Special Issue Editorial "Agile Management"

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Agile management approaches are widely considered a panacea to major problems of the current competitive environment. However, the concept of agility needs a sound conceptual foundation and rigorous empirical research to unfold its theoretical and practical relevance. This introduction to the special issue on "Agile Management" illustrates the aim and intent of this issue and provides an overview of the articles included.

agility, agile management, agile project management, organizational agility

Editorial zum Themenheft „Agiles Management"

Agile Managementansätze werden oft als Allheilmittel zur Überwindung der Herausforderungen eines hochdynamischen Wettbewerbsumfeldes angepriesen. Das Konzept der Agilität benötigt jedoch eine solide konzeptuelle Basis sowie gründliche empirische Forschung, um theoretischen Gehalt und praktisch Relevanz zu erlangen. Die vorliegende Einleitung zu dem Themenheft „Agiles Management" erläutert die Zielsetzung des Heftes und gibt einen Überblick über die einzelnen Beiträge.

Agilität, agiles Management, agiles Projektmanagement, organisatorische Agilität

1. Introduction

Companies are facing highly complex and dynamic competitive environments that demand a high degree of flexibility, responsiveness and willingness to change (*Bennett/Lemoine* 2014). However, many major corporations still exhibit rigid structures, processes, organizational cultures and thought patterns (*Schreyögg/Sydow*, 2010). These characteristics may enhance the efficiency of repetitive processes but obstruct adaptation to a dynamic and complex environment. To better prepare companies to face these challenges, greater "agility" is needed. The concept of agility emanated from software engineering (*Qumer/Henderson-Sellers*, 2008; *Conforto et al.* 2014) and manufacturing (*Gunasekaran/Yusuf*, 2002). In these contexts, agile project management methods were introduced to enable more customer- and solution-oriented development allowing for comprehensive changes over different project phases (Conforto et al., 2016). More recently, the concept of agility has diffused to other areas of management, such as product innovation (*Cooper/Sommer*, 2016, 2017), business model innovation (*Ghezzi/Cavallo*, 2018), organizational structure and processes (*Singh et al.*, 2013), organizational learning (*Annosi et al.*, 2018), leadership (*McKenzie/Aitken*, 2012) and management control (*Lill et al.*, 2019).

Although agile management is advocated by management consultants and practitioners, its relevance for academic research remains to be proved, including its conceptual foundations, theoretical content, and supporting empirical evidence (*Sherehiy et al.*, 2007). The discourse around agility is often marked by euphonious buzzwords, and agility is praised as a panacea to major problems of the current competitive environment. Without a sound conceptual basis and rigorous empirical research, agile management may become just another management fashion following the usual faddish cycle of adoption and abandonment (*Strang et al.*, 2014). On a conceptual level, agile management must be distinguished from related concepts introduced to cope with complexity and enable flexibility, such as dynamic capabilities, organizational ambidexterity and strategic flexibility (*Evans*, 1991; *O'Reilly/Tushman*, 2008). On this basis, the theoretical content and relevance of agile management can be scrutinized. Finally, the antecedents, use and effects of agile management in practice can be studied empirically.

This special issue is devoted to exploring various aspects of agile management. The aim is to develop theory and to provide empirical evidence on the antecedents and consequences of agile management in different areas of application. The special issue includes six selected articles covering a variety of topics, such as organizational agility, operational agility and agile project management.

2. The Content of the Special Issue

In the first article, "The Agile Paradox: Reduce Formalization? Introduce Formalization!", *Bachman, Kurzmann, Catrellon Gutierrez* and *Neyer* elaborate on the question of whether firms should increase or decrease formalization to achieve organizational agility. This conceptual paper seeks to overcome the apparent paradox that introducing agility in an organization requires less formalization in some respects but increased formalization in others. By developing a more nuanced view of formalization, *Bachman et al.* argue that agile organizations are characterized by more supportive formalization and less coercive formalization.

In the second paper, "Implementation of Design Thinking to Improve Organizational Agility in an SME" by *Fischer, Lattemann, Redlich* and *Guerrero*, the authors analyze how small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) can apply Design Thinking to improve organizational agility. *Fischer et al.* present a longitudinal case study of an SME in the energy sector and find that, over time, the use of Design Thinking as a collaborative user-centered approach to innovation can lead to the emergence of agile subcultures in SMEs that support organizational agility. Organizational agility is stimulated in three main areas: communication and the pursuit of organizational goals, organizational culture, and operational activities.

In the next article, "Widerstände gegen Agilität: Agiles Change Management als Erfolgsfaktor in Projekten der digitalen Transformation" ("Resistance to Agility: Agile Change Management as a Success Factor in Digital Transformation Projects"), *Heidt, Gauger, Wagner* and *Pfnür* argue that agile project management and change management are closely related. Change management can be a means to overcome resistance to agility and therefore should be integrated in agile projects. The authors conduct a case study of a digital transformation project in the automotive industry that was carried out using agile project management methods (Scrum). Based on expert interviews with various project participants, they find that in agile projects, personal communication, individual stake-

holder management and participation are the most critical elements of change management that need to be adapted to the agile context.

This is followed by the article "Principles of Operational Agility: A Case Study of a Swiss Telecommunication Company" by *Lorenz, Bäckert* and *Heck*. This contribution deals with the question of operational agility. More specifically, the authors elaborate on the question of how principles of agile development and agile manufacturing can describe operational agility. *Lorenz et al.* combine findings in the literature on agile development and agile manufacturing with evidence from an exploratory case study of a Swiss telecommunication company to derive eight principles of operational agility. These principles can be used to guide the transformation of organizations in their development towards greater operational agility.

The relationship between agile project management and project control is the subject matter of the article by *Rieg* and *Ulrich*. In their paper "Agilität in Projektmanagement und Projektcontrolling – Ergebnisse einer empirischen Studie" ("Management and Control of Agile Projects – Empirical Evidence"), they present the results of a survey-based study on the use of traditional, hybrid and agile project management and the respective instruments for project control. The authors follow a contingency theoretical reasoning, which they confirm empirically. The results of the study show that the use of agile project management methods corresponds with the use of agile project control, whereas more traditionally managed projects and hybrid projects are subjected to more traditional project control instruments. The use of agile project management methods also seems to lead to a higher degree of satisfaction among project participants. The results further suggest that a fit between the project management method and the project control instruments increases project success.

The final article, "Agility as a Matter of Degree: An Empirical Study of the Determinants of Agility in Projects" by *Andresen, Mohammad* and *Wald*, seeks to provide more clarity on the concept of agility on a conceptual level. The authors argue that the choice between agile project management and traditional project management methods is not binary but a matter of degree. Furthermore, the determinants of agility, agile project management methods, and project agility as an outcome need to be distinguished. Building on *Qumer and Henderson-Sellers'* (2008) 4-DAT framework, *Andresen et al.* empirically test a model including a set of internal and external determinants of project agility and identify customer involvement, organizational culture and (less) upfront planning as important determinants.

Our special issue finishes with a brief review of the book (only available in German) "Verantwortungsvoll führen in einer komplexen Welt. Denkmuster – Werkzeuge – Praxisbeispiele" by Peter Gomez, Mark Lambertz, and Timo Meynhardt. The authors rely on the Viable System Model to make their case for a paradigm shift in management.

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