

Change Management: Strategies for Successful Organizational Transitions

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Abstract:

This journal article explores the concept of change management and its significance in facilitating successful organizational transitions. It delves into the challenges associated with change, the importance of effective change management strategies, and the role of leadership in driving and supporting change initiatives. Drawing from a comprehensive review of literature and empirical evidence, this article provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for implementing change management in organizations.

Keywords: change management, organizational change, resistance to change, change leadership, change communication, digital transformation, remote work, hybrid work, change sustainability, change resilience, change measurement, stakeholder engagement, change agent effectiveness, change impact, employee well-being, cultural intelligence, adaptive leadership.

1. Introduction

Change management refers to the structured approach employed by organizations to transition individuals, teams, and entire systems from the current state to a desired future state (Cameron & Green, 2015). It involves a systematic process of planning, implementing, and monitoring change initiatives to minimize disruption and maximize the likelihood of successful outcomes (Kotter, 1996).

1.1 Background and context of change management

Change management has emerged as a vital discipline within organizational studies, focusing on the structured and strategic management of transitions within organizations. Scholars such as Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) have conducted extensive reviews of theory and research, highlighting the importance of understanding the complexities of change and its impact on individuals and organizations.

Early pioneers in the field, including Kurt Lewin (1947), emphasized the need for planned approaches to change, recognizing that organizations often face resistance and barriers during transformational processes. Burnes (2004) reevaluated Lewin's work, shedding light on his three-stage model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, which remains influential in change management practices today.

The literature also underscores the challenges faced by organizations in implementing change initiatives. Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio (2008) delve into resistance to change, highlighting the multidimensional nature of resistance and the importance of addressing it proactively to ensure successful change outcomes.

Contemporary change management literature emphasizes the role of leadership in driving and supporting change efforts. Kotter (1996) emphasizes the significance of leadership in setting a compelling vision, aligning stakeholders, and facilitating communication throughout the change process. Hayes (2018) explores the various models, tools, and techniques employed by change managers to navigate organizational transitions effectively.

Moreover, the context of change management is shaped by the evolving nature of organizations and the external environment. Dunphy and Stace (1993) highlight the need for organizations to strategically manage change, considering the dynamic business landscape and competitive pressures. Pettigrew (1985) provides a case study of the industrial giant ICI, illustrating the challenges and strategies employed during a significant organizational change.

In summary, change management is a multidisciplinary field that draws upon theories, models, and empirical research to understand and address the complexities of organizational change. The literature highlights the significance of effective leadership, proactive addressing of resistance, and strategic planning in successfully managing change. As organizations continue to evolve, change management practices adapt to meet the challenges of the dynamic business environment (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the article

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive exploration of change management and its significance in facilitating successful organizational transitions. The objectives of the article include:

- 1.2.1** Providing an overview of the background and context of change management: This article aims to provide readers with an understanding of the historical development of change management as a field of study, the challenges organizations face in managing change, and the evolving nature of change management practices.
- 1.2.2** Examining the importance of effective change management strategies: The article aims to emphasize the importance of implementing robust change management strategies in organizations. It will highlight the potential consequences of poorly managed change initiatives, such as decreased productivity and employee disengagement, and emphasize the benefits of effective change management in achieving successful outcomes.
- 1.2.3** Exploring key strategies for change management: This article will delve into various strategies and approaches that organizations can employ to effectively manage change. It will cover areas such as creating a compelling vision, developing comprehensive change management plans, effective communication, building a change-ready culture, involving and empowering employees, addressing resistance, and monitoring progress.
- 1.2.4** Highlighting the role of leadership in driving and supporting change initiatives: The article will underscore the critical role of leadership in change management. It will explore the qualities and behaviors of effective change leaders, such as transformational leadership, transparency, trust-building, and supporting employees throughout the change process.
- 1.2.5** Offering practical recommendations and insights: Drawing from a comprehensive review of literature and empirical evidence, this article aims to provide readers with practical recommendations and insights for implementing change management in organizations. It will offer actionable strategies and best practices that organizations can leverage to navigate organizational transitions successfully.

Overall, the article seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on change management by offering a comprehensive understanding of the concept, highlighting its importance, and providing valuable insights for organizations and change management practitioners.

1.3 Methodology of the Study

The findings presented in the sections were derived from a combination of scholarly sources, including journal articles, books, and reputable publications. The sources were collected through a systematic literature review, utilizing academic databases, such as JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar, to identify relevant articles and publications on change management, resistance to change, and organizational culture.

The study explored the topic of change management, focusing on the definition, background, and context of change management, the theoretical foundations and models of change, the importance of change management in organizational settings, types and sources of resistance to change, as well as the impact of change on employees and organizational culture.

2. Understanding Change Management

2.1 Definition and scope of change management

Change management can be defined as a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from the current state to a desired future state (Cameron & Green, 2015). It involves a systematic process of planning, implementing, and monitoring change initiatives to minimize resistance, promote acceptance, and ensure successful outcomes (Hayes, 2018).

Change management encompasses a wide scope, covering various aspects of organizational change. It involves understanding the need for change, identifying the desired outcomes, assessing the impact on individuals and systems, developing strategies for implementation, and managing the transition process (Carnall, 2003).

According to Senior and Fleming (2006), change management involves addressing both the technical and people aspects of change. The technical aspect focuses on the structural, procedural, and technological changes required, while the people aspect emphasizes the psychological, cultural, and behavioral aspects of change.

The scope of change management extends beyond individual projects or initiatives. It encompasses organizational change at different levels, ranging from incremental improvements to large-scale transformations (Dunphy & Stace, 1993). Change management can involve various types of changes, such as strategic changes, process changes, technological changes, cultural changes, and organizational restructuring (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Change management also involves the engagement and coordination of stakeholders across the organization. It requires effective communication, stakeholder analysis, and involvement of employees at all levels to ensure successful adoption of change (Kotter, 1996).

In summary, change management is a structured approach that encompasses a broad scope, including the planning, implementation, and monitoring of change initiatives. It addresses both the technical and people aspects of change and involves various types of changes at different organizational levels.

2.2 Theoretical foundations and models of change management

Change management is supported by various theoretical foundations and models that provide frameworks for understanding and implementing successful organizational change. This section explores some of the key theories and models within change management, drawing insights from scholarly sources.

2.2.1 Lewin's Three-Step Model:

Kurt Lewin's three-step model is a foundational theory in change management. Lewin proposed that change involves unfreezing the existing state, making the desired change, and then refreezing the new state to make it stable (Burnes, 2004). This model emphasizes the importance of understanding the current state, creating motivation for change, and reinforcing the change to sustain it.

2.2.2 The McKinsey 7-S Framework:

The McKinsey 7-S Framework, developed by Waterman, Peters, and Phillips (1980), focuses on seven interconnected elements that must be aligned for successful change: strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and shared values. This model emphasizes the interdependencies between these elements and the need to address them holistically during change efforts (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

2.2.3 Kotter's Eight-Step Model:

John Kotter's eight-step model provides a comprehensive framework for managing change effectively (Kotter, 1996). This model emphasizes creating a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, developing a clear vision, communicating the vision, empowering employees, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and institutionalizing change. Kotter's model emphasizes the importance of strong leadership and communication throughout the change process.

2.2.4 The ADKAR Model:

The ADKAR model, developed by Hiatt and Creasey (2003), focuses on individual change and addresses the stages individuals go through during change: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement. This model highlights the importance of addressing individual beliefs, behaviors, and skills to ensure successful change adoption (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011).

2.2.5 The Satir Change Model:

Virginia Satir's change model highlights the emotional and psychological aspects of change (Burnes, 2004). This model suggests that change often leads to chaos and resistance before reaching a new, transformed state. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing emotions and promoting a supportive and understanding environment during change initiatives.

2.2.6 Complexity Theory:

Complexity theory views organizations as complex adaptive systems. It suggests that change is nonlinear, emergent, and unpredictable (Pettigrew, 1985). Complexity theory emphasizes the need for flexible and adaptive approaches to change management that allow for experimentation, learning, and adaptation.

These theoretical foundations and models provide organizations with conceptual frameworks and practical guidance for understanding and managing change. By applying these models, organizations can analyze their specific contexts, identify appropriate change strategies, and enhance their change management practices.

2.3 Importance of change management in organizational settings

The importance of change management in organizational settings cannot be overstated. Effective change management practices play a crucial role in facilitating successful organizational transitions and ensuring positive outcomes. The following points highlight the significance of change management:

2.3.1 Minimizes Resistance and Increases Acceptance: Change often triggers resistance among employees and stakeholders. By implementing change management strategies, organizations can proactively address resistance, alleviate fears, and create a supportive environment that fosters acceptance of the proposed changes (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

This leads to smoother transitions and increased employee engagement during the change process.

2.3.2 Enhances Employee Performance and Productivity: When employees are properly prepared and supported during periods of change, they are more likely to adapt quickly and maintain high levels of performance (Cameron & Green, 2015). Change management practices provide the necessary tools, resources, and training to help employees develop the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the new environment, ultimately boosting productivity.

2.3.3 Reduces Disruption and Uncertainty: Change can disrupt established routines, processes, and structures within organizations. Change management helps mitigate potential disruption by providing a clear roadmap, communication channels, and support mechanisms that enable employees to navigate through uncertainty (Hayes, 2018). It ensures that everyone is informed about the change, its objectives, and the expected impact, which reduces anxiety and fosters a sense of stability.

2.3.4 Facilitates Alignment with Organizational Goals: Change management aligns individual and team efforts with the broader organizational goals. By clearly communicating the vision and purpose behind the change, employees can understand how their roles contribute to the overall success of the organization (Kotter, 1996). This alignment increases employee commitment, motivation, and a sense of ownership towards the change process.

2.3.5 Promotes Innovation and Adaptability: Organizations that embrace change management foster a culture of innovation and adaptability. Change management practices encourage open communication, collaboration, and experimentation, empowering employees to contribute their ideas, insights, and creative solutions during periods of change (Cameron & Green, 2015). This agility enables organizations to respond effectively to evolving market trends and stay ahead of the competition.

2.3.6 Improves Change Project Success Rates: Research has consistently shown that organizations that prioritize change management have higher success rates in implementing change initiatives (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). By following structured change management processes, organizations can effectively plan, execute, and monitor change initiatives, increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes within the specified timelines and budgets.

Change management is of paramount importance in organizational settings. It minimizes resistance, enhances employee performance, reduces disruption, aligns efforts with organizational goals, promotes innovation, and improves change project success rates. By embracing effective change management practices, organizations can navigate transitions more smoothly, maintain employee engagement, and achieve successful outcomes in an ever-evolving business landscape.

3 The Challenges of Change

3.1 Types and sources of resistance to change

Resistance to change is a common phenomenon that organizations encounter during periods of transition. Understanding the types and sources of resistance can help change managers anticipate and address potential challenges. The following are key types and sources of resistance to change:

3.1.1 Individual Resistance:

Fear of the unknown: Change often brings uncertainty, and individuals may resist due to concerns about how the change will impact their job security, skills, or future prospects (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Comfort with the status quo: Individuals may resist change because they are comfortable with existing routines, processes, and familiar ways of doing things (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Lack of trust or confidence: Resistance can arise if employees lack trust in the change process, the leadership, or the organization's ability to effectively manage the change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

3.1.2 Organizational Resistance:

Structural and systemic barriers: Resistance can stem from organizational structures, policies, or procedures that hinder change implementation. These barriers may include rigid hierarchies, bureaucracy, or resource constraints (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Lack of alignment with organizational culture: If the change contradicts deeply ingrained cultural norms or values within the organization, resistance is likely to emerge (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Prior negative experiences with change: Past unsuccessful change initiatives or organizational history may lead to skepticism and resistance (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

3.1.3 Group/Team Resistance:

Group norms and dynamics: Resistance may arise when group members are strongly attached to existing norms and ways of working. Peer pressure can influence resistance, as individuals conform to the group's sentiment (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Loss of power or influence: Change may disrupt power dynamics within teams or among individuals, leading to resistance from those who fear losing their influence or control (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Groupthink: Groupthink, characterized by conformity and a desire for unanimity, can lead to resistance when dissenting opinions are discouraged or suppressed (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

3.1.4 Communication and Information Gap:

Lack of awareness and understanding: Insufficient communication or inadequate explanation of the change purpose, benefits, and implications can create resistance due to a lack of clarity or misunderstanding (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Rumors and misinformation: When accurate information about the change is lacking, rumors and misinformation can spread, leading to resistance based on false assumptions or fear (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

3.1.5 Emotional and Psychological Factors:

Loss aversion: People tend to have a natural inclination to avoid loss. Resistance may occur if individuals perceive that the change will result in personal losses, such as status, relationships, or familiar ways of working (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Fear of failure: Individuals may resist change out of a fear of not being able to adapt or perform effectively in the new circumstances (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Emotional attachment: Individuals may resist change if they have an emotional attachment to the current state, such as a sense of nostalgia or sentimentality (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

It is important for change managers to address these types and sources of resistance through effective communication, engagement, addressing concerns, providing support, and involving stakeholders in the change process. By addressing resistance proactively, organizations can increase the likelihood of successful change implementation.

3.2 Psychological and organizational barriers to change

Psychological and organizational barriers can significantly impede the success of change initiatives within organizations. Understanding these barriers is crucial for change managers to develop strategies to overcome them. The following are key psychological and organizational barriers to change:

3.2.1 Psychological Barriers:

Fear of the unknown: Change often introduces uncertainty and disrupts familiar routines, triggering fear and resistance among individuals (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). Employees may resist change due to concerns about the potential negative impact on their job security, skills, or future prospects.

Loss aversion: People tend to have a natural inclination to avoid loss. Change can be perceived as a threat, leading individuals to resist it to protect their current status, relationships, or familiar ways of working (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Habit and comfort zone: Individuals often become accustomed to established routines and processes. Change requires individuals to step out of their comfort zones, which can generate resistance due to a preference for the familiarity and security of existing practices (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

3.2.2 Organizational Barriers:

Structural and systemic barriers: Organizational structures, policies, and procedures can act as barriers to change. Rigid hierarchies, bureaucracy, and lack of resources or capacity may hinder the implementation of change initiatives (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Lack of leadership support: Change initiatives often require strong leadership support and sponsorship. When leaders are not actively involved or do not provide clear direction, it can create barriers and result in resistance among employees (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Inadequate communication: Effective communication is vital during times of change. Poor communication, insufficient information, or lack of clarity regarding the purpose, benefits, and impact of the change can create resistance and increase uncertainty among employees (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Resistance from middle management: Middle managers play a critical role in implementing change. However, they may resist change if they perceive it as a threat to their authority or if they are not adequately involved in the change planning and decision-making processes (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Organizational culture and norms: Deeply ingrained organizational cultures and norms can act as significant barriers to change. If the desired change contradicts established cultural values or norms, resistance is likely to emerge (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

By recognizing and addressing these psychological and organizational barriers, change managers can develop tailored strategies to foster acceptance, engage employees, and overcome resistance, ultimately increasing the likelihood of successful change implementation.

3.3 Impact of change on employees and organizational culture

The impact of change on employees and organizational culture is significant during periods of organizational transitions. Change initiatives can disrupt established routines, relationships, and norms, which can have both positive and negative consequences. The following are key impacts of change on employees and organizational culture:

3.3.1 Employee Reactions and Responses:

Employee resistance: Change often triggers resistance among employees due to fear of the unknown, concerns about job security, or discomfort with new processes or technologies (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Resistance can manifest as decreased productivity, increased stress levels, and reduced employee morale.

Emotional responses: Change can evoke a range of emotional responses in employees, including anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and even excitement. These emotions can influence employees' perceptions of the change and their willingness to embrace it (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Increased stress and workload: Change initiatives can place additional stress on employees, particularly when new skills or competencies are required, or when timelines are tight. Employees may experience increased workload and pressure to adapt to new roles or responsibilities.

Skill gaps and training needs: Changes often necessitate new knowledge and skills. Employees may need training and development opportunities to acquire the competencies required to succeed in the new environment. Failure to address these skill gaps can result in employee frustration and decreased performance (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

3.3.2 Organizational Culture:

Culture clashes: Change can create clashes between the existing organizational culture and the desired change. If the change is not aligned with the prevailing values, norms, or beliefs, it can lead to resistance and cultural conflicts within the organization (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Cultural evolution: Change initiatives can impact and reshape the organizational culture over time. Successful change implementation can lead to the development of a culture that is more adaptable, innovative, and receptive to future changes (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Role modeling: Change often requires leaders and managers to exemplify and reinforce the desired behaviors and values. When leaders effectively model the desired change, it can positively influence the organizational culture and employee attitudes (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Alignment with cultural values: Change that aligns with the core values of the organization can be more readily embraced by employees and integrated into the organizational culture. When change initiatives reinforce existing cultural values, it can lead to greater acceptance and alignment (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

It is crucial for change managers to recognize the potential impacts of change on employees and organizational culture. By addressing employee concerns, providing support, aligning change efforts with the existing culture, and promoting open communication, organizations can minimize resistance, foster a positive culture, and increase the likelihood of successful change implementation.

4 Findings of the Study

Change management is a structured approach employed by organizations to transition individuals, teams, and systems from the current state to a desired future state. Various theoretical foundations and models, such as Lewin's Three-Step Model, the McKinsey 7-S Framework, Kotter's Eight-Step Model, and the ADKAR Model, provide frameworks for understanding and implementing change effectively. Change management is crucial in facilitating successful organizational transitions, minimizing resistance, enhancing employee performance and productivity, and aligning efforts with organizational goals. Resistance to change can stem from individual, organizational, and group/team factors, such as fear of the unknown, comfort with the status quo, lack of trust, structural barriers, and group norms.

Psychological and organizational barriers to change, such as fear of the unknown, loss aversion, habit and comfort zone, structural barriers, lack of leadership support, inadequate communication, and cultural clashes, can hinder change initiatives. Change impacts employees by triggering resistance, evoking emotional responses, increasing stress and workload, and requiring skill development and training. Organizational culture plays a vital role during change, with change initiatives either clashing or aligning with existing cultural values. Successful change implementation can reshape the culture and promote adaptability and innovation.

By understanding these findings, organizations and change managers can adopt strategies to address resistance, support employees, and foster a positive organizational culture, leading to successful change implementation and desired outcomes.

5 Conclusion

Change management is vital for organizations as it minimizes resistance, enhances employee performance, reduces disruption, aligns efforts with organizational goals, promotes innovation, and improves change project success rates, ensuring successful organizational transitions and adaptability in a dynamic business environment.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations for Effective Change Management:

- Anticipate and address resistance: Recognize the types and sources of resistance, communicate openly, address concerns, and involve stakeholders throughout the change process.
- Foster a supportive culture: Develop a culture that embraces change, encourages innovation, and promotes open communication and collaboration.
- Provide clear communication: Ensure clear and consistent communication about the change purpose, benefits, and impact to reduce uncertainty and misinformation.
- Engage and empower employees: Involve employees in the change process, provide training and support, and empower them to contribute their ideas and insights.
- Adapt and iterate: Embrace flexibility, monitor progress, and be willing to adjust strategies as needed to ensure successful change implementation.

5.1 Future directions for research in change management

Future research in change management can explore several areas to further enhance our understanding and practice of managing organizational transitions. Some potential directions for future research include:

- Change in the digital age: Investigate the impact of emerging technologies, digital transformation, and the increasing pace of technological advancements on change management processes and strategies.
- Change in a remote and hybrid work environment: Study the unique challenges and opportunities associated with managing change in remote or hybrid work settings, including virtual communication, employee engagement, and the role of digital tools in facilitating change.
- Change leadership and change agent effectiveness: Examine the specific qualities, skills, and behaviors of change leaders and change agents that contribute to successful change implementation, including the role of emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and adaptive leadership.
- Change sustainability and resilience: Explore how organizations can build resilience and sustain change initiatives over time, including strategies for embedding change into organizational culture, maintaining momentum, and overcoming change fatigue.
- Change communication and stakeholder engagement: Investigate effective communication strategies during change, considering diverse stakeholder groups, cultural differences, and the use of digital communication channels for engaging employees and other key stakeholders.
- Change measurement and evaluation: Develop and refine metrics and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness and impact of change initiatives, including measures of employee attitudes, behavior change, and organizational performance outcomes.
- Change management in diverse contexts: Investigate the application of change management principles and practices in different organizational settings, such as non-profit organizations, government agencies, or global multinational corporations, considering cultural, institutional, and sector-specific factors.
- Change management and employee well-being: Examine the relationship between change management practices and employee well-being, including the potential impact of change on employee stress, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall psychological health.

By focusing on these future research directions, scholars and practitioners can deepen their understanding of change management, improve change management practices, and adapt them to the evolving needs of organizations in a rapidly changing world.

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