Possible Strategies for Managing Discontinuous Change

The Roles of Leaders in

Change Management

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Abstract

Organizational change is an essential part of business development. It is notoriously difficult and more often than not, proposed changes in an organization fail to achieve their objectives. This is due to the inadequacy or dismissal of leaders in disseminating changes to their followers in a way that encourages them to embrace and implement change(s). Organizational leaders have a very difficult job; however, they must not shirk their responsibilities towards the bread and butter of their organization – the employees. Leaders are solely responsible for ensuring that employees have a sense of belonging and significance in their organization. Once this is realized, the process of change management becomes easy and employees will be less resistant to change and more secure in their abilities and their positions. Nonetheless, there remains a lot to be learned surrounding the best ways to bring forth change in an organization. This paper provides a review of the available literature in the area of change management, covering the drivers of change and the attitudes of leaders and employees to organizational change. It also introduces some strategies that leaders can execute in their efforts towards widely accepted and successful changes in their organization.

Index Terms: Globalisation, Transformational Leadership, Change Management, Efficacy, Commitment, RTC

Introduction

In recent years organizational change has deeply influenced the role of leaders and leadership styles. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and discuss the role of leaders in change management in

relation to understanding and handling the response of organizational members toward changes, so that a leadership strategy for managing discontinuous change can be developed. Based on this purpose, this paper is divided into two main sections drawing on relevant literature. Section 1 discusses the external drivers of change and the attitudes and roles of leaders and employees to change from the perspectives of scholars. Section 2 covers the strategies that leaders may implement to successfully manage discontinuous changes in an organization.

Analysis of scholarly research relating to the role of leaders in change management

There is plenty of literature expounding the role of leaders in change management. This section, covers literature around change management, the forces behind change, and the employees' response toward changes in order to analyze the role of leaders in these processes.

Change management

Change management approaches are a tool to shift an organization from its existing state to a planned future state. Organizational leaders must adapt to this process in order to assist the stakeholders in accepting changes in business environments in order to maximize profits. According to Vales (2007), organizational change is constant and leaders and managers require a myriad of critical skills to implement it. According to Whelan-Berry, Gordon, and Hinings (2003), organizational changes can only occur when the majority of organizational members adapt to their behavior toward the change. A synthesis can be drawn upon the definition of organizational change as a structured method, which ensures that the organizational changes being implemented are smooth and successful with lasting benefits. Based on the literature, it can be assumed that change management is dependent on the external forces of the business environment, including change in customer attitude. Thus, it can be argued that, to successfully implement changes in an organization, leaders must acquire knowledge about the forces of change.

Forces of changes

In today's business climate, change is rapid and perpetual. This is the result of constant changes and growth in the social and business environments. Globalization, technological advancements and changes in customer needs are just some of the well-known drivers of organizational change. In addition to these, global economic conditions and the emergence of social media such as Facebook and Instagram are some of the more modern drivers of organizational change. Nonetheless, there is not a lot of literature relating to these forces of change. Increasing our understanding of what drives organizational change will help businesses be better prepared and plan steps towards successful changes.

Globalization

Global competition plays an important role in organizational changes. Heger (2007), argued that organizational restructuring is often the result of increased industrial competition and government laws. For example, since the 1970's the manufacturing of garments has declined in the USA due to shifting manufacturing units to developing countries such as, China and Bangladesh. In addition, due to the emergence of foreign competition and other successful organizations with their innovative new products, local organizations have been forced to adapt changes to sustain themselves in the market.

The literature also suggests that with globalization and increased immigration there has been a proliferation of cultural diversity causing demographic changes in organizations as they hire more immigrants. As a result, just as with the society in general, almost every organization has had to adjust and embrace immigration and outsourcing.

Technology

The advancement of technology is making all aspects of business faster, more effective and cheaper. To this end, in order to keep up with rapid advances in technology, globalization, and the impact of social and corporate media, employees are forced to constantly upgrade their skills and knowledge by attending numerous training and development programs. Interestingly, according to Stevens-Roseman (2009), although older employees are still working as mentors, organizations are constantly hiring young persons from the new generation as a way of harnessing skills in technology to promote organizational change.

Social networks including Facebook, Twitter, Linked In and other blogs have also played a significant role in organizational change by revolutionizing marketing and exponentially increasing target markets. In fact, almost every customer service oriented organization, together with manufacturers now advertise on social media and offer online shopping

Politics

Politics has always played an important role in organizational changes. According to Heger (2007), the introduction of government regulations including pressure to make financial dealings transparent, have reduced fraud and furthered ethical improprieties in business. Organizational leaders, consumers, and employees are more sensitive towards business environments and conduct due to the increased level of awareness through education. Indeed, the behavior of companies has become a concern in this present era, where big brands like Gap for instance have faced criticism for being "unethical in their dealings". One example where organizations have been negatively affected by global political regulation can been seen with the imposition of a strict quota system by the USA on developing countries in the garments export industry. This has created a growth barrier for countries like Bangladesh, who are one of the largest produces of garments in the world.

Cost Reduction

One way that many businesses originating in developed nations reduce costs is by moving their production offshore to countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. For example, Bell Canada moved their entire customer service unit to India to cut costs. In return, the Indian chapter of Bell Canada had to accommodate changes in both technology and management to meet Canadian customer needs.

Another way that organizations are being forced to cut costs in the present economy is via employee layoffs and even closing down entire divisions. For example, Sears Canada has just announced 700 layoffs in order to restructure their company and Future Shop and Best Buy are closing down a number of retail stores in Canada, laying off 900 employees. In addition, big brands such as, General Motors, Circuit City, Eddie Bauer, Bear Stearns, and Merrill Lynch have been subject to bankruptcy and being merged with other organizations. In another example, the collapse of housing and financial sectors in the USA in 2008 had affected not only organizations but also people in general. It is clear from this discussion that further studies on these forces of change relating to technological advancement, global economic condition and the emergence of social media and online shopping are required. By increasing our understanding of change management the progression and preparation of business growth can become a lot more calculated and contribute to the successful implementation of change.

Employee attitudes toward change

There are two key sources of resistance to change, including individual sources (stemming from employees) and organizational sources. The attitude of employees toward change is an important topic for organizational leaders to understand. When organizational leaders fail to understand or acknowledge the attitudes of their employees toward particular changes, those changes can become

almost impossible to implement. There are many examples in the literature on how the resistance of employees to change can cause significant issues and serve to work against change. According to Burnes (2004), the unsuccessful implementation of changes occurs when organizations fail to achieve the intended goals due to the proposed changes. Choi (2011) predicted that about 75% of projects connected with organizational change fail every year. Choi (2011) noted that the inability of organizational leaders to understand the attitudes of employees toward the change process is the most common reason behind failure. Furthermore, Jones, Jimmieson and Griffiths (2005) illustrated that successful change occurs only when individuals embrace alternative working behaviors that align with proposed changes.

According to Berneth, Armenakis, Field and Walker (2007), there are four key attitudinal constructs relating to professional attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and environmentally fit individuals. These four constructs are readiness for change, commitment to change, openness to change and the levels of cynicism among employees about an organizational change. Below is a literature review discussing the origin, application, and antecedents that define the role of leaders today.

Readiness for change

Studies on readiness for change originated primarily in health, psychology and medical literature. These studies focused mainly on individual behavior changes from harmful habits such as, smoking, drug abuse, and alcoholism toward healthy habits such as, exercising, managing body weight, and maintaining a healthy diet (Morera, Johnson, Freels, Parsons, Critenden, Flay & Warnecke, 1998). Researchers have started to apply similar theories about readiness to organizational changes. According to Jansen (2000), considering organizational context is necessary in order to prepare for

changes. This implies that employees need to understand the possible outcome of changes so that they know where they belong in the change process. While the leaders of an organization is able to put forward proposals to make changes, the success and the implementation of change is likely to be a function of the employees understanding and readiness for that change. Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) further illustrated that by consulting employees and ensuring their involvement by seeking information and opinions from them regarding a potential change, we can positively impact upon the overall organizational readiness for change. In line with this, Jones, Jimmieson and Griffiths (2005) suggested that the belief among employees in an organization's ability to accommodate changes contributes heavily to readiness for changes. Several factors that contribute to readiness were outlined by Berneth et al. (2007). Including the availability of policies to support changes, trust in peers and leaders, participation at work, self-efficacy, motivation, organizational commitment, personal competence and job satisfaction.

Commitment to change

Both scholars and practitioners have considered commitment as an important employee behaviour. According to Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topuolnytsky (2002), effective organizational commitment is related to workforce outcomes such as, attendance, engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, on-the-job behaviour, health, and overall well-being of employees. In support of this literature, Meyer et al (2002) classified commitment to organizational change into three types - *affective, normative, and continuous* commitment. These three commitment types bind individuals to the course of action that is necessary for successful implementation. Affective commitment covers an individual's emotional desires to provide support based on company benefit and a strong sense of belonging to a business. Normative commitment brings a sense of obligation to the individuals to support the changes. Finally, continuance of commitment involves supporting

the change due the recognition of cost associated with the failure of change (Cunninham, 2006). It is important to ask then, what factors contribute to the levels of commitment to change in an organization? According to Herold, Fedor and Caldwell (2007), factors that contribute to the level of commitment to change include the extent and turbulence of proposed changes, positive impacts of changes, and organizational vision in relation to changes. Further contributors proposed by Choi (2011) cover organizational factors such as, previous experiences with change, the quality of relationships between leaders and employees, leadership practices, availability of infrastructure and technology for supporting changes, and levels of satisfaction with HR practice.

Openness to change

In recent years openness has been a frequently asked question during the HR interview process, because employers seek to understand the personalities of the individuals whom they hire. According to Robbins (2005), openness is an important part of ones of personality together with creativity, curiosity, and artistic sensitivity. Choi (2011) defined 'openness to change' as the willingness to accept and adapt to changes. Some of the key contributors of openness to change are factors that affect the attitude of employees. These factors include participating in the decision process, being exposed to change, trust in leaders, a successful history of changes, internal locus of control, and a personal need for achievement (Devos, Buelens & Bouckenooghe, 2007).

Cynicism about organizational changes

There is in fact a lot of literature covering the cynicism around change management. According to Reichers, Wanous and Austin (1997), and Bommer, Rich and Rubin (2005), the definition of cynicism around change is losing confidence in the leadership of change because past change efforts were unsuccessful. Wanous, Reichers and Austin (2000), Bernerth et al. (2007) and Cindy, Neubert

and Xiang (2007) supported this argument by stating that employees hold pessimistic views about change, as they believe the change agents lack motivation, and are incompetent.

Based on the analysis of the literature, it is argued that readiness for changes belong is affected by the factors of resistance to change. Including the individual routine, security, economic dynamics, and fear of confronting the unknowns. In most cases, individuals are programmed within a set system. Therefore, when there is a need for change in that system, resistance is a normal response. Individuals that are risk evasive and more prone to their secured habit, often feel threatened by changes. Changes in job role or the specific task may incite a fear of not being able to perform the task effectively, which is particularly concerning if pay is closely tied with performance. For example, BMO Bank of Montreal of Canada faced a strong resistance from their mortgage specialist team, when they omitted the base salary of the post announcing it fully commissioned in 2007.

In light of these facts, further research blending the contemporary theories of motivation with employee attitudes toward change is essential. Ultimately, understanding employee attitudes toward change could facilitate the development of methodologies for better change management outcomes.

The role of leaders

Leaders, each with their unique leadership styles play the most important role in balancing organizational culture to effectively manage discontinuous changes. According to Vroom and Jago (2007) and Piersol (2007), leaders are not only responsible for making necessary organizational changes, but are also accountable for inspiring employees toward adaption of the changes by offering collaboration and coaching. Kark and Dijk (2007) added that effective leaders engage workers by utilizing innovative strategies in change management, resulting in higher performance and productivity.

Most studies available on the role of leadership have investigated factors that contribute to successful organizational changes in structure, environment and strategy. These studies also discuss the actions leaders should take in order to proceed with changes. In the sections that follow we will discuss the role of leaders in shaping the attitude and reactions of employees toward organizational change.

Personal attributes of leaders and employee attitude

Not surprisingly, the personal attributes of leaders affect the attitudes of employees towards change. According to Carpenter, Geletkanycz and Sandars (2004), these personal attributes shape the choices and decisions leaders make in relation to organizational changes, which in turn influence the beliefs and attitudes of followers. Employee attitudes that are often correlated with leaders' attributes are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to leave an organization. Berson, Oreg and Dvir (2008) illustrated that the personal attributes of leaders, namely their values and traits influence their behavior and decision-making processes. At the same time, the values and traits of leaders contribute to formulization of organizational culture and climate (Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia, 2004). Thus, it can be argued that the values and traits of leaders influence their interpretations of reality and perceived outcomes. Leader traits and values can in turn influence the adaptation of followers toward certain behaviours as well as the engagement and decision-making processes of followers. For example, a risk averse leader is usually opposed to decision-making and this will more than likely influence followers in the same behavior.

Individuals with similar mindsets to their superiors are happy to work together with them, while others are not. Leaders can successfully maintain a culture and climate in the organization by creating a workforce that is influenced by their beliefs and thoughts. Usually, this process is relevant in the case of senior leaders such as CEOs who determine the vision and mission of the organization

and create strategies and policies around these. Taken together the literature points to an important and influential correlation between the attributes of leaders and the attitudes of followers.

The influence of leader values on the follower's reaction to change

According to Oreg and Nov (2008), values influence the attitudes and choices that are interpreted in behaviors of the individuals. Irrespective of personality and behavioral differences there must be a correlation between the values of leaders and those of their followers in order to create a successful and seamless organizational culture. According to Oreg and Berson (2011), individual differences in values create divisions among organizational members with relation to their priorities. For example, some individuals believe in factors such as, autonomy, and openness to new ideas while others believe in factors such as, tradition, security, and stability.

It is elaborated from the literature that there are two mains contrasts between leader values and employee reaction. The first contrast is personal goals versus the welfare of the employees. The second contrast is leader preference for the current state versus the preference for change. For example, leaders who advocate consistency may translate changes as a danger, thus avoiding them by discouraging employees to become innovative. By contrast, leaders who value challenges and stimulation may interpret changes as an opportunity and support them by encouraging followers to take risks and demonstrate innovative and unconventional ideas and reward them for it. Therefore, the values of leaders influence the goals they assign to their followers and shape their attitudes. With this literature in mind, we can argue that the values of a CEO shape organizational culture, as they link to the other leaders and managers, who create or transform the workforce according to the vision of their CEO. It is very important that followers look up to their leaders as a source of certainty during any changes that they are not accustomed with. One very strong and well-known

example of a highly influential leader is the late CEO of Apple Inc., whose values are still reflected among the behaviour of present employees.

The influence of leader traits on the follower's attitude to change

There are numerous studies on leadership traits, but in this paper, we are mainly concerned with the role of leader traits in relation to organizational change and the attitude of followers. According to Oreg and Berson (2011), the orientation of a leader toward changes is also tapped through their traits. Oreg (2003) argues that the traits of leaders that are resistant to changes (RTC) also capture the responses of the followers in the same notion. According to Oreg, Bayazit, Vakola, Arciniega, Armenakis, Barakauskiene and Van Dam (2008) RTC is a separate trait from others such as, sensation, tolerance, and openness. According to Nov and Ye (2008), RTC is linked to a number of outcomes such as, the occupational choices and interests of individuals, the ability to adapt to technological advances, and the intention to resist specific organizational changes.

The literature argues that the RTC trait of leaders influences behaviours and choices of both leaders and other organizational members. As with values, the traits of leaders also influence the form of guidance and the decision-making processes leaders pass on to their followers. For example, leaders that are naturally resistant to changes encourage and reward employees to work under strict routines and discourage new ideas and innovativeness. This leadership trait reflects the value of consistency, stability, and security, however it promotes negative effects of change and acts to prevent or delay change even if it is a good thing. There are many organizational leaders that are resistant to diversification. A great example can be seen in the leaders of the Canadian banking sector, who act as the ambassadors of a stable economy promoting a low percentage of risk taking attitudes compared to the leaders of the US banking system who are well known for their innovation and acceptance toward risk.

The role of transformational leadership and follower attitudes to change

Transformational leadership behaviour plays an important role influencing and inspiring the attitudes of followers toward change. According to Herold, Fedor, Caldwell (2007), transformational leadership has the superior ability to manage organizational changes as well as to motivate a workforce toward it. Oreg and Beson (2011) supported this notion by illustrating that transformational leadership behavior acts to moderate employees' attitude. There are a number of broad concepts of transformational leadership such as, leader-member relationship, perceived leader support, and visionary leadership (Dam, Oreg & Schyns, 2008). According to Oreg and Berson (2011), these concepts are also related to the employees' attitudes to changes. Bommer et al. (2005) argued that transformational leadership behaviours are negatively associated with employees' cynicism about changes but at the same time, they have a strong relationship with the success of a merger where change is inevitable. Nemanich and Keller (2007) agreed by elaborating that transformational leadership behaviour plays a significant role in shaping new climates in an organization, by reducing employee resistance to change.

Here we can argue that transformational leadership behaviours influence the attitude of followers'to change through a number of routes. Firstly, transformational leaders are able to play their role by stimulating and inspiring their followers with their vision surrounding proposed future changes. Secondly, by using intellectual stimulation they can set goals to challenge the employees to accept the innovative solutions as well as challenge current situations that need to be changed. Transformational leaders also play the role of moderator by interacting with the attributes of followers. The role of such behaviour involves discovering and establishing relationships between the followers' characteristics and responses to changes and innovations. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to transcend their personal orientations at work and harness their own

concepts by leading them to identify personal goals. Because of this leader-employee interaction, followers tend understand the concept and need for change and are motivated through the vision of a transformational leader. By communicating their vision of the future, transformational leaders reduce the uncertainty associated with changes and create an innovative organizational culture that is open as well as committed to changes. Further studies into the effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement and motivation in relation to organizational changes are necessary to better understand employee attitudes and perspectives, particularly where change is not successful.

Strategies for leaders in managing discontinuous changes

The success rate of planned organizational change is very low. According to Beer and Nohira (2000), 75% of change projects end in disappointment and Burnes (2004) warned that in reality this statistic is likely to be higher. While we originally set upon exploring the role of leaders in relation to organizational changes, what we noted in the process was that most endeavors for change were in fact failing. This raises a question about the communication gap between the scholars and practitioners as well as a gap in practicing the strategies for change successfully. In this section, the authors propose some possible strategies for managing discontinuous changes from the angle of planned organizational changes. Here strategy development is based on scholarly research relating to leaders in change management together with survey results collated by scholars to build change management strategies and ultimately transform organizations.

Other important leader strategies

Creating a 'learning' organization

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Leaders may use the learning strategy as a tool for managing changes. In organizations that promote a learning atmosphere so employees may always come with innovative ideas that bring positive changes. In learning organizations leaders often use double-loop learning, which involves fixing inaccuracies by changing values and revising goals, guidelines and customary routines. This is completely contrary to single-loop learning where inaccuracies are fixed exercising old practices and existing guidelines.

Adequate Communication around organizational change

Communication is probably one of the most important strategies leaders may adapt in implementing changes successfully. Thus, poor communication is the main reason behind failures in organizational change. Communicating proposals for organizational change must focus on building the understanding of the changes among employees. Once leaders develop their vision, they must communicate to both teams and individuals, explaining and persuading the workforce regularly about the significance of proposed changes (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Ideally leaders should communicate the existing circumstances and then provide a rationale in support of their case for change together with an optimistic forecast for the results of those changes.

Employees' participation in change related activities

Leaders may encourage employee participation in regards to planning and implementing organizational changes. This participation may be in groups or on an individual level. Employee participation deepens the understanding of the change philosophy, thus increasing the commitment among employees. By encouraging employee participation employees take a more active role in change related tasks and become instrumental in the implementation and planning of changes (Whelan-Berry & Sommerville, 2010).

Aligning change management with human resources practices

Leaders may adapt certain human resource (HR) exercises as strategies for managing changes. Some important and highly relevant HR practices include coaching, staffing, performance appraisal, incentives, rewards, and feedback. Leaders can adapt an appraisal criteria based on the change vision that signals the importance of adapting the changes as well as increase motivation among employees. Alignment of recruitment, selection, and appraisal assist leaders to maintain the implemented changes. Furthermore, pressure for the new behaviours must be consistent, otherwise individuals will have a tendency to avoid them and root back to the past behavior (Cameron & Green, 2004).

Conclusion

Like any other changes organizational changes are inevitable. Leaders play a significant role in processing, managing, and sustaining changes. It is necessary that both leaders and organizational members adapt to organizational changes successfully and keep the organization flexible enough that it can absorb exogenous shocks such as, changes in customer taste and demand, entry of new competitors, and changes in technology. Inflexibility and non-responsiveness toward such changes may lead to business failures. For example, the failure of Blockbuster to change its business model from traditional video rental to online streaming has resulted in recent financial woes. At the same time, the recent innovative development of the Blackberry smart phone that meets the current consumer taste and demand has brought research-in-motion back into the competitive market of smartphone manufacturers. Clearly, change is necessary for the growth and sustainability of any business. Therefore, organizational members must be adaptive toward and embrace changes in order to grow businesses and increase profits.

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