

Abstract:

Purpose □ The purpose of this paper is to review and discuss the potential of available event formats for facilitating the initiation of organizational change processes. It presents unconferencing, a relatively new event format, which seems to provide unique opportunities for this purpose. It reports and analyzes the case of a large Swiss university which initiated its pro-sustainability transformation by organizing an unconference.

Design/methodology/approach

□

Researchers studied the effects of unconferencing and the mechanisms, which brought them about in a case study. In the empirical setting of a large Swiss university, a qualitative study triangulating participatory observation, narrative and problem-centered interviews, participant survey and documentary analysis was carried out. Data were collected and analyzed at different points in time.

Findings

□ Empirical findings suggest that unconferencing is an appropriate event format for facilitating the initiation of the pro-sustainability organizational change process of a university. In our case, unconferencing achieved systems connectivity, enabled mutual learning and generated excellent outputs in form of project proposals.

Social implications

□ The paper raises the awareness of other universities and organizations of an event format they might wish to apply in their organizational change processes.

Originality/value

□ So far, research has not provided satisfactory answers to the question, how to best initiate organizational change. This paper provides a systematic investigation of available methodological approaches. It furthermore explains unconferencing, which is increasingly applied by practitioners but so far has stimulated only little discourse in the scientific community.

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