

Organizational Change-A Psychological and Emotional Perspective

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Abstract— In the current climate of economic pressure and evolving political priorities, organizational change is becoming an increasing priority. However, change is a complex process that can have negative as well as positive outcomes and as such it is worth looking at the available evidence so that the process is conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Change needs to be associated with a sense of urgency and must be propelled by various driving forces that need to be stronger than the restraining forces.

Persons leading a change effort need to understand what to expect at the emotional level of the change experience and the psychological phases people must go through to adapt successfully to changes affecting their work patterns.

An individual's perception of a change situation determines whether resistance will occur. The same situation can be perceived as a positive change by one person and a negative change by another

I. INTRODUCTION

Concept of Change

Change refers to an alteration in the system whether physical, biological, or social.

“Organizational change is the planned alteration of work environment in an organization.” It implies a new equilibrium between different components of the organization including technology structural arrangement, job design and people.

Organizational change involves moving from present state to future state or desired state. It is Intentional attempt by management to improve the overall performance of individual, group and the organizational as a whole by altering the organizational structure, behavior and technology. Organization change includes organizational development in broadest sense.

According to Nickols (2000), change management has at least three basic definitions, which are as follows:

- A body of knowledge, which consists of models, methods and techniques, tools, skills and other forms of knowledge that go into making up a practice.

Hiatt and Creasey (2002), state that change management evolved as a result of the convergence of two predominant fields of thought, namely:

McKee (1998) provides an interesting insight into change management by reflecting on the difference between change

and transition. He states that changes are successfully made by organizations, but they fail in the process of transition. Change is physical, like moving from point A to point B, but transition is a psychological process that people need to go through to come to terms with the new situation and this takes time. Transition starts with an ending. For people to successfully make a change, they must leave the past. Transition, as an inward psychological process, happens much more slowly than the outward physical change.

Types of Organizational change

1. Unplanned change

Unplanned change occurs when management may not have expected such change as they are not ready for change and the forces for change overwhelm the efforts for resist change.

2. Planned change

Planned change is a systematic management efforts to move an organization or a subsystem to new or desired state. It may include deliberately changing the organizational design, technology, task, people, information systems etc.

Change Phases

By breaking change down into discrete time periods or phases, change leaders can

adapt their strategies and techniques based on the unique attributes of that phase. There are four stages in the process that forms the foundation of successful change management, namely:

1. Creating a sense of urgency - Change in an organisation does not happen in a vacuum. If nothing happened to disturb organisational life, change would be very slow and perhaps, merely accidental. Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining the needed co-operation to bring about change. Employees at all levels within the organisation need to be aware of the forces driving change, and need to be motivated to undertake change that will impact on their personal and working environment.
2. Building a strong guiding coalition - Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. A strong guiding coalition is always needed - one with the right composition, level of trust and shared objectives. The kind of leadership that needs to be present with major change efforts is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is where leaders are agents of change. These leaders develop a vision for the organisation, inspire and collectively bond the employees to that vision and gives them a ‘can do’ attitude that makes the vision achievable.

- Transformational leaders energize and direct employees to a new set of corporate values and behaviors.
3. Formulating a Vision and Strategy - At the heart of change management lies the change problem. That is, for some future state to be realized, some current state needs to be left behind and some structured, organised process for getting from one to the other needs to exist. The vision is the bridge between the current and future states and is the force behind transformations. The vision should include the rationale, benefits and personal ramifications of the suggested change.
 4. Implementing the Change: Communicating the vision Managers must be clear in their communications and a formal communications plan is very helpful during a change initiative. Communication competes with "share of mind" with many other communications. Weak communications exist, when senior and middle managers do not confer with supervisors or employees about the intended changes. Communication needs to be assessed by looking at the why, what, how, and when of communicating during the planning and implementation phases of change. Many change interventions fail because organisations fail to plan and manage communications, which means that the change programme doesn't gain the awareness, support, involvement and commitment needed to succeed.

Critical Aspects of Impact of change

The impact of change on an organization is manifested in multiple ways. There are various aspects that are impacted in organizational change. These are as follows:

- Amount – The number of alterations required by the change.
- Scope – The range or span of the organization affected by the change.
- Time – The amount of time the participants have to implement the change.
- Transferability – The degree to which the change is easy to communicate and will be understood by participants.
- Predictability – How well the participants can accurately anticipate the effect of the change on them.
- Ability – The degree to which change targets feel they have or can attain the knowledge and skill necessary to implement the change.
- Values – The degree to which the change targets must change some of their strongly-held beliefs about the way they are operating.
- Emotions – The extent to which the change requires targets to feel differently about people of operating procedures.
- Knowledge – The degree to which the change requires participants to learn new information or view existing information differently than they have in the past.

- Behaviors – The extent to which the change requires targets to modify their daily routine of job-related activities.
- Logistics – The degree to which the change requires any significant alteration in the targets' job procedures, such as scheduling, time management, and equipment utilization.
- Economics – The degree to which the change requires targets to operate differently regarding budgets, expenses, or funding.
- Politics – The degree to which the targets must modify their current methods of influencing others, utilizing power, networking, teamwork, dealing with territoriality, or protecting vested interests.

Roles in the Organizational Change Process

During any organizational change process, four roles are essential to the success of the change process. These are the change sponsor, the change agent, the change advocate, and the change participant.

Change Sponsor – A sponsor is the individual (or group) with the power to determine that change will occur. They are responsible to introduce the change and legitimize it by using their organizational power and influence to legitimize the change. In most institutions, a change sponsor is usually performed by executive or upper administration.

Change Agent – An agent is the individual (or group) responsible for seeing that a previously determined change occurs. They design and implement or help to implement the change. The role of change agent is normally performed by middle or lower level administration.

Change Advocate – An advocate is the individual (or group) who want to achieve a change but lacks the power to sanction it and require support from the appropriate sponsor who can approve the change. Any individual within an organization who has a good idea and the ability to communicate it can be a change advocate.

Change Participant – A participant is an individual (or group) who, as a result of the change, will alter their knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behavior. These people are the focus of the change effort and must be educated to understand the changes they are expected to accommodate. Typically, they are part of a workgroup. In a change project, change agents assist them in adapting to the change.

The Human Element in Organizational Change

Most projects designed to change the organization are initiated with minimal attention given to the human aspects of change and to the resistance which generally occurs during the actual implementation. Administrators display little understanding about the critical role that the human element plays in influencing the orderly transition phase of a change effort. Typically, they focused on the operational and technical aspects of accomplishing change within their institutions. Focusing on fulfilling traditional administrative functions, they use the common management approach of "tell and sell" to implementing change.

When confronted with the uncertainty caused by change, most people attempt to maintain a sense of control over their lives. This sense of control is created when people feel they understand their environment and can adapt to it as changes occur. This understanding derives from an individual's frame of reference that allows one to interpret and understand what is occurring in the present and what to expect in the future.

When change disturbs an individual's pattern of expectations of the future, uncertainty increases and disrupts the individual's sense of control. If the change is minor the individual makes psychological adjustments to his or her expectations and adapts to the change. If the change is major individuals react with feelings of uncertainty, disorientation, confusion, and loss of equilibrium. These feelings result from inconsistencies between what was expected and what is perceived. Individuals no longer know what to expect from themselves or others. Major change in an organization that results in a disruption of expectations of its members always causes a level of crisis.

Human beings, and consequently their organizations, exhibit certain limits to the amount of change that they can assimilate over a given period of time. Beyond these limits, individuals can no longer effectively adapt to change within their organization. Healthy coping behaviors are replaced with dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., increased anxiety, confusion, miscommunication, low morale, defensiveness, and territoriality) that prevent the adoption of the new behaviors required by the change. To avoid these symptoms, administrators responsible for the implementation of major organizational change need to know what impact change efforts will have on those individuals or groups who need to alter their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior to accommodate the change.

Psychological Nature of Change

Human beings experience change when they are faced with a situation that they perceive is beyond their current capabilities. To deal with the situations they normally encountered, human beings have to believe that they have the capability to deal with it. The capability of individuals to deal with change consists of not only having the ability to deal with the change, but also the willingness to apply that ability while understanding both the risk and opportunity the change poses. Most individuals develop the abilities and willingness to use them in solving the challenges they have previously encountered successfully. They do not see these challenges as representing any significant change in their lives because they are usually able to accurately predict what the outcome of a situation will be. Their expectations of the outcome are upset, however, when they encounter a challenge that they perceive as beyond their capabilities. The resulting disruption in the balance between their perception of their capabilities and the demands of the challenge encountered represents the discomfort posed by change.

An individual's perception of a change situation determines whether resistance will occur. The same situation can be perceived as a positive change by one person and a negative change by another. The perception of whether individuals perceive a change as positive or negative depends not only on the difference in how people perceive the nature of eventual

outcome of the change, but also the degree of influence and control people believe they have in determining the outcome. Persons are more comfortable with change when they not only possess the ability and willingness to change, but also from the degree they feel able to predict and control it. Individuals perceive change as negative when they are unable to anticipate it, dislike its implications and feel inadequately prepared for its effects. Where once they experienced emotional equilibrium because they had some control of the situation, they now experience the anxiety because they are unable to predict and feel they have no, or little, control over a situation they perceive as chaotic. Thus, it is not the magnitude of change, but the degree to which one's expectations are met and the ability to predict the outcome that determines peoples' perception and emotional response to change.

Change is considered minor when it does not significantly disrupt what people anticipate will happen. In such circumstances, they simply adapt to the change by making minor adjustment in their expectations and readily lose any feelings of minor stress that initially appear. When a change is major, however, peoples' expectations are no longer valid and they believe they have lost control over some important aspect of their lives. A feeling of being in their comfort zone disappears to be replaced by their experiencing confusion, anxiety, fear, anger and a loss of emotional equilibrium.

Before planning or even contemplating an organizational change project, change sponsors and agents should try to systematically anticipate participants' perceptions and identify who might resist the change and why. Some common categories of reasons people resist change are:

- A desire not to lose something of value.
- Misunderstanding of the change and its implications.
- Belief that the change doesn't make sense for the organization.
- A low tolerance for change

The Emotional Response of Change

Persons leading a change effort need to understand what to expect at the emotional level of the change experience and the psychological phases people must go through to adapt successfully to changes affecting their work patterns. Emotional responses of participants typically accompany major institutional change and affect acceptance of that change. These responses develop as the "emotional cycle of change" that consists of predictable phases. Understanding the emotional cycle process allows individuals leading the change project to interpret and deal with current behavior of those affected by the change and to help them to develop more realistic expectations of the change's outcome.

When these phases are ignored or not taken seriously, resistance to change usually increases. Change projects are not likely to be successful when participants only understand what to expect in terms of the project's goals and rewards. It is also important to prepare those affected by the change for any emotional shifts that might occur in themselves or others because of the project.

Organizational Change-A Psychological and Emotional Perspective

During the change process, the emotional responses of change participants shift from feelings and attitudes of the certainty of success in the early stages to satisfaction at the project's completion. When an individual becomes voluntarily involved in the significant change activity or project, the level of positive feeling concerning that venture is often directly related to the person's expectations of what will be involved. Although individuals may become pessimistic about their ability or willingness to accomplish the task, the more they learn about what is involved in the project the more likely they are to eventually come to accept and support it.

Positive response to change - As persons make the transition from the state of "unfreezing" to the state of "refreezing", persons who have a positive response to the change typically go through the following five emotional phases.

Uninformed optimism- At the beginning of a change project, there is frequently a "honeymoon period." Hopes and optimism are high among the individuals involved. It appears that all the major obstacles have been identified and planned for. Feelings are running high and morale is at a peak.

Informed pessimism- When the change project has developed further, problems increasingly surface. Few solutions are apparent or available. The project may seem unattainable or unrealistic. Morale drops, and people ask themselves why they ever got involved or thought they could accomplish the change project in the first place.

Hopeful realism- Participants in change usually begin to perceive the project differently in this phase, and pessimism declines. They begin to feel a sense of realistic hope based on solid reality testing and develop a new confidence in their capability to handle whatever new problems may surface.

Informed optimism- During this phase, optimism continues to develop, based on the growing confidence in self and project. Typically there is a fresh burst of energy linked to overcoming problems and uncertainty and sensing that completion is near.

Rewarding completion.- Once a successful change has been made, the experience processed, and the project formally closed, participants experience a sense of satisfaction.

Negative response to change - Persons who have a negative response to the change experience a different cycle of eight emotional phases.

Stability- The announcement of the change has not occurred yet. The status-quo is representative of the state of the organization.

Immobilization- The initial reaction to the announcement of the change is shock. The change is so alien to the participant's frame of reference that he or she is often unable to relate what is happening, resulting in temporary confusion or complete disorientation.

Denial- The participant is unable to assimilate new information regarding the change into his or her frame of

reference. Information related to the change is often rejected or ignored. The common reactions are: "It won't last. It won't affect me" or "If I ignore it, it will go away".

Anger- The individual exhibits frustration, hurt and, at times, irrational, indiscriminate lashing out at those in close proximity. These emotions may be directed at individuals who are the friends, family and colleagues who are blamed, criticized and treated with hostility.

Bargaining- To avoid the negative impact of the change, participants begin to negotiate. Bargaining can take many forms including extension of deadlines, reassignments, exception from the change, etc. This phase is the beginning of acceptance because the participant recognizes that he or she can no longer avoid confronting the change.

Depression- In this phase, participants normally respond with feelings of resignation to failure, and being victimized. They display a lack of emotional and physical energy. There is also a general disengagement from one's work. Although unpleasant, depression represents a step in the acceptance process as the full impact of the change is being finally acknowledged.

Testing- Participants begin to regain a sense of control by freeing themselves of feelings of depression and victimization. The new limitations posed by the changes are acknowledged and ways are explored to redefine goals that will make it possible for them to succeed within the new framework represented by the change.

Acceptance- The change is now responded to realistically. While the participants may not still fully like the change, they are more grounded and productive within the new context

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