Change management theories of john kotter and kurt lewin

[Business](), [Company]()

There are a variety of theories relating to change management all explaining a different strategy for managing a period of change. With companies needing to evolve due to technology improvements, competitors, acquisitions and legislation, an organized change management strategy is key to ensuring a successful outcome. However according to CIPD (2017) research less than 60% of re-organizations met their objectives. Therefore how companies manage that change needs to be organized and planned, two key change management theories come from John Kotter and Kurt Lewin.

In 1995 John Kotter wrote a book called " Leading Change" this detailed 8 steps. Kotter began with the importance of demonstrating the need for change and establishing motivation. According to Kotter 75% of the company needs to buy into the change for it to be successful. The following steps talked about engaging with influencers to lead the change and creating a vision so people understand what they're working towards. He discussed the importance of communication and removing any blockages for that change to be successful. He explained the importance of celebrating quick wins, which help maintain motivation and highlight successes. He went on to explain how not to confuse these quick wins with the end of the change initiative, as the final change runs much deeper in the organization.

Kurt Lewin introduced his model in the 1940's and was thought to be much simpler than Kotters with three main stages, unfreeze, change and refreeze. Like Kotter, Lewin started with need to established motivation for change by using statistics and evidence " Motivation for change must be generated before the change can occur”. The unfreezing stage can create some uncertainty as Lewin is asking people to re-evaluate how business is done. There needs to be time for people to understand the changes required before moving forward and they need to be involved throughout the transition via communication. The final stage “ refreeze” is similar to Kotters final stage, Lewin discussed how important it is to ensure these changes become rooted in the business.

When IBM were reporting loses in the early ‘ 90’s a new CEO joined and he wanted to adopt Lewins’ model. He spent time understanding the culture as he felt there was an urgent need to change it, he gathered statistics to understand and demonstrate the need for change. He documented in his book Elephants Can Dance “ Our greatest ally in shaking loose the past was IBM’s eminent collapse. Rather than go with the usual happy face, I decided to keep the crisis front and center. I didn’t want to lose the sense of urgency”. He went on to improve transparency and a build a culture of open communication to facilitate the next stage. He relaxed the dress code, created desire to do better by highlighting successes of competitors and gave employees a voice. Due to the desire for change and open culture, employees were able to see a better way of working and embraced the change. Finally he introduced principles to underpin the culture and “ freeze” the change. He thought the change would take 5 years however it actually took ten. Lewins’ model has advantages in being simple, goal orientated and uses a visual language for people to understand. However one area not highlighted is when to deal with people who are resistant, there is an assumption the first stage will gather enough motivation to see the change through to completion. Also there is a lack of human element to the model, a consideration of feelings and the experience of the employee. It's a more fluid and less structured model which might mean it's difficult to set timeframes around each stage, as seen at IBM. There have been theories following on from Lewin to add depth and detail to his three stages, these came from Lippit (1958) and Schein (1987) which extended Lewins three steps, by adding more detail under the same headings, they felt the stages actually overlapped each other and required more information for organizations to be successful in managing change.

Ericsson adopted Kotters model when they wanted to integrate 4G. Ericsson found the model extremely beneficial to guide them through this period of change, from using key factual information to drive urgency, engaging influential change makers, communicating and having a clear vision. They found that a clear vision empowered employees to make the right decisions in line with the change strategy. Kotters model is very detailed and allows leaders to set out a clear plan with associated timeframes for each step; however Ericsson highlighted how each step needs to be completed before moving onto the next and how it focuses on the model and plan rather than the change itself. Kotters' model came from his experience within larger, complex companies, it's perceived to be a top down model, driven by leaders and potentially too structured. The inflexibility with the Kotter model can be seen to be negative and a reason for failure, as managers often want a less rigid change process. The model is very focused on organizational change and doesn't address personal aspect to the business.

Robert Tanner (2018) and other studies highlight how Kotter's model is compatible with Lewin's and is in reality an extension of it, with similar underlying principles but with Kotters adding the detail. In 2015 a training company Velopi adopted the simpler Lewin method however felt the need to invest in further change management ideals and therefore adopted Kotters, like Tanner they saw the Kotters model as an extension of Lewins and used both to ensure a successful change management strategy with enough detail.