approaches in preparing implementation of organizational change. The main difference between executive organizations and scientific organizations is that executive organizations intend to spend more time in analysing the process of change.

There is also a difference between organizations with employees that have a high or a low willingness to change. This depends on the meaning of the organizational change inside and outside the organization.

It is practically not possible to transfer to a new situation in one step. Especially by guiding employees through the stages of the organizational change will increase their willingness to change and make them feel empowered.
The ability of employees to change is connected with the meaning.
Meaning to employees arises not by itself. It has to be propagated by the management by clear communication.

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A possible contribution also depends on the choice of the right people who have the right skills to stimulate and motivate people when the phases of implementation becomes more challenging. An approach to successful implementation of organizational change can also be to reorganise the organization, in certain cases this can mean redundancies.

In the common situation, management of organizations spent a lot of time in preparing the organization change. Less time is spent in accomplishing the organizational change.
Typical is that in a lot of change processes the communication is key of the implementation plan. A huge risk is that the employees' comments on the different change processes are not heard by the management due to the fact that the communication is not well organized and equipped.

Third conclusion: Cyclicity in change processes results to awareness of the phases in the change process

Organizations have experience with cyclicity in change processes. One of the examples of this kind of cyclus is:

Figure 2: an example of cyclicity in a change process

In this example of cyclicity in a change process there is a start with a vision of a result and a change ('believe'). The next phase is to tell about this vision in the organization and to deepen it by - or with the involvement of - the employees. The next step is to make a plan. After the execution of the plan, there is an evaluation to find activities for reparation and to formulate lessons for a next change process.

Cyclicy leads to awareness of the different phases in the change process. In this approach it is also possible to stimulate the involvement of the employees in a change process. The significant question is the change power of the employees. It is interesting to find patterns and cyclicity in change processes of organizations and parts of organizations with the information about the 'emphasis' (accents in change processes).

2. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHMICS

Preparatory to the second meeting of the participating organizations in the platform the members completed a survey on organizational rhythm. This survey includes a number of propositions that give descriptions of the five theme's of organizational rhythms (emphasis, intonation, pace, period and repetition).

The members were asked to give their opinion about the propositions of organizational rhythms using the criteria: completely agreeing, agreeing, neutral, disagreeing and completely disagreeing.

For each theme of organizational rhythm, propositions are given for reflection by the members. The questions are numbered by the propositions for reflection. For emphasis, there are 21 propositions (e-1 to e-21), for intonation 18 propositions (i-1 to i-18), for pace 22 propositions (p-1 tm p-22), for frequency 11 propositions (f-1 to f-11) and for repetition 10 propositions (r-1 to r-10).

Nr.	RITME - TEMPO		geheel mee oneens (1)	oneens (2)	neutraal (3)	eens (4)	geheel mee eens (5)
t-11	Bij de planning van een verandertraject wordt rekening gehouden met de opvattingen van medewerkers over het tijdsbeslag van het traject	met mening medewerker over veranderplanning wordt rekening gehouden (t-11)	1	4	2		1
t-12	Versnellingen in het verandertraject komen niet voor	versnellingen komen in verandertraject niet voor (t-12)	1	4	1	1	1
t-13	Vertragingen in het verandertraject komen niet voor	vertragingen in verandertraject komen niet voor (t-13)	2	5	1		
t-14	Versnellingen in het verandertraject komen met name voor aan het einde van een verandertraject	versnellingen komen voor aan het einde verandertraject (t-14)	1	3	2	2	
t-15	Versnellingen in het verandertraject komen met name voor bij de start van een verandertraject	versnellingen komen voor aan start verandertraject (t-15)	1	3	2	2	
t-16	Vertragingen in het verandertraject komen met name voor aan het einde van een verandertraject	vertragingen komen voor aan einde verandertraject (t-16)		3	4	1	
t-17	Vertragingen in het verandertraject komen met name voor bij de start van een verandertraject	vertragingen komen voor aan start verandertraject (t-17)		5	2	1	
t-18	De medewerkers geven aan dat zij de verandertrajecten van de organisatie ervaren als trajecten met een hoog tempo	medewerkers ervaren verandertempo als hoog (t-18)	1	1	4	1	1
t-19	De medewerkers geven aan dat zij de verandertrajecten van de organisatie ervaren als trajecten met een laag tempo	medewerkers ervaren verandertempo als laag (t-19)	1	2	3	1	1
t-20	In een verandertraject is nauwelijks sprake van tempowisselingen	verandertraject bevat nauwelijks tempowisselingen (t-20)		5	1	2	
t-21	In een verandertraject is regelmatig sprake van tempowisselingen	verandertraject bevat regelmatig tempowisselingen (t-21)		1	1	6	
t-22	In vergelijking met het vorig jaar ligt het tempo van veranderen hoger	verandertempo ligt hoger dan vorig jaar (t-22)	1	2	1	3	1

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Figure 3: Survey Organizational Change part 3 Rhythm-Pace; p-1 to p-22

After preparation of the results, the propositions are filtered with strikingly different or unanimous distributions. These are discussed with the members to reach a clarification for each theme.

Eight organizations participated in the research. The small number of completed questionnaires cannot result in general conclusions. However, it is possible to give statements about the situation of the rhythmic themes in the practice of the organizations.

2.1 Theme of Rhythmics – Emphasis

There is no unanimous representation about the periods of calmness and commotion in change processes

The employees of an organization are not always given enough time to get used to the new situation during the implementation phase of organizational change. Half of the members of the platform mentioned that the employees do not get enough time to adjust to the new situation.

Half of the members of the platform say that there is a long time of uncertainty about the continuation of the change process. The other half of the members of the platform mentioned that there is uncertainty about the continuation of the change process over a long-term period.

A third of the members of the platform mentioned that employees are not involved in the change processes and a quarter of the members of the platform says that their employees are certainly involved in the change processes. The members are almost unanimous in their opinion that organizational change can only be successful when employees are directly involved during the design and/or the implementation phases of the organizational change.

Employees do not feel constantly involved in the operation of change in their organizations. This statement was made by four fifths of the members.
Employees are not only involved to the change process during the implementation phase, but they are also involved in the time of preparation and planning the change process. This statement was made by half of the members.

The members of the platform do not agree about the answer on the question whether an organizational change can be more successful if simultaneously a cultural change of the organization is implemented. A third of the members agree with this view, a third disagree with this view and a third gave a neutral answer.

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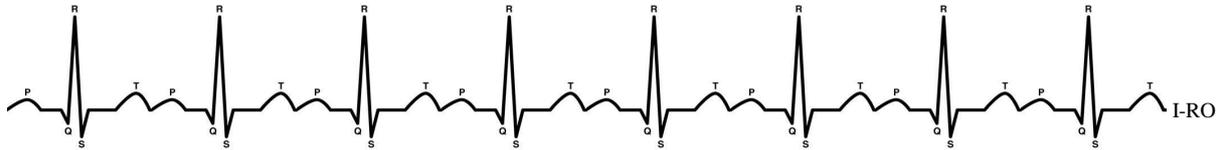
It is remarkable that frequently the practice is to plan for staged change, but that the execution of staged change in practice is not executed by this stages. Half of the members agree with this observation.

Above descriptions show that there is no clear representation of the periods of rest and stress (emphasis) in change processes. There are also different opinions about paying attention to other change processes in the organization and paying attention to the holidays of the employees.

2.2 Theme of Rhythmics – Intonation

Organizations prefer more use of cyclicity in change processes

The start of a change route is in the approach of it, which is not always the same. The employees are informed about the situation of the change process at certain moments during a change process. Almost all members of the platform agree with this statement.

Half of the members mentioned that after the change process they do not evaluate this process with the employees of the organization. The causes for this situation were not discussed.

The opinions about the intonation (accents) in change processes for the start, the intermediate accents and for the end of a change process are not clear. Prominent is that organizations often prefer to use cyclicity in change processes. In practice this is showed in different variants, especially for the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) elements.

2.3 Theme of Rhythmics – Pace

There are a lot of changes in pace (velocity) in change processes

Almost unanimously the members of the platform agree that the time span, with a start and a finish of the change process, is important. Also, the members almost unanimously recognize that at one moment there are more change processes that occur simultaneously.

The organization is focused on continuous renewal. The employees prefer this continuous approach. This description of the situation is recognized by a third of the platform members. One eighth of the members do not agree with this description and the other members are neutral.

The speed of the implementation of change processes is determined by the formal decision-making processes. This description of the situation is recognized by almost

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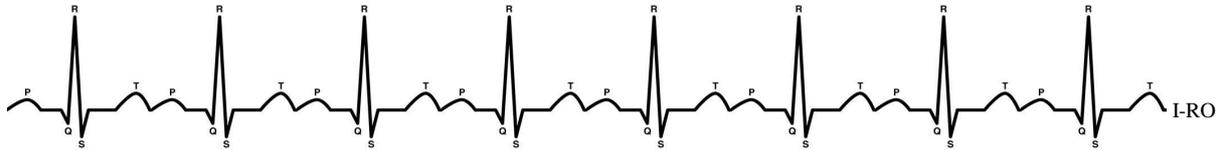
all the platform members. They recognize also a lot of changes in pace during change processes.

All participants of the platform agree that the velocity of initiating and implementing organizational changes is determined by the formal decision processes within a company. They also recognize the different pace changes during the implementation of the organizational changes. They also notice that the time span plays an important role at the implementation phase. The personal experiences of each participant concerning the accelerations and delays during implementation are different from each other.

2.4 Theme of Rhythmics – Period

Often the implementation of organizational changes is planned

The start of the implementation of organizational changes happens at arbitrary moments during the year. Often, but not always, the management is taking the summer holidays into account when planning is made. Half of the participants of the platform confirm that all the activities that have to be done before and during the implementation phase are planned and written down in a plan. They also confirm that during implementation the activities and the moments they are planned often change.

Half of the participants confirm that the period of initiating, planning and implement ting the organizational changes normally takes one year. A quarter of the participants says that they cannot confirm and a quarter of the participants did not gave a response.

2.5 Theme of Rhythmics – Repetition

Results of the evaluation of implementations or organizational changes are used as lessons learned

The preparation of the start to implement organizational changes often takes more time than planned a lot of participants confirm.

More than half of the participants confirm the lessons learned from earlier organizational changes are used in the preparation of a next one. Some of the participants say they do not use the lessons learned from earlier organizational changes. The reason why was not discussed.

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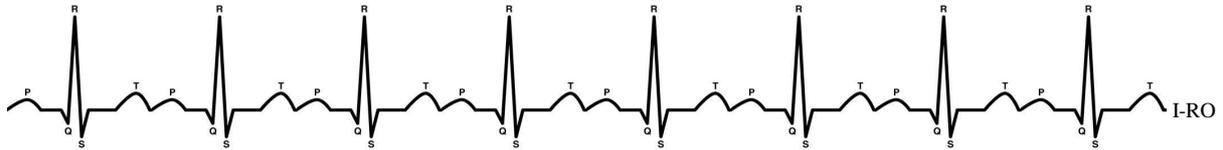
3. CONCLUSIONS

In preparation for the second meeting of the Innovation Platform Rhythmics of Organizational Change, eight participants were asked to answer a list of questions about the different rhythmic themes. The results were discussed during the meeting on October 27th, 2009, and included in this white paper.

Some remarkable results of the survey 'Rhythmics of Organizational Change' were:

Emphasis
■   The employees within a company do not always get enough time to get used to the new situation.
■   Only a quarter of the participants confirmed that their employees feel empowered and engaged during the different phases of the implementation of the organizational change.
■   There is no unambiguous view in the different periods of rest or stress during the different phases of the implementation of the organizational change.

Intonation
■   Conclusion is that there are no typical patterns of accents recognizable for a start, an implementation of the organizational change and the finish of the implementation. Typical is that the participants of the platform confirm that the cyclicity (for example by Plan, Do, Check, Act or cyclicity in the calendar year) is used more frequently.

Pace
■   The pace changes often during implementation of an organizational change.
■   Some of the participants confirm that changes of pace is happening continuously during the time span in which the implementation phase is executed and that time is a very important factor.

Period
■   The turnaround of an implementation of organizational change often takes less than a year.
■   All the activities necessary for implementation are planned and written down in a plan.

Repetition
■   More than half of the participants confirm the lessons learned from earlier organizational changes are used in the preparation of future organizational changes.

We can conclude that there is no clear and uniform resemblance concerning the ways implementations of organizational changes are made to measure in relation with the

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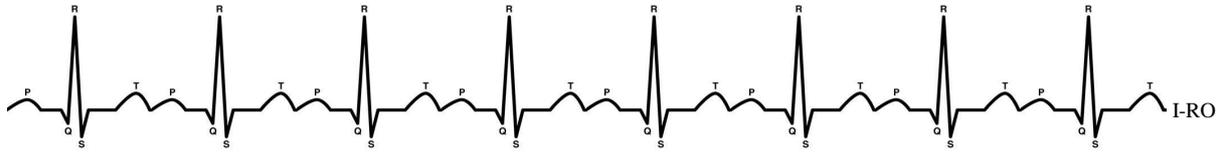
capacity from the employees to change. Different outcomes are noticed about the way organizational changes are implemented and how the employees experience the effects of the outcome. With regard to pace and emphasis, it can be concluded that multiple configurations of these themes are recognizable.

In the next phase of this research, the themes will be further examined by the Innovation Platform of Rhythmics of Organizational Change in collaboration with the platform members and partners of the platform (the participating organizations and several universities and the research company TNO). This will be done by starting pilots within various organizations to obtain more quantitative and qualitative data on the different rhythmic themes.

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