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IMPACT OF CHANGE AGENT'S ASSOCIATION IN CHANGE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The organization continuously interacts with the environment. The environmental forces force the organization to make changes in itself. At one point of time organization feel in affirmative and try to make changes. Change making is not so simple as seems to be. They have to look for a person who can make the change in the organization. The present study provides theory and evidence of the benefits of change agents' closeness to drivers and resistors for change adoption. The literature on organizational change has suggested that closeness to change drivers plays an important role in organizational change. On the analysis upon the contingent effect of strong ties to resistors on change adoption indicate that the business principle that efforts to convert resistors of change are futile should not be applied indiscriminately to all types of change. The present study indicates that when the change does not diverge from the institutional status quo, change agents who divert their influence efforts away from resistors may be ill-advised, as our findings says that strong ties to resistors may in this case facilitate change adoption. The study shows that change initiatives should be systematically considered for the extent to which they diverge from the present institutional status.

KEYWORDS

change agent, change process.

INTRODUCTION

Change is a type of organizational development while the members of the organization change by the input of new strategies, which in turn leads to behavioral change. The change will develop the organization to better fit predicted future environments (Porras & Silvers, 1991). Nonas (2005), and Silvers (1991) theory indicates that the organization has complete control over its development. Organizations are open systems meaning that they are characterized by continuously ongoing processes of input, transformation and output interacting with a surrounding environment. It is impossible to achieve complete control over an open system, while it is affected by external forces consisting of surrounding systems, like customer, supplier, society etc. (Katz & Kahn, 1987). Change is constant modification that comes about of unexpected events in everyday work. This theory assumes that it is impossible to have complete control over the organization's development and that the result of a change will normally not be exactly as the predicted result. To realize effective and successful change, organizations need both management and leadership. Management is a set of processes that keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling and problem solving. Leadership on the other hand, is a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles. To perform change it is important with competent management and without this, the transformation process can get out of control. But for most organizations, the bigger challenge is to lead change. It is only leadership that can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in a significant way and anchor the change in the culture of an organization. In modern, complex organizations it is not enough with only one leader; many people need to assist the leadership task. The risk with too much focus on management rather than leadership leads to an inward focus and bureaucracy takes over. In companies with success that creates some degree of market dominance that then leads to company growth, the physical expansion of the organization leads to a much greater need for management. This focus, together with arrogant managers who over evaluate their current performance and competitive position; can result in a "slow" organization that has great difficulty in making any transformation or change. This above described pattern is especially evident in large, established firms where getting a transformation process started proves often more difficult. It is also a risk that, in these kinds of companies, the change programs are over managed and under led. (Kotter, 1996). The foremost important ethical issue that the organization and its leader should deal with before implementing any change strategy is that of defining the goals, behavioral outcomes or expected change objectives. In a large organization, it is likely that this kind of process will break down making it impossible to realize the change. The spreading of too much information within the organization can be a problem in a change process as the information may generate resistance that there is often not enough resources to deal with. It is better to introduce the change gradually within the organization and in smaller groups, thereby allowing for clear and correct explanations and avoiding misunderstandings. (Brown, 1991). When a change is needed, the leader must often take the role as a change agent. He or she must guide the organization through changes, implement changes and support organizational members in adapting to the changes. Today, when change is always present, leadership can be defined as the process of managing change. It is the leaders' responsibility to ensure that the organization and its members are flexible enough to manage an adaptation of behaviors and skills to fit environment changes. If the individual will manage to contribute to their changing organization, the leader must emphasize, encourage and provide continuous education and learning. (Howell & Costley, 2006). The group for the change normally only involves a small number of people and is expected to delimit the risks that the change process may develop in an unexpected direction. (Norrgrén 1996) Organizations using learning strategy see change as a pattern of constant modifications. While they do not believe it is possible to create complete control over the change process and the organizations development, they do not see the value of deciding exact final results in advance.

REACTIONS TO CHANGE

The hazard of organizational failure increases with organizational change and such a change increases the likelihood of an additional change of the same type. Both these effects decline over time (Amburgey, 1993). Kelly and Barnett (1993) research study is based on a model that was presented by Hannan and Freeman in 1984, which includes both internal and external constraints on organizational change. Organizations exist as long as they are reliable and act rationally. When organizational goals are strong and institutionalized and the activities are routines, the reliability and accountability are high within the organization. However institutionalization and reutilization also generate strong pressure against organizational change. This means, that the characteristics of organizations stability also generates resistance to changes. Changes disturb internal routines as well as connection with external stakeholders and both internal and external stakeholders prefer reliable and predictable performance. This means, that organizational change is hazardous and normally disturbs the equilibrium of the organization. Organizational change increases the failure rate of organizations, independent of the effects of the changed characteristics. The reason for this statement is as stated above, that a change disturbs the routines in the company. (Barnett, 1993).

CAUSES OF EMPLOYEES' RESISTANCE

One or some of the causes can lead the change to severe resistance from employees. The consequences of employees' resistance are very important to be mentioned here, to reveal the miseries of resistance for organization and the change program. The consequences of employee's resistance to change range from; slow down of the change (and thus increase in cost) (Bryant, 2006), less productivity (outcome), employees corruption, high employees' turnover, disturbance & trouble in change program, failure of change program, and in extreme situation it can even lead the organization to destabilization & breakdown

(Coetsee, 1999; Coch and French, 1948). Organizations may face the above problems in change due to employees' resistance. It should not be denied that resistance to change might be a valuable employees' passion that can be channeled more constructively (Dent Eric, 1999).

THE CHANGE AGENT

The change agent is often a person whose mission is to build the motivation to make the change and help the organization to identify changes in functions that must be done. The change agent also helps the organization to carry out necessary changes for the future. The agent's task starts with a diagnostic phase where the agent tries to evolve a model with existing theory that is adapted to the particular organization. In short, the change agent's role is to act as transducer between scientific knowledge regarding organizational functioning and change processes and the particular situation during this phase. The developed model must be reasonably complete, predictive and adequate to provide the organization with useful information. (Bowers & Franklin, 1972). The model must be presented to the members of the organization in an excellent way, because the issue of acceptance is critical. Even if it is a really good model, it has no value without a good understanding of the members of the organization. To realize this, the change agent must be a good communicator and has enough knowledge about the groups' tasks to relate the model with these tasks, that is to say an understanding of the organizations reality. In later stages, the change agent often helps the organizations members with skill acquisition and perfection. The agent must not only know which skills are necessary, but also be competent in guiding the acquisition.

ASSOCIATION OF A CHANGE AGENT

The association strength is a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie (Granovetter 1973). Organizational scholars following on Granovetter's footsteps have highlighted the informational implications of strong ties, arguing that emotional closeness between two actors motivates them to invest time and energy in sharing complex, tacit or confidential knowledge (Hansen 1999). The foundation of trust has been shown to increase cooperation among organizational subunits during a crisis, boosting an organization's adaptive performance in response to exogenous and endogenous shocks (Stern 1998). Building on this research, we argue that strong association provide a change agent with a relational basis to overcome resistance when attempting to institute organizational change. Below we specify mechanisms through which strong ties to organization members with the potential to derail change allow the change agent to reduce resistance and thus boost the chances of change adoption. We then identify conditions under which such mechanisms are likely to affect fence-sitters and resisters differently. Strong ties can increase an actor's ability to introduce organizational change by providing her with an affective basis for the cooptation of actors capable of influencing the outcome of the change initiative.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Different authors have discussed the importance of causes/antecedents of employees' resistance to change to know the right problem and develop strategies to overcome it. Kurt Lewin discussed first the employees' resistance to change in 1940's. His early work focused on the aspects of individual behavior that must be addressed in order to bring about effective organizational change (Kurt 1945). Different studies are being conducted on a various issues concerning resistance by the employees. A few of them are reviewed here.

Bryant (2006), in his study on employee's resistance to change found different causes responsible for resistance to change. One or some of the below causes can lead the change to severe resistance from employees. The author opined that the consequences of employees' resistance are very important to be studied to reveal the miseries of resistance for organization and the change program. The consequences of employee's resistance to change range from; slow down of the change and thus increase in cost, less productivity (outcome), employees corruption, high employees' turnover, disturbance & trouble in change program, failure of change program, and in extreme situation it can even lead the organization to destabilization & breakdown. Organizations may face the above problems in change due to employees' resistance.

Kegan & Lahey (2001) described the resistance to change a psychological dynamic called a "competing commitment" as the real reason for employee resistance to organizational change. The change is not challenged, but rather it is resisted, or not implemented at all because the employee faces additional issue or concerns related to the change. When an employee's hidden competing commitment is uncovered, behavior that seems irrational and ineffective suddenly becomes stunningly sensible and masterful - but unfortunately, on behalf of a goal that conflicts with what you and even the employee are trying to achieve". Competing commitments should not be viewed as a weakness, but as a version of self-protection. If these competing commitments are a form of self-protection, then what are employees protecting themselves from? Kegan & Lahey believe the answer usually lies in what they call "big assumptions" - deeply rooted beliefs people have about themselves and the world around them. Many rarely realize they hold big assumptions because they are woven into the very fabric of people's existence, and thus they accept them as reality. "These assumptions put an order to the world and at the same time suggest ways in which the world can go out of order.

Amburgey, Kelly and Barnett (1993) research study is based on a model that was presented by Hannan and Freeman in 1984, which includes both internal and external constraints on organizational change. Organizations exist as long as they are reliable and act rationally. When organizational goals are strong and institutionalized and the activities are routines, the reliability and accountability are high within the organization. However institutionalization and routinization also generate strong pressure against organizational change. This means, that the characteristics of organizations stability also generates resistance to changes. Changes disturb internal routines as well as connection with external stakeholders and both internal and external stakeholders prefer reliable and predictable performance. This means, that organizational change is hazardous and normally disturbs the equilibrium of the organization.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are to find out the impact of relationship of a change agent with the employees in reducing the resistance and increase the likelihood of change adoption. It also studies as to whether any diverge from institutional status quo lead to decreasing in the likelihood of change adoption.

SAMPLE

A sample of 50 professionals working at different level has been put in the study. All participants had clinical backgrounds as well as managerial responsibilities, their levels of responsibility varying from mid- to top-level management. The participants also represented a variety of departments in their institutions.

ANALYSIS

The change itself has no substantive upside in the eyes of resisters, complying with the change agent's request for support requires resisters to refrain from acting on their unambiguously negative attitude toward the change solely for the sake of their relationship with the change agent. Likewise, to push the change through, the change agent has to disappoint close contacts, knowing that they see no benefit from the change. The intensity of a negative attitude toward a change initiative is shaped in part by the content of what is being resisted. Understanding resistance thus requires understanding what the change entails. Organizations embedded in the same environment, and thus subject to the same institutional pressures, tend to adopt similar practices. We propose that the degree to which the change diverges from the institutional status quo in the organization's field of activity constitutes a boundary condition on change agents' realizing the benefits of strong ties to potential resisters. Namely, when implementing less divergent changes, affective cooptation is likely to favor a change agent, because it may persuade resisters to tolerate a change that does not alter significantly the functioning of the organization. When the degree of change divergence is much lower, the advantages of strong ties accruing to the change agent are weaker, and may turn into liabilities that reduce the likelihood of change adoption. Two mechanisms account for this contingency. First, more divergent changes represent a greater threat for resisters, strengthening their

opposition. Fence-sitters have a balanced view of the change's potential upside and downside, irrespective of the extent to which the change diverges from the institutional status quo. In their perception, breaking with taken-for-granted practices may greatly upset the organization but may also greatly improve it.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the study coefficient for mean tie strength with endorsers, in particular, suggests that closeness to potential influencers who are positively disposed toward the change does not provide a change agent with distinctive advantages. Endorsers may well aid change adoption by championing the initiative and generating support for it (Markham 2000). The benevolence toward the change agent and desire for their personal approval are, however, unlikely to change their behavior, because their attitude toward the change is positive from the start, thereby posing no threat to their relationship with the change agent. Our qualitative data provided several illustrations of this behavioral pattern. These checks indicate that it is the overall positioning of a change agent in relation to resisters and fence-sitters that influences the likelihood of change adoption, rather than other features of the distribution of tie strength with resisters and fence-sitters, such as the variability of closeness, the absence of a particular alter type, or an especially close relationship to given individuals. To account for the possibility that a close personal connection may be particularly beneficial when potential resisters, endorsers and fence-sitters occupy a high-rank position in the formal structure of the organization, we ran models including three interaction terms for mean tie strength with potential resisters, endorsers and fence-sitters, respectively, and the mean hierarchical level of actors in each of these three groups. We found no evidence for any such pattern. In addition to formal status, the change agent's informal status in the organization may affect the probability of change adoption, because well-regarded actors may be more effective change agents and have more strong ties to influential members of the organization. To account for this possibility, we constructed a measure of an actor's prominence in the task-advice network using the difference between the number of received advice ties and the number of sent advice ties. The inclusion of prominence in the task-advice network altered neither the direction nor magnitude of the coefficients for our main predictors. The study found that the effects of strong ties to potentially influential resisters on change adoption are contingent upon the extent to which the change diverges from the institutional status quo. The lower the levels of divergence the change entails, the more affective cooptation favors the change agent, because it increases the chance that the benevolence felt by resisters toward the change agent may persuade them to tolerate a change they do not approve of but which is unlikely to alter significantly the functioning of the organization. As the degree of divergence increases, however, not only does closeness to resisters have decreasing positive effects on change adoption, but it can have detrimental effects too, as the intense disapproval of close contacts increases the psychic toll change implementation takes on the change agent, dampening her own drive toward change. The findings demonstrate that the effects of tie strength can be contingent on whom the actor establishes a social connection with. The beneficial effects of tie strength were confined to actors with the potential to resist the change. These findings indicate the need to theorize with greater nuance about the contingent effects of different targets of strong and weak social connections in organizations. It encourages network and organizational change scholars alike to consider the affective interpersonal dynamics that underlie the effectiveness of individual agency in organizations while accounting for the nature of the change.

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