The affects of workplace change and stress

Business, Management

Growth and organizational evolution causes change, resistance to that inevitability and stress as a byproduct. The tactics individuals and leaders adopt can cause harmful consequences if not managed with sensitivity and awareness. Change can be threatening for those experiencing job insecurity (Robbins & Judge, 2007) or develop teams and co-workers that act at cross-purposes (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003). Change can be a source of stress, but so can workload, leadership styles, and the shuffling of roles and responsibilities (Cooper, 2006).

Management of resistance and stress is largely dependent on the organizations leadership to be the bulwark of these human traits by perceiving their sources and proactively attending to them. According to Robbins and Judge (2007), resistance to change is derived from two sources: individuality and organizational. Resistance resulting from an individual is due to the perceptions and personalities of people in the workplace. For example, change may cause insecurity in people and resistance because change threatens and alters their perception of job security (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Organizational resistance is linked to the formulation of the organizational structure. Structural inertia (e. g. formalized regulations) would be an example of an organizational source of resistance. These sources of resistance to organizational changes can be difficult to detect because of the way in which they present themselves. Robbins and Judge (2007) noted that, " resistance can be overt, implicit, immediate, or deferred" (p. 647). Burnes (2003) asserted that most organizations, management development, and

organizational change, are seen as separate activities and carried out by different groups.

According to Burnes (2003), whenever management development and organizational change are divided and passed on to different groups, it is a recipe for change management failure. Burnes (2003) argued that organizations need to embrace organizational change and organizational development tactically and operationally to increase their competitiveness. Burnes (2003) suggested that organizations must create a synergistic link between organizational development programs and change management programs. Burnes (2003) noted that, appropriate managerial skills and competencies must be taken into consideration when dealing with organizational change.

Although it may not be apparent, a synergistic link will produce managers that are mutually supportive in there efforts to overcome resistance to change and reduce the likelihood of change management failure. In contrast, Beaudan (2006) stressed that organizational change reaches a point where synergy and energy collide. Managers working mutually together in organizational development and change management programs will become fatigued as energy, time, and resources begin to diminish. Beaudan (2006) called this a " stall point" (p. 2) and the beginning phase of resistance to change.

Organizations reach a stall point no matter how much time and energy is focused toward bringing together organizational development programs and change management programs. Beaudan (2006) introduced a typical change curve to illustrate the phases of organizational change implementation and

how these phases contributed to resistance, stall, success, partial success, and failure to organizational changes. As Beaudan (2006) pointed out, in the beginning phases of organizational change, people are enthusiastic and often supportive while others reserve their judgment.

It is at this point, where the stall point begins and change becomes pivotal. According to Beaudan (2006), organizational change will move toward the path of success or failure. Beaudan (2006) defined successful organizational change occurring when " change is implemented and brings about expected results" (p. 2). Whereas, change management failure occurs when change is not put into organizational operation and the organization goes back to its outmoded ways of operations and deteriorates.

Despite the typical change curve introduced by Beaudan (2006) that described change implementation cycles over two year periods, Huy and Mintzbereg (2003) presented an organizational change model to illustrate how dynamic, systematic, and organic change affects organizations. According to Huy and Mintzbereg (2003), dynamic change originates from organizational crisis or when power is concentrated and descends from top senior management personnel. For example, Vivendi Universal underwent a five-year buying binge in the telecommunications and media markets (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003) in an attempt to build a media market monarchy.

When the stock market bubble burst in the 1990s, Vivendi's stock value dropped sharply, which then created an organizational crisis (i. e. dynamic change) and required guided top down management decision-making. Top down decision-making can be effective but can back fire and create covert resistance (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003). No less important is systematic

change. Huy and Mintzbereg (2003) stated that workforce groups and consultants who handle quality improvement, work reprogramming, benchmarking, and strategic planning often promote systematic change.

According to Huy and Mintzbereg (2003), systematic change can become overly formalized and technique-orientated to the point in which the initiative is stifled and resistance to change becomes implicit and deferred in the organization. While on the other hand, senior executive leaders drive dramatic change and systematic change is advanced by specialist and experts, organic change tends to arise from the grass roots level within an organization without being formally managed (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003).

Huy and Mintzbereg (2003) emphasized that organic approach to change can become detrimental when groups of people work at cross-purposes and fight over each other over resources. Moreover, these informal groups pander to experiential learning practices that result in serving its own interests and proceed to challenge authority covertly and implicitly (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003). Huy and Mintzbereg (2003) asserted, " neither dramatic nor systematic nor organic change works well in isolation" (p. 80).

Huy and Mintzbereg (2003) viewed these three forces as interacting together to transform the organization. Dramatic change approach must be balanced by order, systematic change guided by leadership, and the organic change must be manifested in a systematic way, supported by leadership (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003). Change contributes to stress and there are obvious challenges to managing this in the workplace. Cooper (2006) claimed that workplace stress for businesses in the United States has been estimated to be $150 billion a year.

This is a significant cost factor for American businesses. Despite the monetary costs of stress, what are the primary causes of stress and how do organizations manage stress? According to Cooper (2006), the primary stressors are high workload, job insecurity, culture clashes, different leadership styles, and re-allocation of roles and responsibilities. Cooper (2006) argued that significant organizational changes would cause unavoidable stress. Above all, it must be added that change brings with it increased workload, as organizations begin to compete in the global economy.

In contrast, Rojas and Kleiner (2001) emphasized the following common stressors: unrealistic goals for work completion; unrealistic timetables; high level of job interruptions; environmental factors such as noise, temperature, lighting; dealing with violent, abusive people; and competing for job promotion. Rojas and Kleiner (2001) suggested the following recommendations toward managing stress: take one assignment at a time; avoid pointless interruptions; delegate; avoid confrontational discourse; exercise regularly; and communicate with management concerning excessive tasks and unrealistic timetables.

Whereas, Cooper (2006) advocated prevention and intervention programs specifically targeting the reduction of workplace stress. For example, establishing flexible work schedules, redesigning the work environment, providing social support and response teams, establishing fair employment polices, and providing counseling services. According to Cooper (2006), the challenge to managing workplace stress will be for managers to be sensitive to not just feeling good about work and the bottom line (e. g. igher wages,

increased productivity, profitability) but the qualitative factor of lifestyle such as hours worked, family time, manageable workloads, control over career moves, and a sense of job security. Management is vital to steering co-workers towards achieving organizational goals and success. Change is unavoidable and will result in stressful environments. As a company evolves, even individuals that embrace new developments experience stall points, fatigue as energy, time, and resources diminish (Beaudan, 2006).

Leaders are pivotal for advancing and implementing change, and if not successfully undertaken can be the cause for an organization returning to its outmoded ways and deteriorating (Beaudan, 2006) or stifling initiative (Huy & Mintzbereg, 2003). Individuals can be the cause of their own stress should they feel job insecurity and work without speaking candidly to supervisors who may target towards unrealistic goals for work completion or give unrealistic time tables (Rojas & Kleiner, 2001).

Though stress is different for each person, there are common methods of dealing with it that upper management can use to relieve these pressure points such as allowing for flexible work schedules and redesigning the work environment (Cooper, 2006). Change is necessary for a company to survive the market, and stress will follow, but how each is handled will exhibit the mettle of its leaders and workers and can produce a heartier and stable organization prepared to meet the next challenge.