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ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND WORKERS' BEHAVIOUR: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Imhonopi, David Favour

&

Urim, Ugochukwu Moses
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun state
Email: davidimhonopi@yahoo.com; chuqueuk@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Change is the only constant phenomenon. An organisation that fails to recognise the inevitability of change is doomed to fail. However, workers' behaviour towards change has become a serious issue facing today's management in complex and ever evolving organisations. Employees' resistance to change has been identified as a critical contributor to the failure of many well-intended and well-conceived efforts to initiate change within the organisation. This paper therefore examines the reasons for workers' resistance to change as well as the impact of organisational change on workers' behaviour within the workplace and how organisations can manage change processes in order to elicit the right and anticipated behaviour from workers in line with the changing business needs. The theoretical synthesis of thoughts drawn from the tenets of the "Individual Perspectives School" and "the Group Dynamics School" is the basis for the explication of the dynamics of organisational change and workers' attitude towards it. This paper contends that securing the support and cooperation of workers through obtaining the right and anticipated behaviour is critical today as ever to the successful implementation of change programmes in organisations.

Key words: Organisation, Organisational change, Change management, Workers, Behaviour, Management

Introduction

Change is inevitable in any organisation. The pace of change is ever increasing – particularly with the advent of the internet and the rapid deployment of new technologies, there is evidence of new ways of doing business and new ways of conducting one's life. Since organisations are a sub-system within the society, changes that take place in the society affect the operations, policies and outlook of organisations and vice versa. Business, we all know, operates in a dynamic environment which implies change, and an organisation that fails to recognise the inevitability of change will be self-destruct. Similarly, the management or manager that succeeds is one that is constantly adapting the direction and operation of his enterprise to changes in technology, social, political and economic environment in which it operates.

However, it must be considered that there is nothing neither more difficult nor more challenging to handle than to initiate a new order of things. Workers' behaviour towards change has become a serious issue facing management in complex and modern organisations today. As Chin and Berne (1976) acknowledge, employee resistance is one significant contributor to the failure of many well-intended and well-conceived efforts to initiate change within the organisation.

For most people, predictability and stability in both their personal and professional lives is preferred to change. Such people typically avoid situations that upset order, threaten their self-interests, increase stress or involve risk (Kotter, 2002). When faced with changes to the status quo, people usually resist initially. This resistance continues, and in some cases increases, until they are able to recognise the benefits of change and perceive the gains to be worth more than the risk or threats to their self-interest. As Bellinger (2004), Inga (2003) and Kotter (2002) point out, people resist change due to the fundamental human objection to having the will of others imposed upon them. Nevertheless, since no organisation can afford to stand still in the ever dynamic whirlpool of the global business environment, organisational change management is therefore important to secure, modify and elicit the behaviour of workers in line with the changing business needs. As part of our contributions to existing literature on effective organisational change management, our objectives in this research work are to: examine what areas change manifests itself often in organisations; examine if there is a relationship between the leadership style an organisation practises and organisational change; examine if workers would still resist change even if they are duly informed; examine if organisational change is best managed when workers are carried along and ascertain whether improvement in the quality of communication and interpersonal relationship between management and workers reduce workers' resistance to change.

The Concept of Change Process

A century ago, advances in machine technology made farming so highly efficient that fewer hands were needed to plant and reap the harvest. The displaced labourers fled to nearby cities, seeking jobs in newly opened factories, seizing opportunities created by some of the same technologies that dislodged them from the farm (Coleman and Morton, 2000). The economy however shifted from agrarian to manufacturing, piloted by the industrial revolution. With it, came drastic shifts in where people lived, how they worked, how they spent their leisure time, how much money they made, and how they spent it. Today, we are at the threshold of another kind of industrial revolution piloted by a new army of economic and technological forces. In recent years, just about all companies, large and small, have made adjustments in the ways they operate, some more pronounced than others. For instance, as Edward and Heller (2006) argue, a study of Microsoft, Compaq, Dell and a multitude of their ilk shows that organisations are inventing new ways of running their businesses and their methods are pre-eminently based on people. In other words, leading organisations are rapidly altering the way they operate: their culture, the technology they use, their structures, and the nature of their relations with employees are a clear departure from the old and traditional concept of the corporation. With so many companies making such drastic changes, the message is clear, "Either adapt to changing conditions or shut your doors." As technology and markets change, organisations face a formidable challenge to adapt. However, not all organisational changes are planned and are intentional (Chapman, 2008).

Change Situation in Organisations

Organisations resort to two forms of change, namely incremental and fundamental. Incremental change is self-evident as it includes changes of work methods and processes, factory layout, new product launches, and other situations where most people would see continuity from the old state to the new. It is progress by evolution rather than revolution. Fundamental change on the other hand refers to change that is on a wide-scale and one that touches deeply at the very heart of the organisational structures and processes. Such a change is usually dramatic and could affect future operations of the organisation and frequently involves major upheavals (Greiner, 1967). Examples are process re-engineering, mergers and acquisitions, downscaling or moves into different activities.

Forces of change

An organisation can only perform effectively through interactions with the broader external environment of which it is a part. Hence, its structure and functioning must reflect the nature of the environment in which it operates. To a large extent, the environment in which an organisation operates tends to exert a need for organisational change. According to Adler, Rosen and Silverstein (1998), causes of change include: change in technology, intense competition, change in customer demand, changing demographic profile, privatisation of public enterprises, and shareholders' demand. Other forces of change include those that originate within the organisation itself like the deterioration of buildings, equipment and machinery and obsolescence of skills and abilities of workers. However, changes within the organisation can be managed. On the contrary, uncertain economic conditions like the global financial and economic meltdown of 2007 - 2009, government policy and intervention in industry, scarcity of natural resources, etc, create an increasingly volatile environment (Wardale, 2009). Thus the main pressure of change is from external forces and organisations must be ready to brave the demands of a changing environment.

Change Agents

Tichy and Hoernstein (1995) consider change agents as elements that are responsible for bringing about change in the individual's behavioural patterns. Since human behaviour is such a volatile and complex phenomenon, changing it will require a number of strategies for the desirable response to be achieved in the human activity areas targeted. Tichy and Hoernstein have identified four types of change agents.

1. **Outside Pressures** These are pressures from the external environment and are directed towards change in the entire organisation. Government interventions in the area of health or safety defects, government policies banning certain importation of products in the country, etc, are examples in this line.
2. **Internal organisational development** This can come slowly through and within an organisation itself and includes redefinition of goals as well as participative goal setting. Instances are development fostered through management by objectives (MBO), work redesign, team development, etc.
3. **Individual change** This involves modifying or improving the behaviour of workers whereby personal goals may be better served with a changed environment of the organisation. For example, with the coming in of the Fashola administration in Lagos state, Lagos state civil servants no longer go to work late neither do they leave early for their homes before the closure of work.

4.   **Change from central management** Change may come from the top management convinced about its necessity and thereby direct the structural, strategic or technological changes that could benefit the organisation and its members.

According to Shaskin and Williams (1984), the change agent may be in the form of a consultant who helps clients find solutions to organisational problems or a trainer who trains a client's workforce to achieve a set of skills that could be used in bringing about the change needed for optimal outcomes. Shaskin and Havelock (1983) identified the characteristics of successful change agents as tabulated below:

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL CHANGE AGENTS		
1	Hemophily	This is the degree of closeness and similarity between the change agent and the client. The easier and more successful the change.
2	Empathy	It is about the understanding of feelings, emotions and thoughts between the change agent and his client which leads to improved communication.
3	Linkage	It refers to the collaboration between the change agent and the client; the tighter the linkage, the better.
4	Proximity	The change agent and the client should have easy access to each other.
5	Structuring	When all the necessary activities related to change are well planned, then implementation becomes easier.
6	Capacity	This is the ability of the organisation to provide the resources needed for successful organisational development.
7	Openness	The degree of openness between the change agent and the client will affect the outcome of the programme.
8	Reward	The greater the potential for rewards, the more determined the efforts of workers in making or supporting the required change.
9	Energy	This refers to the amount of effort put into the change process.
10	Synergy	This refers to the community of support, resources, people, energies and activities put together for the implementation of organisational change.

Source: Shaskin and Havelock, 1983.

Resistance to Change
Change, no matter how beneficial, is generally resisted and is always difficult to carry out. Like Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) and Ross (2000) acquiesced, man prefers to proceed with known methods than change to new ones where the outcomes may not be so certain. However, change will be easier to make and adjust to, if the potential rewards after the change are sufficiently attractive. Since change must occur as a result of the dynamic nature of the human environment, the reasons for resisting change must be studied carefully and addressed.

Toffler (1970) has identified a number of reasons that account for resistance to change. They are:

1. **Insecurity** Change scares people. Individuals are afraid of losing the security they have concerning the known for an unknown future.
2. **Misunderstanding and lack of trust** This occurs when there is a lack of trust in the change initiator-employee relationship.
3. **Lack of proper communication** If the need for the change is not communicated to those who would be affected on time and in an acceptable manner, it can lead to stiff resistance.
4. **Rapidity and extent of change** The nature of the change, either minor or drastic, will determine the resistance level of employees.
5. **Group resistance** This is resistance that stems from herd instinct. Employees resist change in this sense because the group they belong to is not in support of it.
6. **Emotional turmoil** This arises when employees are emotionally not prepared for the change about to take place.
7. **Loss of power and control** When change is to reduce the power base of certain individuals and groups, it can lead to resistance.
8. **Selective perception** When the perception employees or a group has about the change process is negative, it will lead to resistance.
9. **Habit** Change of habits may lead to frustration and resistance.
10. **Economic implications** When change directly or indirectly reduces the pay or other rewards of employees, they will resist it.
11. **Security in the past** Some people may be comfortable with the status quo and may feel threatened when a proposed change programme seems to alter it.
12. **Fear of the unknown** Change confronts people with the unknown and causes them to have anxiety.
13. **Investment in resources** Since change often requires large resources, which may not be available, resistance may greet efforts made to raise resources to implement a change situation.
14. **Past contracts and agreements** For example, agreements entered into by an employer association with a trade union may frustrate any attempt for future change.

Tactics for Managing Resistance to Change

According to Kotter, Schlesinger and Vijay (1979), managers may use a number of tactics to deal with resistance to change. These include education, communication, participation, facilitation and support, negotiation, co-optation, coercion and manipulation. They however point out that manipulation and coercion even though they have their obvious short-term benefits also have their long-term drawbacks. Similarly, research conducted by Rogers (1995) in a clothing factory identified certain potent strategies for managing resistance to change. These are itemized.

1. Leadership.
2. Willingness for the sake of the group.
3. Right timing of change.
4. Simplicity.
5. Clear definition of what is over and what is not.
6. Involvement of informal leaders.

7. Existence of formal avenues of appeal.
8. Availability of distributive justice to correct inequities and make amends.

Theoretical Paradigms on Organizational Change and Workers' Behaviour

We will look at change management and its impact on workers' behaviour from the theoretical viewpoints of the Individual Perspective School and the Group Dynamics School. The individual Perspective School is divided into the Behaviourists and the Gestalt-field theorists (Inga, 2003). The Behaviourists view behaviour as resulting from an individual's interaction with his environment. To the Behaviourist, all behaviour is learned and human actions are conditioned by their expected consequences. For instance, behaviour that is rewarded tends to be repeated, while behaviour that is ignored is not repeated. Therefore, in order to change behaviour, it is necessary to change the conditions that cause it. Behaviour modification involves the manipulation of reinforcing stimuli so as to reward desired activity. The aim is to reward immediately all instances of the wanted behaviour, but to ignore all instances of the unwanted behaviour. This is based on the principle of extinction; behaviour will stop eventually if it is not rewarded. The drawback of the Behaviourist approach is its reductionist tendency, treating human beings as cogs in a machine that respond solely to external stimuli.

For the Gestalt-field theorists, learning is a process of ongoing or changing insights, outlooks, expectations or thought patterns (Inga, 2006). The Gestalt therapy is based on the belief that people function as whole, total organisms, and that each person possesses positive and negative characteristics that must be "owned up to" and permitted expression (Ewton, 2006). People get into trouble when they get fragmented, and when they do not accept their total selves. Therefore, Gestalt-field theorists argue that behaviour is not just a product of external stimuli, rather it arises from how the individual uses reason to interpret these stimuli. They believe that when individual members of an organisation change their understanding of themselves and the situation in question, which they believe in, it will lead to change in behaviour. Essentially, the Individual Perspective School interprets behavioural change to be a result of how the individual relates with or interprets external stimuli or the environment.

The Group Dynamics theory

The Group Dynamic theorists emphasise on bringing about organisational change through teams or work groups, rather than individuals. The rationale behind this according to Lewin (1947) is that because people in organisations work in groups, individual behaviour must be seen, modified or changed in the light of the group's prevailing practices and norms. In other words, to bring about change in organisations, the focus of change must be at the group level and should concentrate on changing the group's norms, roles and values (Bellinger, 2004). Despite its limited focus, the Groups Dynamics theory has proved very influential in developing both the theory and practice of change management. This is because it is now usual for organisations to see themselves as comprising groups and teams, rather than merely collections of individuals. In spite of the emphasis that the Group Dynamics school places on groups, there is no way organisational change management can be done without recourse to the support of and from individual workers.

Discussions on Organisational Change Management and Workers' Behaviour

This research work shows that organisational change takes place in all aspects of an organisation. This agrees with existing literature that successful organisations in the twenty-first century are organisations prepared to embrace the concept of change management (Macredie, Sandom and Paul, 2000). In fact, many organisational theorists and practitioners postulate that the rate of change organisations are subjected to is set to increase significantly. In fact, some even go so far as to suggest that the future survival of all organisations will depend on their ability to successfully manage change (Burnes, 1996; Peters, 1989; Toffler, 1983). For Inga (2003), the rapid changes taking place in the external environment and which impinge on organisational structures, operations and systems are influenced by the globalisation of the world economy and international economic integration. According to him, globalisation has succeeded in linking humans, organisations, markets, technologies, finances, and information into one common interaction network across all national state borders. He therefore concludes that organisations that must survive this fast-paced era must do away with former traditional methods and structure of operations and constantly search for new methods on how to get ahead of their competitors, roll back on cost and reach their targets. However, Edward and Heller (2006) further amplify the argument for new methodology in the area of people-based human management system. According to them, the era of command-and-control methods by which most organisations are run cannot fly in the face of changes taking place in the present global business environment. Such practices if not abandoned will lead to workplace crisis and dysfunctions.

Our research also shows that there is a relationship between the leadership style adopted by an organisation, organisational change and the mode of implementing organisational change. When democratic, change management procedures and processes are put in place to guide change initiatives and vice versa. Leadership style therefore is responsible for workers' negative attitude towards change. This follows that for organisations to get the anticipated supportive behaviour from their workers, the leadership style in place must also be wearing human face. This view is shared by Bellinger (2004), Inga (2003) and Edward et al (2006).

Furthermore, there is abundant literature that also shows that workers will not resist change if they are duly informed, involved and carried along. This substantiates existing literature that workers should be involved in the change process as much as possible (Bellinger, 2004; Inga, 2003; Kotter, et.al, 1979; Kotter, 2002; Rogers, 1995; Tichy and Hoernstein, 1995). However, in a situation where the change is perceived not to have a direct and immediate impact on workers, they will resist the change programme irrespective of whether they were duly informed or not. Therefore as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) and Ross (2000) argue, for workers to support any change efforts, the reward from implementing the change programme must be very attractive and is to have a direct and immediate positive impact on them.

Principally this paper postulates that employees tend to react negatively to change especially if it involves learning something new and risking failure. To mitigate this, there is need for workshops, seminars, formal and informal discussions between management and workers during any transitional period of change. This view was shared by Chapman (2008) and Kotter (2002). They predicted that whenever organisations imposed new things on their workers there would be difficulties. They then advised that rather than imposition, participation, involvement and earlier open and full communication are the important factors

that should be used by organisations in the change management process. They also identified workshops as being very useful to develop collective understanding, approaches, policies, methods, systems, ideas, etc, regarding an intended change programme.

Lastly, this paper amplifies the notion that improving the quality of communication and interpersonal relationship will definitely reduce workers resistance to change and even elicit the right behaviour that would be supportive of the change effort. As Inga (2003) admits, having an effective communication policy is especially important when innovations are introduced. Regular improvement of the main elements of the communication system and assessment of internal and external changes in the environment will further the achievement of organisational goals. In effect, management must explain the necessity of changes, and the objectives that will be achieved as a result of the change efforts.

Conclusion

In today's dynamic human environment characterised by the invasion and pervasion of technology, global competition and increased streamlining of institutional practices and structures, both public and private organisations are facing change at an unprecedented rate. As the environment is changing by the day, even so organisations are forced to change their structures and processes to accommodate the changes in the environment. Denying change will not stop it from happening, instead the challenge is to manage change by understanding its role as a positive agent for corporate progress and personal achievement. Managers who seize the moment and effectively manage change can make it work for their organisations and get a return from change-inspired opportunities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the acceptance and management of change in organisations:

- In implementing change, management should try to win the support of the most powerful and influential groups in the organisation. This is in line with the Group Dynamics Theory that suggests that change can only be secured on a group-level basis. By securing the support of groups, their members would be forced to comply.
- The workforce should also be educated to see change not as an enemy but as a friend. This responsibility lies with management. As Edward and Heller (2006) argue, for this to happen, management has to become multi-disciplinary, cross-functional and interdepartmental, while vertical chains of command are supplemented or superseded by horizontal relationships.
- As a corollary to the above, management must show great emotional sensitivity when it comes to the implementation of change programmes. This will endear workers to support the change process. This view was shared by Chapman (2008) and Kotter (2002) that change management entails thoughtful planning and sensitive implementation, and above all, consultation with, and involvement of, the people affected by the changes. They contend that since change is unsettling, management needs to be a settling influence. Therefore, change needs to be understood and managed in a way that people can cope effectively with it.
- Managers also should involve the workers in the change process/efforts because from the study it is revealed that most workers resist change because they are not carried along.

- Managers should reward constructive behaviours. The most successful mechanism for facilitating organisational change is rewarding people for behaving in a desired fashion.

- Finally, managers should create a learning organisation. This will help workers embrace new ways of thinking, freely share new ideas and be willing and ready to adapt to the changing realities in the business environment without nursing the fear of an unknown future.

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