“NEW WAYS OF WORKING”

Origins, legitimation, and challenges

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THE ORIGINS OF « NEW WAYS OF WORKING »

1st Era (1996-2004): The Dutch Experience: "Het Nieuwe Werken"

- 1996: Interpolis, a Dutch insurance company, merges eight sites into a single building (2.500 workers)
- Some departments (e.g. Public Relations) occupy their workspace for an average of 10% of their working time
- A consultant, Erik Veldhoen, manages to persuade the Board of introducing flexible workspaces to save space
- He then wrote books in Dutch about his ideas ("Kantooren bestaan niet meer" and "the Art of Working")
- His main idea: the rise of a "new culture of flexibility" would increasingly underline space transformation projects

2nd Era (2005-2008): The Microsoft Example: "New World of Work"

- 2005: Leaders of Microsoft publish a white paper warning organizations that new ways of managing people in the digital age had to be found; emphasis on technological innovations and their impact on work organization
- "Old" organizations vs "new" ones
- 2008: Microsoft Netherlands moved to a new building, implements flex desk and remote working

3rd Era (2009-2014): The dissemination of NWoW: "New Way of Working"

- 2011: Book of Dirk Bijl on the *New Way of Working*; press article of Ruurd Baane on "*Bricks, Bytes & Behavior*"; cultural and managerial transformations are increasingly emphasized
- Multiple firms in the Netherlands then in Belgium commit to NWoW projects (Rabobank, Getronics, Alliander…)

4th Era (2015 - now): The banalization of NWoW: "New Ways of Working"

- Multiple firms claim to do many different things, but all use the "NWoW" label to designate their project
- What "NWoW" means has become increasingly complex!

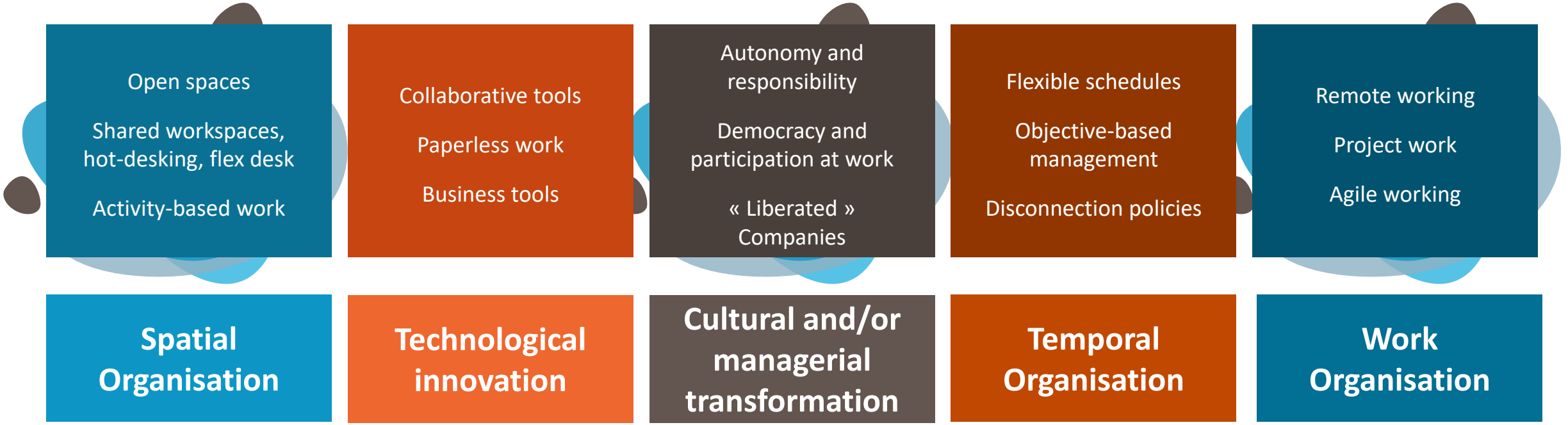
« NEW WAYS OF WORKING »?

WORLD OF WORK

Flexible contracts, technological innovation, outsourcing, mobility, generational issues…

WORK IDEAL

Reactivity, flexibility, autonomy, creativity, transparency, collaboration, democracy, empowerment…



HOW DO SUCH « NWOW » PROJECTS BECOME LEGITIMATE?

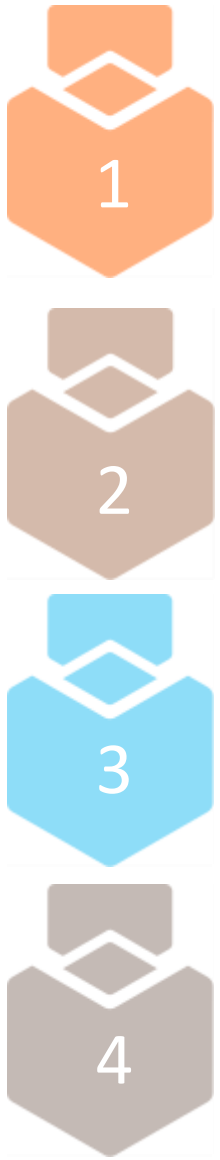
3 years longitudinal and empirical study in an insurance company (« BIC ») (interviews, observation periods, document analysis)

Side note: it's not just a trend from the private sector (SPF Mobilité, SPF Sécurité Sociale, RTBF, universities, STIB, Dutch municipalities, Régie des Bâtiments, Proximus…)

The legitimation process of NWoW at BIC

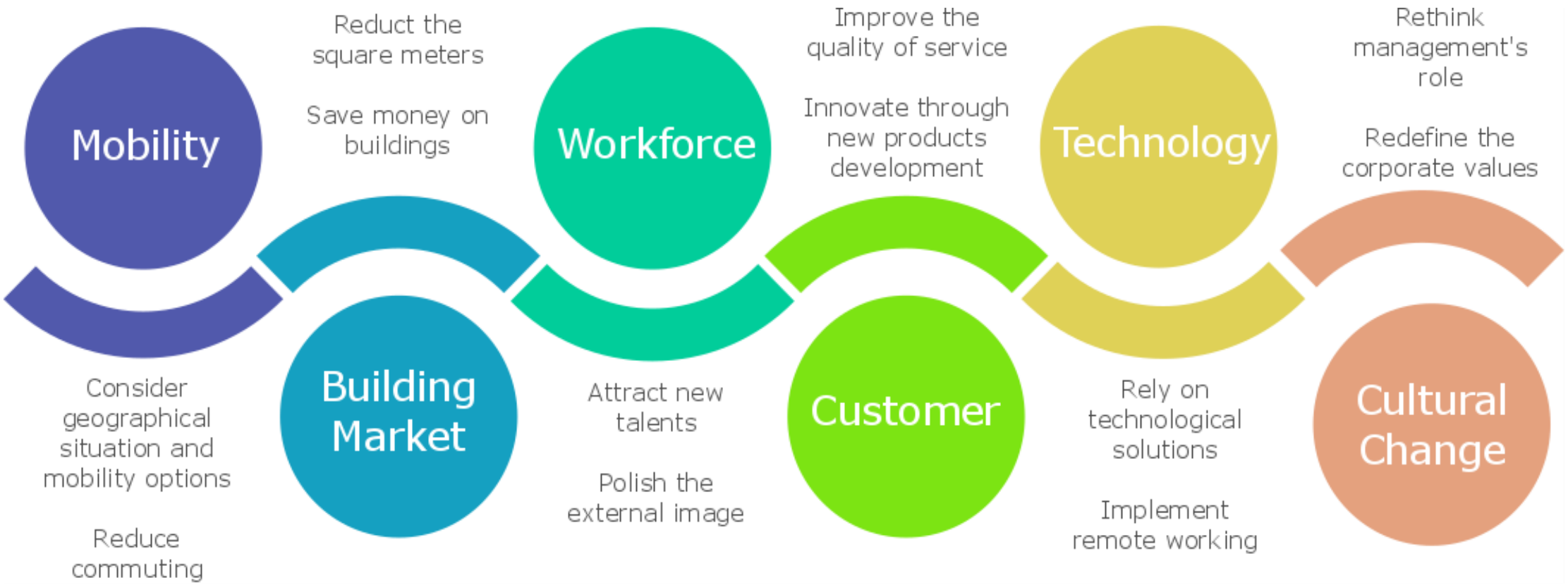
PRECIPITATING JOLTS

Relocation imperative



PROBLEMATIZATION

Socially constructed problem



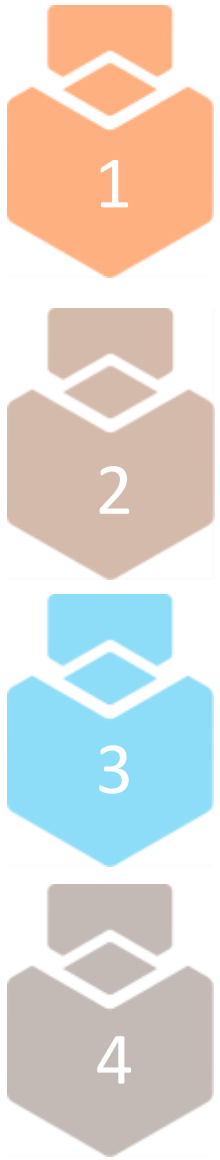
PROBLEMATIZATION PROCESS

"We could have said, in five years, we will move to another building. This is not what happened. We said, 2017 will be a year of cultural change, and incidentally, we will move out". (HR strategic advisor)

The legitimation process of NWoW at BIC

PRECIPITATING JOLTS
Relocation imperative

PREINSTITUTIONNALIZATION
Technically viable solutions



PROBLEMATIZATION
Socially constructed problem

INTERESSEMENT
Persuasion and inspiration

"*We had three lines of argument. One, this will be a project in which we save money. That was, in fact, the easiest part to demonstrate. Two, if we do that, the commitment and the motivation of our employees will rise. And three, as a consequence, their productivity will rise too. We had a lot of questions on those last two points, and it was not something that was easy for everyone in the executive committee to understand […] Because it was at odds with the company's culture*"
"*Our CEO was not immediately convinced […] He had a billion questions, ranging from strategic to pragmatic ones. And after six months, he finally said to the [executive] committee, now, we will not ask further efforts from the team, we have enough information, the real question is, do we believe in it, or not? He used the words: "this is an act of faith." Then, the committee collectively took the decision to go on with the project*" (HR strategic advisor of a large insurance group)

Jemine, G., Dubois, C., & Pichault, F. (2019). From a new workplace to a new way of working: legitimizing organizational change. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 15(3), pp. 257-278.

INTERESSEMENT

The legitimation process of NWoW at BIC

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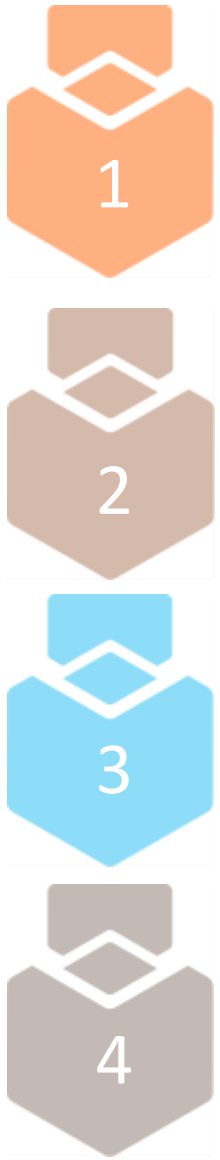
THEORIZATION
« Bricks, Bytes, Behaviors »



PROBLEMATIZATION
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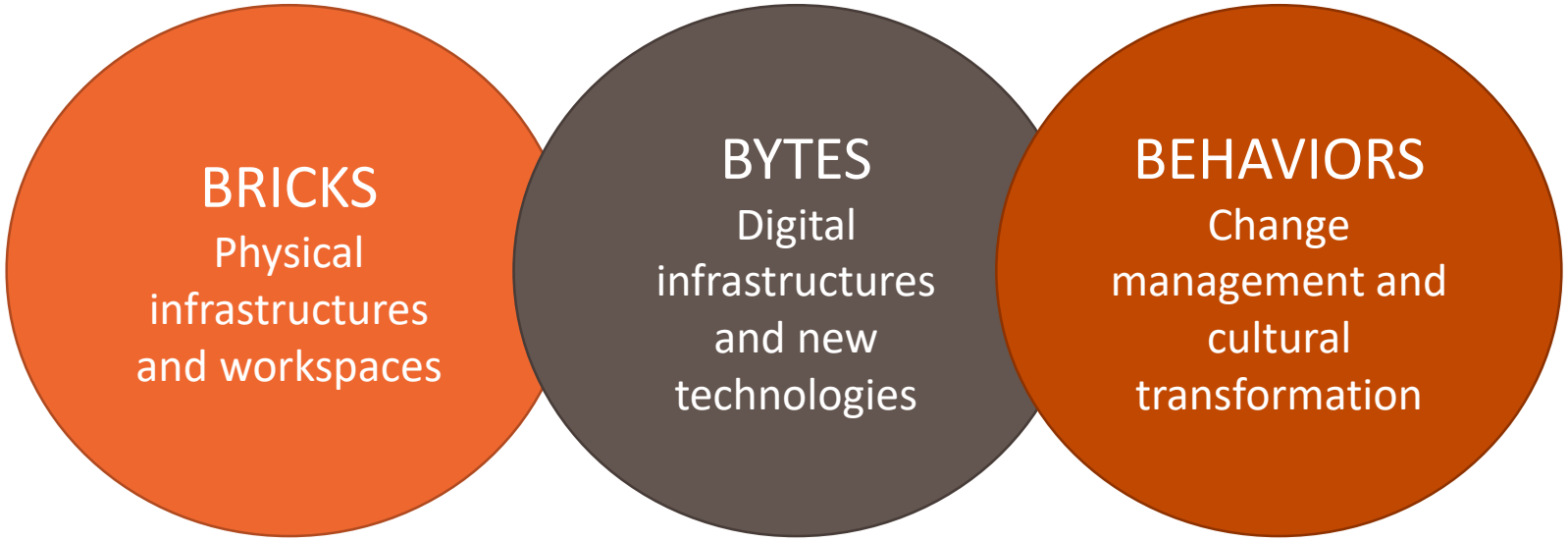


Open spaces
Flex Desk

New tools
Paperless work

Autonomy, trust, responsibility…

Remote working
Activity-based working

"3B" THEORIZATION

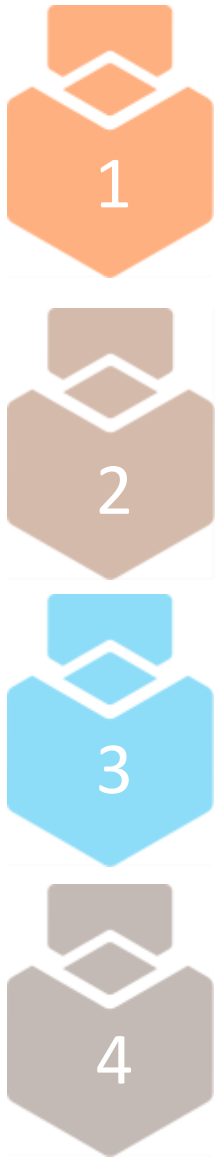
"At some point, we had to adopt a common language(…) When you talk about "NWoW", what are we saying exactly? (…) The"3B" is a proven approach which works very well. We saw that in the Netherlands." (HR Strategic Advisor)

The legitimation process of NWoW at BIC

PRECIPITATING JOLTS
Relocation imperative

PREINSTITUTIONNALIZATION
Technically viable solutions

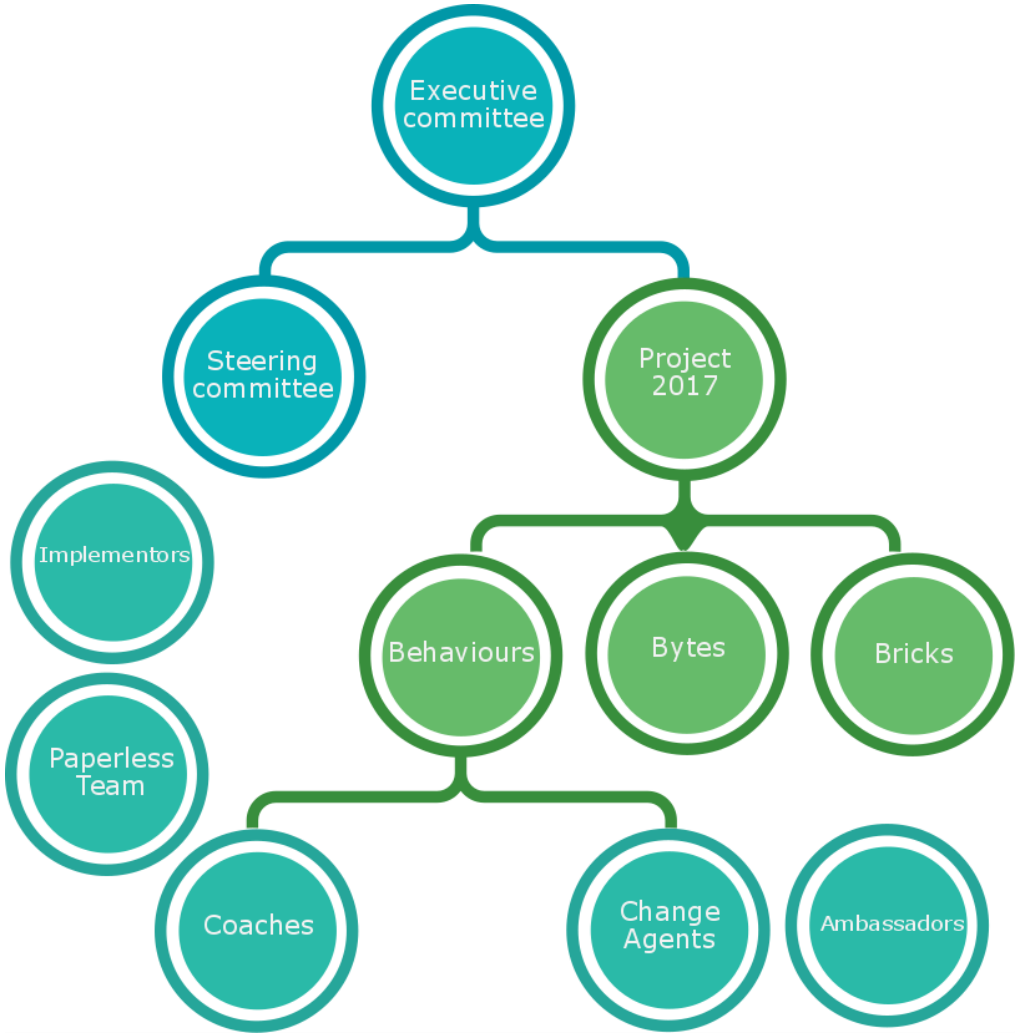
THEORIZATION
« Bricks, Bytes, Behaviors »



PROBLEMATIZATION
Socially constructed problem

INTERESSEMENT
Persuasion and inspiration

ENROLMENT
Teams structuration


Executive committee
Steering committee
Project 2017
Implementors
Behaviours
Bytes
Bricks
Paperless Team
Coaches
Change Agents
Ambassadors

ENROLMENT

The legitimation process of NWoW at BIC

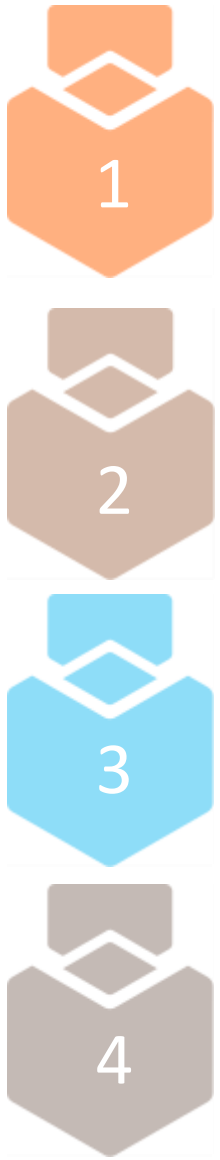
Precipitating jolts
Relocation imperative

Preinstitutionnalization
Technically viable solutions

Theorization
« Bricks, Bytes, Behaviors »

Objectification
Relocation

Dissemination
Visits and mimicry



Problematization
Socially constructed problem

Interessement
Persuasion and inspiration

Enrolment
Teams structuration

Mobilisation
Convinced spokespeople

CHALLENGES OF « NEW WAYS OF WORKING » ENVIRONMENTS

- Most surveys indicate that employees are **rather satisfied with NWoW environments**; common dissatisfaction factors among users include:
  - A difficulty to focus or noisy environments;
  - Lack of customization and personalization of the workspace (territories);
  - Uncivil behaviours (e.g. not cleaning desks, not respecting rules, etc.);
  - Constant exposure (both visual and auditory);
  - Managerial challenges (e.g. being managed at a distance)
  - Control, self-control and peer control issues
- Paradoxically, middle managers are simultaneously indispensable for the success of NWoW projects, yet their role is usually challenged by project leaders
  - Workers' autonomy and responsibility, trust over control, objective-based management, managing at a distance, empowerment, need to reinvent themselves, democracy and participation at work…
- Conceived space (= how NWoW workspaces are described) is very different from lived space (= how users actually live in these workspaces)
- Multiple challenges in the course of the change process!

THANK YOU!

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