

MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE. OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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“Change occurs daily in organizations, by design, spontaneously, or by default. Change is oriented to the future, and each individual change may provoke a reaction that in turn provokes another future reaction”.

Phd. Patrick J. Montana

ABSTRACT

Why is leading change important? The most basic reason is that entities, whether they be individuals, managers, teams, or organizations, that do not adapt to change in timely ways are unlikely to survive. The resistance of the change characterizing the bureaucracy in public sector's organizations. In US, Fortune Magazine first published its list of America's top 500 companies in 1956. Sadly, only twenty nine companies from the top 100 on the original list remain today. Survival, for any type of organization cannot be taken from granted. The most successful companies know that, to survive, they must adapt to accelerating and increasingly complex environmental dynamics. Today's norm of pervasive change brings problems, challenges and opportunities. Those individuals, managers and organizations that recognize the inevitability of change, learn to adapt to it, and attempt to manage it, will be the most successful.

KEYWORDS: *Change-the process of transforming the manner in which an individual or organization acts from on set of behavior to another; may be systematic or planned, or may be implemented in a random manner*

Organizational development - *the concept of changing the behavior of an organization, either its entirety or in parts, by changing the way employees work, the structure of the organization, or the technology used.*

Resistance to change - *a force active in individuals and in groups that minimizes or limits the amount of change that will occur.*

Organizational climate - *the overall economic and social environment of an organizational entity, taking into account such notions as power structure, external forces, and perceived needs.*

Change process's - *the ways in which changes are accomplished; may be imposed from above or participative, depending on the organizational philosophy and nature of the change.*

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Loosely translated from the French that means “the more things changed, the more they stay the same”. In the words of Machiavelli “There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in introducing a new order of things”. These quotations point out two basic and somewhat opposite concepts about change”.

No change is final. This really means that a static mode in management is impossible. Each change creates a set of other changes.

Most people and most organizational entities become comfortable with the way business is done. BAU¹ is often the easier route to getting one's job done. Managing change implies changing people's habits, behavior patterns, and sometimes attitudes about how jobs are performed.

The concept of change encompasses the future-that is the unknown. Change brings uncertainty, and each action of change produces a reaction. A memorandum from senior management indicating a new set of work hours, a new system for sales orders, or a new claims processing method is sure to evoke discussion among those responsible for implementing the change.

Why do some organizations adapt to new markets, see opportunities for their product or service, centralize and/or decentralize their management structures, develop innovative programs for training their employees, and other organizations glide along the same basic mode for many years? Recognition and acceptance of forces for change-external and individual- is a key element in foreseeing change.

1.1 External forces that determine changes

Key among external forces for change is recognizing the need for more, less, or different goods and /or services. Consumer needs and wants change; other similar businesses change their promotion or pricing structures; and shifts occur in the spending ability of various groups of consumers. The manager and the firm that avoid recognizing these changes may well be outpaced by others who have seen the trend and have adapted their operation to take advantage of an opportunity in the marketplace.

Changes in laws or regulations can also be potent external forces for change. Here there is usually less choice about compliance. The change, however, can impact the amount of resource outlay for a firm, the amount and type of records that must be kept, and the way a supervisor performs. For example, consider a new safety regulation requiring safety glasses in a machine shop department. The organization is obliged to ensure that workers have the glasses (perhaps even at the employer's expense) and the workers have the glasses. Unless introduced carefully and with some consideration of the workers' views, the need to meet or comply with an external force could be viewed very negatively.

A third external force can be termed "technology". Examples abound: sensing devices that read codes at supermarket checkout counters; IT innovating; these technological advances continue to appear at an extremely high rate. Managers who ignore these advances (most of them are providing from public sector) run the risk of slower processing, longer term obsolescence, or, in some cases, high cost-benefit ratios.

1.2 Internal forces

One of the most important internal forces for change is the power structure or organizational arrangement of the firm. Such areas as control systems, formal authority structure, information channels, are reward systems tend to influence managers' incentives to develop ideas for change and even to implement those ideas. If we consider an organization from public sector, affirm with very stringent control systems, a hierarchical power and decision structure, and a minimal merit raise compensation system. For the US management [1,p.350], these organizational attributes, separately or in combination, may represent considerable hurdles to developing and/or implementing change. The American experience in organizational behavior shown up that many times a crisis situation (stockholder uprising or a bankruptcy threat) is needed to "unfreeze" the organization.

¹ Business as usual

A second internal force that exerts pressure for or against change is the force of people. Human resources are generally necessary to produce the organization goods or services. Many people prefer the business-as-usual approach and resist change. Others, anxious for new ideas, are always looking for new and better ways. If we designed the situation of “new and better ways” person is supervising a group of “business-as-usual” subordinates; the possibility of conflict and the need for some intervention to resolve such as conflict are apparent[2,pp.239-243].

1.3 Change: a continuum and a process

One of the basic laws of nature is that each action produces a reaction. So, too, in the management of an organization, each change, whether the introduction of a computer system, a change in an assembly line, or a change in the pay raise system, produces a different pattern of behavior on the part of those affected. If the desired pattern of behavior is not achieved, chances are that another change intervention will be developed to try to achieve the desired goal. This tends to produce a continuum of change or, stated alternatively, an absence of sameness.

Most organizations prefer to implement change in a systematic, orderly manner. In general, some stimuli (external or internal) to change trigger an idea or recognition of a problem. Alternatives are then developed and analyzed and a decision made and implemented. Results are then evaluated and data used to provide feedback for further changes.

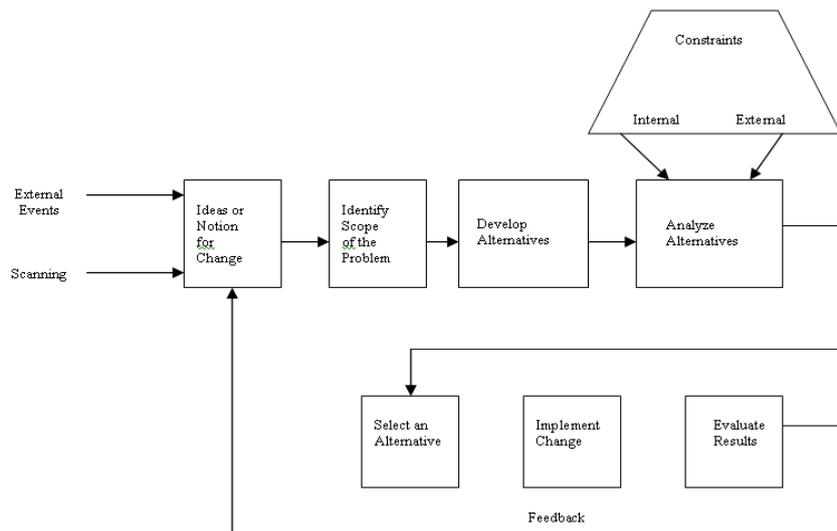


Figure 1 A systematic approach to managing change

1.4 Implement the change

Implementation of a planned change is a key component of any managerial job and involves translating upper management’s decision into activities that will produce the desired outcomes.

In implementing change, it is important to note varying styles of leadership. In a continuum, one may describe these styles as ranging from autocratic to participative. In the autocratic style, change is assumed to be an edict from top management. This may be in a form of memorandum or a special videotape or cassette or letter. The initial intervention is a written or verbal communication instructing workers to change their behavior pattern. It is

one-way form of communication that assumes that lower level managers and workers will change their behaviors to achieve to desired outcome. Such an autocratic approach does not take into account several factors, chief of which are:

- The natural resistance to change
- The need to unfreeze current behavior patterns
- The tendency to continue doing business as usual.

Another approach to managing change is to involve subordinates in developing and implementing the change. This participative approach shares the responsibility and authority for change by bringing the subordinates on board very early in the process. This principle is, in fact, one of the basic concepts of the quality circle approach, developed in the United States in the mid-1940-s and adopted and popularized by Japanese industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For this highly participative approach to work, several conditions must exist:

- Subordinates must wish to be involved. A managerial leadership climate that encourages employees to take part in solutions to the problems of the organization must exist. They must believe that their participation is not simply a rubber stamp to support a solution predetermined by management.

- Managers must be confident in their roles. Normally a manager considers it his or her responsibility to solve problems. The concept of involving subordinates who may come up with a better solution takes a high degree of confidence and an understanding of the broader role of the manager.

- Employees must be willing to voice new ideas, and managers must be willing to listen new ideas. These two conditions complement each other. If one is absent, the other will be defeated. As a manager, you may be faced with a situation in which you would like employees to participate, but your predecessor practiced the autocratic management style and employees were unaccustomed to any participation. Given the first opportunity of participation, it is highly likely that employees will initially offer few, if any, suggestions to solve problems. Consistent involvement, over time, is needed to build this relationship.

Once subordinates and managers develop confidence in the participative approach, problems may be presented and solutions discussed. Implementation becomes easier because of the earlier involvement and because subordinates have “bought in” to the problem, the process, and the solution.

1.5 A change model

One of the earliest theories of change was the forced field analysis proposed by Kurt Lewin[3, pp.228-229]. Change occurs when the forces pushing in one direction are greater than the forces pushing in the opposite direction. A state of balance exists when the restraining forces acting to prevent the change are equal to the forces attempting to produce change.

According to Lewin, planned change occurs in three stages: unfreezing, change and refreezing.

1. Unfreezing occurs when individuals see a need for change. The status quo is disturbed by unsettling forces that challenge current values, attitudes and behaviours.

2. Change is the action-oriented stage in which the situation is diagnosed, improved patterns of behavior are selected, and a new equilibrium is created. As a result of change, individuals develop new values, attitudes and or/behaviors.

3. Refreezing stabilizes the changes and solidifies the new patterns of behavior. Refreezing requires continued management of the change process beyond the immediate implementation. Refreezing also requires that individuals experience positive consequences to strengthen their continuing commitment to the new change. The new state then becomes the status quo for future behavior [4, pp.129-146].

According to Lewin’s force field analysis, managers created planned change by altering the restraining and driving forces. A careful analysis is needed to determine how the restraining forces can be reduced and/or how the driving forces can be strengthened. It

has been a popular model for analyzing change programs and predicting the effects of future changes.

1.6 Overcoming resistance to change

Harvard professors John Kotter and Leonard Sclesinger[5,pp.328-336]have developed six general strategies for overcoming resistance to change:

Education and Communication

Even if the consequences of a change are generally perceived as positive, extensive communication will help reduce anxiety and ensure that people understand what is happening, what will be expected of them, and how they will be supported in adapting to change. The objective is to help people learn beforehand the reasons for the change, how it will occur and what the likely consequences will be.

Education and communication are commonly used where people lack information about the change or have received inaccurate information. Educating people about a change, can be very time consuming, but if people are persuaded that the change is a good thing, they will help with the implementation.

Participation and Involvement

Participation increases understanding, enhances feelings of control, reduces uncertainty and promotes a feeling of ownership when change directly affects people. Encourage those involved to help design and implement the changes in order to draw out their ideas and to foster commitment. It is difficult for people to resist changes that they themselves helped bring about.

Participation is a necessity when the initiators do not possess all the information needed to design the change, or when others have power to resist. Participation takes a lot of time, and those involved may be able to influence inappropriate changes. Participants may have helpful information and ideas, and they will be committed to implementing whatever change is decided upon.

Facilitation and Support

By accepting people's anxiety and legitimate and helping them cope with change, managers have a better chance of gaining respect and the commitment to make it work. Provide encouragement and support, training, counseling, and resources to help those affected by the change adapt to new requirements. Although it takes a lot of time and may not always work, when people are resisting because of anxiety and coping problems, facilitation and support are vital ingredients of successfully implementing change.

Institutionalizing Changes in the Organizational Culture

At this refreezing stage, new values and beliefs are instilled in the culture so that employees view the changes not as something new but as normal and integral part of how the organization operates. This is achieved by rewarding new behaviors so that old habits, values, traditions and mindsets are permanently replaced.

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