

Models of organizational change

[Business](#), [Organization](#)



Introduction

Change is defined as “ *the process of transforming the manner in which an individual or organization acts from one set of behaviors to another* ” (Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 44). Change may be systematic and planned, or it may be implemented in a random manner. A situation in which most of the people in the organization are required to learn new behavior and skills is considered as major change. In addition to theory of organizational change, it is useful to have frameworks or models that help to “ *simplify i. e. combine organizational parts into more manageable portions, and focus on the most important portions related to the organizational change* ” (Shapiro, 2003, p. 15).

Models can be either mental or formal, however, regardless of the type of mode are simplifications of phenomena and serve to create a better understanding of how the organization operates. Models of organizational change aid in better examination of an organizational change and also give a common language that would help in developing the implementation strategy (Shapiro, 2003, p. 15).

A useful organizational model is one that “ *simplifies and at the same time represents reality i. e. a framework that makes it easy for the employees and employers to understand and organizations and helps them to organize and their realities in ways that promote understanding and action for change* ” (Burke, 2002, p. 14). There is no shortage of models of organizational change. In fact many organizational models or frameworks for understanding organizations exist in both academic and applied works.

One of the most popular models of organizational change is the one proposed by John Kotter. This paper discusses two other equally popular models - Kurt Lewin's three step change model, and William Bridge model of managing transition. Both these theories will be analyzed in detail in terms of their effectiveness.

Kurt Lewin's Three Step Change model

Kurt Lewin developed his ideas about organizational change from the perspective of the organization metaphor. His model is well known and is quoted by many managers in present times. Lewin says that a motivation for change must occur first. This replaces the old behaviors and attitudes as employees become dissatisfied with the status quo (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 97). Lewin, a social psychologist, who developed a three-stage model of how to initial, manage, and stabilize the change process. These three stages are known as unfreezing, movement and refreezing (Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 50).

The first step is to unfreeze the level of the present behavior. This step can take many forms and needs to be tailored as much as possible to the particular situation (Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 50). At the organizational level, the unfreezing step could be, for example, one of presenting the data and corresponding analysis to show the organizational members that there is a sizeable gap between where they are and where they need to be to meet growing demands for instance in their market place where the customer service is slipping dramatically. The second step involves moving towards the new desired level of behavior (Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 50).

With respect to the above example of organizational gap, moving might take the form of either training managers in the customer service department to behave differently towards their subordinates or implementing action plans for changing work processes and/or improving information systems. The third step i. e. the refreezing step establishes ways to make the new level of behavior relatively secure against change (Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 50). In the above example, this step could include the introduction of a new reward system to reinforce the new desired behavior of the department or restructuring certain aspects of the organization so that new ways of measuring performances are put into place

When Lewin's model for change is compared to the Kotter's model of change, the Kotter's steps one through four represent Lewin's unfreezing i. e. establish urgency, forms a powerful guiding coalition, create vision and communicate the vision; Kotter's steps five through seven represent Lewin's movement i. e. empower others to act on vision, plan for and create short-term wins, and consolidate improvements; and Kotter's step eight i. e. institutionalize new approaches is Lewin's refreezing (Burke, 2002, p. 151). The figure below represents the Lewin's three step model of change.

Figure: 1 Kurt Lewin's three-step change model

(Leonard, McGuire, 2007, p. 50)

Lewin's model uses the organism metaphor of organizations. The primary tendency of organism and in this case an organization is that it has the tendency of maintaining equilibrium in response to disruption changes. That is to say after a change has occurred; the organization will strive to adjust

itself back to its original steady state. The model also suggests that the new steady state must be intentionally moved towards and strongly established to make the change more permanent (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 97).

Lewin's model essentially describes the whole attitude behind how effective change must occur. Regardless of the different discrete steps involved in any type of change, the process is probably one of the most fundamental processes of what must happen during a change. Probably the best part of the model is the motivation bit, as it means that a change can be voluntarily brought about if the situation demands so.

William Bridge model of managing transition

William Bridges model is also a three phase model, but it focuses on how individual can manage personal transitions. However, the theory can easily be applied to organizations (Burke, 2002, p. 154). In addition, the theory also helps the larger organizational change to happen smoothly. Bridges also makes a clear distinction between planned change and transition and points out that transition is the more complex of the two. He focuses hence on enhancing the understanding of what goes on during transition and how can one manage this process more effectively. In this way, he manages to separate the mechanistic functional changes from natural human process of becoming more aware of change and adapting to new way of things (Burke, 2002, p. 155).

The transition process in Bridges model consists of three phases: ending, neutral zone and new beginning. The first process i. e. ending is the process of letting go of the past and of the previous ways of doing things. Bridges

emphasized the needs for people to achieve some closure about the past and to celebrate what was good about it. The second phase i. e. the neutral zone, is a period of time in which the individual is neither in the past nor in the new phase. This phase is experienced as a state of limbo and emotional disconnection and is ambiguous and often anxiety provoking (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 108).

There are individual differences regarding the time it takes for people to let go of the past and embrace the new, but it is a phase the leaders of change need to be sensitive to and not rush people through. The third and final phase is known as new beginnings, the time when organizational members start to focus on new goals and priorities begin to try the required new behaviors, and are psychologically prepared to move ahead (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 109).

In this stage too, patience on the part of the change leaders is needed, because as people try new behaviors and skills, mistakes will be made and corrective action will be required. The transition process is shown in the figure below.

Figure: 2 William Bridge model of managing transition

(Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 108)

Bridges ideas of organizational transition lead to a deeper understanding of what is going on when an organizational change takes place. While focusing on the importance of what is going on emotionally at each stage in the change process, the organization and chiefly managers are more aware of the transitions that people involved in change undergo (Cameron, Green,

2004, p. 110). Also the three phases mentioned by him are not unlike Lewin's three-step procedure, and are in fact more relevant in the present times, where the economic instability is forcing many companies to take several complicated and often unpleasant changes. Needless to say, the model is considered to be particularly useful when organizations are faced with inevitable changes such as the closure of sites, redundancy, acquisition and merger (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 110).

The ending and new beginnings are real tangible events in these situations, and the neutral zone is important, though uncomfortable. The model is more difficult to use for anticipatory change or home-grown change where endings and beginnings are more fluid, and therefore harder to discern. Another reason why this model is effective is because many a times it is found that close to the change, managers may experience difficulty when they have reached a new beginning and their people are still working on an ending, which is one of the main sources of frustrations (Cameron, Green, 2004, p. 110). Being aware of this issue makes the transition process much easier, which is the aim of this model.

References

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