

Reflections on change journal critical thinking

Business, Strategy



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Let me begin by a confession that at the start of this module, I did not anticipate so much. As a matter of fact, I thought it will be straightforward. They say change is inevitable; like growing. You can't do anything to change the inevitable, can you? On hindsight, I now look at my initial disinterest with a lot of dismay. I was on the brink of missing out on one of the most significant aspects of an organization's survival. I am now aware that change is actually an optimization process in the quest for an ideal state. On a professional level I realized that I have been unwittingly involved, one way or another in a change process. Once I was approached by a leading retail outlet to provide my opinion on particular issues that were meant to improve customer satisfaction. I am now aware that for the research personnel to have engaged me; a group of individuals must have sat through the deliberations. They must have recognized that there was space for optimal advancement; and they must have rationalized the ways to approach this

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endeavor. This is change.

While I could not add a theoretical conjecture to my experience then, I can now note any attempt to organizational change because of the various responses I learnt in this module. I also got to learn so much from class discussion. I for instance understood Lewin's module after a heated debate about its efficacy and practicability. I must admit the lecture slides were informative and the resource materials included were clear and straightforward. They were designed to cover particular durations of the entire module. The course outline provided at the beginning allowed for any student intent on reading ahead to do so without any fears of deviating from the confines.

There are a few concepts or practices that I personally did not find appealing or cost-effective but all in all they are nevertheless included because their strengths possibly lie in their ability to evoke thought and debate.

The Class in General

The aim of this module was to develop an understanding and possibly an appreciation on the current models of effecting a change. Every aspect of the organization therefore was ideally looked into. Of significance to me was the challenges and issues to change, and this included the nexus of the change drivers and the target recipients. I think my interest here emanated from the assumption that consumers are the drivers to change. Their recommendations and complaints finding a way back to the organization. I came to learn that in the highly competitive world of commerce, an organization's survival is determined by its ability to take the initiative and push for a change. This will be in an attempt to stay relevant or to ward-off

competition. When you come to think of it, you realize that the layoffs, outsourcing, mergers; are actually different facets of organizational change. From these classes I got to learn how these scenarios are calculated. I had to shift my view point about firms that lay off workers.

The dissemination Process

2012 Curriculum was amply spread into weekly classes, beginning with an overview of the theoretical framework and terminologies that would be repeated over and over during the classes. Of significance in this introductory class organization development, human dimensions of change and new approaches to change. This outlined the objectives of the curriculum in about five bullets; a scenario that simplified the core issues. By providing an overview of change management theory and terminologies, I was able to begin my process of appreciation of the course. Later there was an opportunity to compare the theories to the more subtle dimension of the human mind to change. In this regard, Organisational Change: Development and Transformation by Waddell, D. M. Cummings, T. D. & Worley, and C. G was particularly intuitive. The book gave glimpses of development in modern organizational change practices. The examples provided made the relational connection to the theories much easier.

While nothing makes a better reading material to me like the classical old, hardcover books; I find the online learning site very exciting. The user interface was friendly; though I found the reading list a bit confusing with some materials that were almost similar. In line with the emphasis on the golden rule, I have included it fundamentals in this journal because it was a significant guide to approaching an issue in social science. Prepare and

engage is a constant reminder that you only get as much as you are willing to allow. It went beyond reading the recommended texts, or the accompanying articles; it was about engaging all the stakeholders available in discussions aimed at investigating the practicality of the theoretical aspects. The interactive approach adopted was a bonus, it not always that one is compelled to look at a course on a more personal level. Questions that asked me about my expectations of the unit, who we are, and the change stories we had; helped me to build a sound rational connection. In my opinion it was a proper way to kick off the class because it made me have the feeling that what was about to unfold was about my expectations, our expectations and who we are.

Most of my own perspective was still a continuation of the right questions. I particularly related to French & Bell's definition of change; 'The new state of things is different from the old state of things', sounded simple enough to be understood at face value whilst also having many perspectives hiding between the lines. From it could find all the other definitions often adduced from a constructive approach. Change that is unplanned can also be responded to in a manner that limits the consequences. I realized that even those changes that are not purposefully sought can be positive. This is a something that many people have missed. An unanticipated disaster can be scary, but with a proper mindset and resourcefulness, one is able to gain some traction from it.

I also significantly valued the lessons that highlighted the particular levels of change. The examples of the individual, group and organization-wide changes were significant. The illustrations particularly on organizational-wide

change provided for a fascinating experience. I found it very exciting that while in class focused on organizational behavior, I was able to learn particular things that will have significant a impact on how I live my personal life as well. It was overwhelming to realize that a course meant strictly for professional advancement could relate so strongly to personal inclinations and tendencies. Therefore, how I handle any transition outside my professional setup will certainly be smarter. The theoretical frameworks about change were laid bare, making me able to ask myself questions like; how have I managed change on a personal level? Can I be any better, now that I have an insight of certain fundamentals of this concept? In response to these questions, I found enormous value in books and class discussions. Getting into the scale and scope of change, the differences in incremental or quantum; short or long term; and continuous or discontinuous; was insightful. I particularly liked the self-explanatory graphs that represented these different scenarios. Radical, smooth and bumpy were terms that reminded me of the day to day conversations that we have in expressing changes. ‘.. Am in a bumpy financial situation’ or statements like, ‘ the anticipated transition from our current offices to a safer side of town will be smooth’ or; ‘ there has been a radical shift in our operations after the passage of the new law’.

I must admit that I was surprised by statistical revelation that close to 70% of change initiatives fail to meet expectations. More alarming was the fact that some of these failed change initiatives were actually launched by reputable firms or agencies. This acted as a reminder that even the most seasoned organizations may flatter if they don’t execute a change in the

most professional way; leading to significant losses. I remember reading about the Multiplex Wembley Stadium sometimes back, and I thought how unfortunate the situation was. At least now I can see how things could have been different if a proper change management was put in place.

Over and above, the introduction to this unit taught me certain subtle lessons. Change in general will be well executed or responded to if the primary player reacts in an intelligent way, manages the change effectively, and is able to establish clear avenues of communication. Having understood that more often the ghostly members of the decision-making organ are the consumers; I now can, and will always attempt to have them on board in the core issues of planning. The lesson on change roles was instrumental. The three pronged approach of change strategists, change implementers, and change recipients was an invaluable summary. The highlight of implications for managers made feel a personal responsibility to lead my organization to successful change initiatives.

Misconceptions resolved?

I did not think that beyond a meticulous boardroom planning, communication had to be handled in an equally meticulous manner. A simple report that is well intentioned if not well constructed could lead to panic, sometimes among employees (who mistakenly fear that outsourcing or a merger might render them redundant) or the customers. The other misconception that I had clarified was the ease of effectuating a change. I got to confirm that change is hard. In the long run, I came to realize that the right attitude and a commitment to an established goal will guarantee successful transition.

Whilst I am aware that even the best laid plans sometimes flop, good plans

of change often include contingency plans for the even the worst case scenario. Through the recommended readings and group discussions, I got to learn that my knowledge thus gathered will never be enough. I forever remain a student to the dynamics of change.

Theories and Practices

The fundamental theories and practices were well elaborated. I did not have any feeling of deep disagreement with any of them, but being postulations of ideal situations I found that strict adherence to any practice may be fatal.

The discussions on OD as Planned Change were significant, very insightful.

The scientific model advanced if used could lead to successful change initiatives. The three main theories discussed were, (1) Lewin's Change Model; (2) The Action Research Model; and (3) Positive Model of Action Research.

Organization Transformation was significantly covered in details in week 10 of the unit. Ideally the weeks aims was summarized as thus; explore change models relevant to transformational change, to explore as part of transformational interventions, the place of culture change, to consider how culture change may be implemented. The case study of a 7 year culture change at the ANZ Bank was an important connection of theoretical learning and real life experience. The three points Strategic Change Leadership was pegged on particular virtues; envisioning, energizing and enabling. These were in line with the principles of strategic leadership that required that employees and the other stakeholders are engaged in the decision making machinery.

The debates that followed were really heated, particularly on linking vision

and change. However, I did not consider vision as an attribute of heroic leadership or of heroic organization. Such a grandiose proclamation would water down the fundamental responsibilities of leadership. In the modern global economy; it is the ability to look ahead; to hypothesize scenarios; and to triangulate them with the present state of affairs in developing a vision. In this regard I found no heroism. Fully aware that plans tend to go out of their laid path, like they have a mind of their own; I had a sigh of relief when the Contingency model of change hit the slides. I also found the Ten Commandments very informative.

The OD strategy was contrasted with OT (Organization Transformation); being a little conservative, I had a soft spot for the OD model. In my opinion it portends a proper transitional strategy that does not shake the organization to the very core. While Waddell, Cummings & Worley gave a very technical definition of Organizational Development, my understanding was that is that OD is about a planned development that is done within the framework of the organizational strategies. I felt a bit of a challenge in connecting the three theories until I adopted Lewin's rational; unfreeze, change, and refreeze. This three stage approach was to me so simplified yet all encompassing. I reckoned that all that research prior to a change, its optimal consideration, execution and post-change assessment; roughly falls within these three stages.

The philosophical basis of OD was simplified. To my understanding, OD was about the slightest transition that required the incorporation of new ideas, Information Communication Technology (ICT). It is about an organization seeking to build internal capability. Though it could be argued that

sometimes revolutions offer a fresh start, it cannot be done on a day to day basis. In this regard OT cannot suffice.

Scope of the issues

I found the semester arrangement and the issues to be addressed quite commendable. From an introduction that outlined the fundamentals of the curriculum, through my role as a student, diagnostics and intervention abilities, to the always controversial issues of downsizing. While there was no notable progression in complexity of the issues, the arrangement of the semester's learning objectives was amply divided into weeks. This allowed for a focused discussion of particular issues per week. While I could have overlooked the incorporation this manner of curriculum arrangement, in this journal; I found it well-crafted. I want to be able to reflect on it in future should I be tasked by a responsibility to lecture. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, the incorporation of graphics was a bonus and a good aid to memory. The video links were intuitive.

Personal strengths and challenges

The issues addressed in week 11 therefore were very insightful because they found a nexus with my personal philosophy of change. I feel that to lead a group to a successful transition, the unique and realistic issues should be identified prior to deciding on which model to employ above all the others. This will help the decision makers not only to come up with a decision, but with the best decision. This is the reason why I found it difficult to find relate to the dialectical models. I set out therefore to investigate an aspect not covered; what should be the guiding points in developing a credible theory?

In response I noted the following as the core questions that should be asked; (1) who are you seeking to influence; (2) what benefits are you hoping to achieve; (3) when do you hope to realize the anticipated benefits from the change; (4) what strategies ought to be taken into account to realize the desired goal; (5) how will the work be done; and finally; (6) why you believe the theory will work. When all these have been considered and a plausible approach developed, then there should be adherence to it.

Conclusion

After these few weeks of training, I find myself wiser; while my initial non-professional conceptions have been replaced by well researched and practical ideas, I still believe that an understanding of the team's strength and wide consultations is in order. Any team leader must not isolate him in a corner, and hope that his views are the best.

In recognition of the fact that this is a subject whose proper application will be line dividing between success and failure, I intend to seek other opinion leaders on this subject and engage them some more. Ideally this is a work in progress. Over the last half a century, there has been phenomenal development on Organization theories, therefore any professional hoping to remain relevant must keep fine tuning his skills, and must endeavor to learn the emerging best practices as they come. There are also a number of resource materials that I never got to look at due to time constraints and the pace of the semester or unavailability. But of more importance to me, I will make it a personal responsibility to engage management bodies that have succeeded where others failed; who have failed when everyone expected them to succeed.

Just like the image issued about the different stages of metamorphosis in a butterfly's life. Change will always be a requirement for growth. The tortoise never moved without sticking its head out. Finally I would state that this module has sharpened some skills in me that will become handy in my day to day life.

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