Change management and Organisational commitment

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Abstract

In a dynamic business environment, organizations that must remain relevant and viable are constrained with the challenge of championing and implementing change according to the environmental realities. This development presents a decision making dilemma which managers must necessarily cope with because organization and its members are averse to change. Focused on the review of extant literature for available qualitative data, this study attempted to highlight the pivotal importance of organizational commitment during change. It examined Kurt Lewin's three step change model and equally explained the nature of organisational resistance to change with Lewin's force field theory of change. The findings revealed that organizational commitment provided for organizational effectiveness and performance even when an organization is compelled to implement planned change. The study recommended that managers should adopt planned change as a proactive measure to mitigate against resistance to change.

Keywords: Commitment, organisational change, planned change, resistance

Introduction

Every organization is faced with the perpetual challenge of developing a committed workforce and achieving sustained productivity. No organization can achieve optimality in productivity unless its employees are committed to the organization and what it stands for. Therefore, it is important to understand the concept of commitment as an organisational variable (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). Invariably, for organizations to achieve their aims and objectives as put forth in their vision and mission statements, the commitment of their workforce must be guaranteed (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). We have seen that today's business environment is characterised by a fast past paced change. For this reason, Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) stated that organizations are continuously involved with one program of change or another. But it is becoming increasingly important for organizations to gain competitive advantage by being able to manage and survive change (Amagoh, 2008), because organisational change as a process, is a concept that is encumbered with resistance by organization and its people (Kreitner, 2007; Robbins & Judge, 2007). Therefore change managers rely on the commitment of their employees when implementing organizational change. Visagie and Steyn (2011) observed that previous studies have identified organizational commitment as a pre-requisite to the successful implementation of organizational change. Because no matter how successfully or administratively perfect a proposed change may be, individuals in an organization implement or break the change.

Existing literature on change management and commitment have dwelt on the fact that managers may initiate change or that change may be imposed by specific changes in policies and procedures or through external pressures, but this present study examined the relevance of employees commitment to change management with a view of explaining the importance of planned change. Structured into three parts, in the next section extant literature on the subject matter was reviewed while part three concludes.
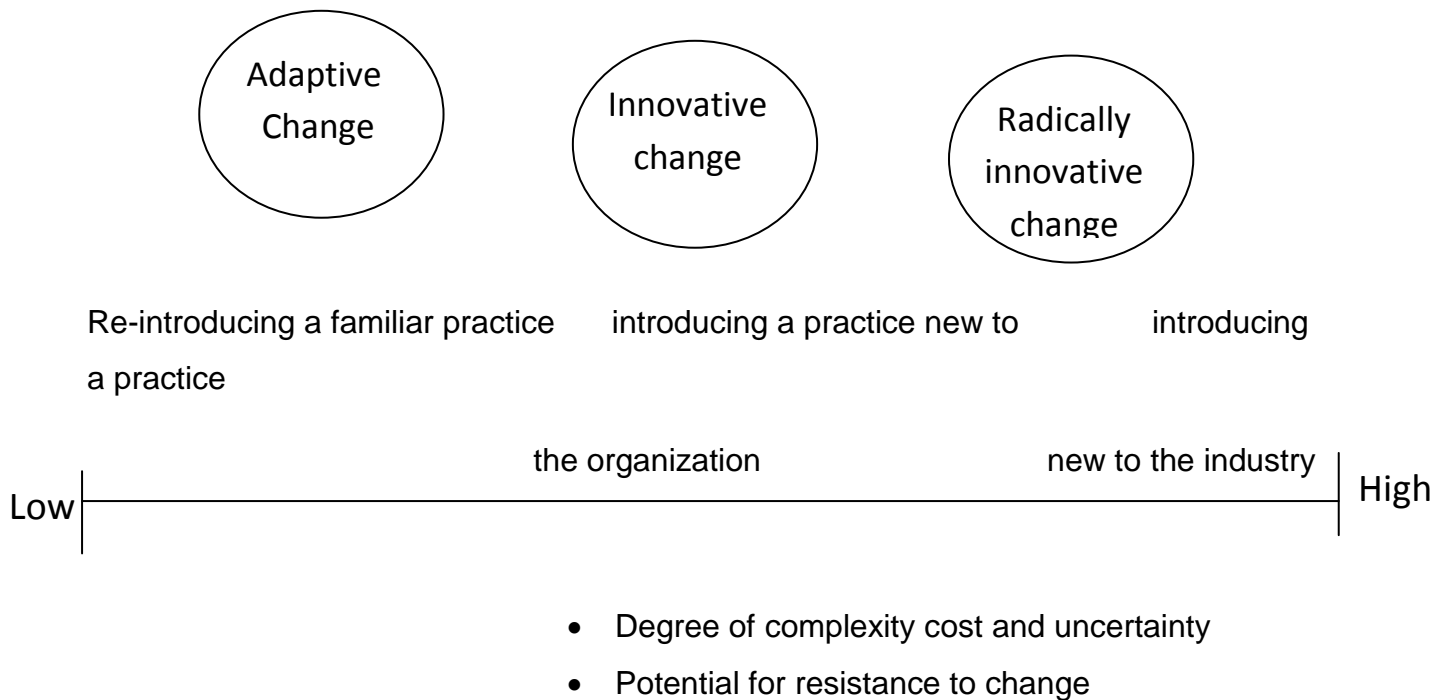
Literature review

Nature of change

Change is a unique phenomenon, we live with it and experience it on a daily basis. According to Robbins and Coulter (2001), Change is an organizational reality. It is precipitated by the increased global competition, developments in information technology and the need for ethical considerations among other factors (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004).

The concept of change implies that a situation, person or thing has altered in some way. Change implies difference, adaptation, innovation and renewal. Organizations as relatively permanent and structured groups of people engaged in the pursuit of common goals are as liable to change as any other natural phenomenon in our world. (Cole, 1995, p. 55).

This statement is supported by Robbins and Judge (2007) who captured the spate of today's change succinctly and stated that we live in a period that is characterized by discontinuity. They maintained that if an organization is to survive, it must respond to changes in its environment. Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) emphatically stated that companies no longer have a choice, they must change to survive. Furthermore, Moran and Brigthman (2001) cited in By (2005) stated that organisational change is necessitated by the need to enhance the organisations direction with regards to structure, capabilities and process in order to meet the changing needs of its market. This change may affect attitudes, goals, resources, laws and other factors (Hefron, 1968 cited in Song, 2009). Therefore, given the nature of change, there is need for managers to engage in organisational change management. Kreitner and Kinicki (2004)

presented a typology of organisational change. This typology has been used to explain the nature of organisational change.

Figure 1:   A generic typology of organizational change

Re-introducing a familiar practice   introducing a practice new to   introducing a practice

                                                        the organization   new to the industry

Low ——— High

- Degree of complexity cost and uncertainty
- Potential for resistance to change

Source: Kreitner, R., & Kinicki, A. (2004). *Organisational behavior* (6th ed.). New York, NY:
          McGraw Hill.

Change management

According to Song (2009, p. 7), "change management is a systematic approach to dealing with change, both from the perspective of an organization and on individual level". Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson and Singleton (2008) opined that organisations who anticipate and proactively engage the future are more successful in the long run. Forthrightly, Cole (1995), has identified that there are two basic types of change, namely: reactive change and planned change. In reactive change, organizations are forced to change at short notice by the internal and/or external environmental factors. Whereas, in planned change, the change is initiated by the organization in view of anticipated trends from forecast (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Pryor *et al.*, 2008). Thus, "most planned organisational change is triggered by the need to cope with potential future problems; for example intended government legislation, a new product development by a major competitor, further technological advances" (Mullins, 1985, p. 910). According to Robbins and Judge (2007), because the success or failure of an organization is due to the activity or the inactivity of the organization and its people, planned change is concerned with improving and channeling the behavior of individuals and groups within the organization. This view has been supported by a number of scholars (Bateman & Snell, 1999; Cole, 1995; George & Jones, 1996; Mullins, 1985; Robbins & Judge, 2008). Planned change is an intent to boost the operational effectiveness of the organization, it includes effort to stimulate innovation, empower employees, introduce work teams and increase productivity among others (Mullins, 1985; Robbins & Judge, 2008).
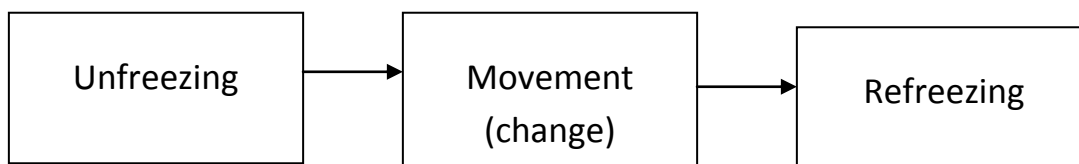
Models of organisational change

Scholars, researchers and practitioners alike, have developed some models for organisational change. These models of planned change attempt to help managers and leaders to understand the nature of change and equally guide them in the implementation of organnisational change (Gilley, Mcmillan & Gilley, 2009). Among others, such models include: Kurt Lewin's three step change model (Cole, 1995); David Ulrich's seven-step model (Alhogail & Mirza, 2014; Pryor *et al.*, 2008); and John Kotter's 8-step change model (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). For the purpose of this study, we adopt

Kurt Lewin's three step change model to discuss how managers can plan and achieve organisational change.

Lewin's three step change model

This model was developed by Curt Lewin in the 1950's (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Lewin (1991) cited in Cole (1995) argued it was necessary to unfreeze the current organisational and individual behavior before introducing any changes. This is concerned with recognizing and addressing the underlying perceptions of the target group, preparing the ground by creating motivation for the proposed change (George & Jones, 1996). Then devising ways of helping them to adapt to the change, and gaining their confidence and acceptance of the change. After this is achieved, the next step is to stabilize the organization by instituting the new changes. As such, organisational change management involved a three stage process vis-à-vis, unfreezing the status quo; movement (change) to a desired state; and re-freezing this new change to make it permanent (Gilley, *et al.*, 2009). However, Bateman and Snell (2007) cited in Wainaina, Kabare & Mukulu (2014) stated that critics of Lewins three step change model are of the view that the model is not relevant and that unfreezing and freezing do not apply to human behavior.

Figure 2: Lewin's three step model

Source: Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2007). Orgnisational behavior (12th ed.). New Jersey,

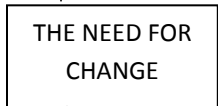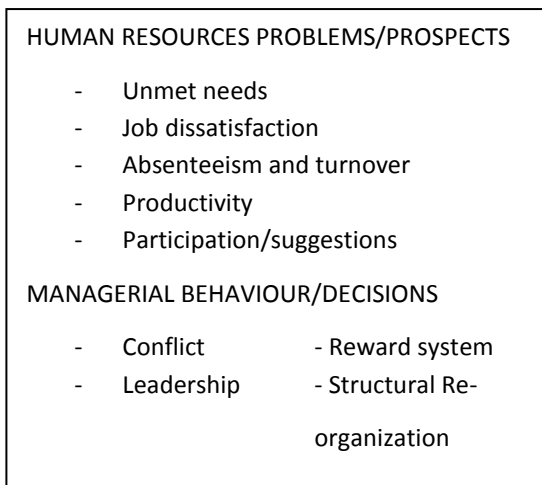   NJ: Pearson Education.

Need for change

A number of factors are responsible for the push for organisational change. Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2008) submitted that the forces for change may come from the environment external to the firm, from within the organization, or from the individuals themselves. These forces or factors supervene to precipitate change (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). The reason for organisational change is to ensure that organisations remain adaptively relevant to the scheme of things in their operational environment (Sarayreh, Khudair, & Barakat, 2013). This means that if organisations refuse to adapt to the environmental realities, they may be challenged, and eventually forced to stagnate, operate at a loss, loose existing customers and clients or even become moribund, and finally fail. Depicted below are the internal and external forces of change (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). These are the forces that usually push for organisational change, when the influence of these forces are overwhelmingly huge, organization and its managers are left with no other option but to succumb under the pressure unleashed on them by these forces.

Figure 3: Internal and External forces of change

EXTERNAL FORCES

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
- Age
- Education
- Skill level
- Gender
- Immigration

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

- Manufacturing automation
- Information technology

MARKET CHANGES

- Mergers and acquisition
- Domestic and international competition
- Recession

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PRESSURES

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                                          │
                                          │
                                          ▼
                              ┌───────────────────┐
                              │   THE NEED FOR    │
INTERNAL FORCES               │      CHANGE       │
                              └───────────────────┘
                                          ▲
┌──────────────────────────────────┐      │
│ HUMAN RESOURCES PROBLEMS/PROSPECTS│      │
│                                   │      │
│   -  Unmet needs                  │      │
│   -  Job dissatisfaction          │      │
│   -  Absenteeism and turnover     │      │
│   -  Productivity                 │──────┘
│   -  Participation/suggestions    │
│                                   │
│ MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOUR/DECISIONS    │
│                                   │
│   -  Conflict      - Reward system│
│   -  Leadership    - Structural Re-│
│                                   │
│                      organization │
└──────────────────────────────────┘
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Source: Kreitner, R., & Kinicki, A. (2004). *Organisational behavior* (6th ed.). New York, NY:

McGraw Hill.

Resistance to change

Organisational change is a critical issue, and has always constituted a managerial dilemma which most organisations must of necessity cope with (George & Jones, 1996). This was affirmed by Robbins and Judge (2008) who stated that the findings from studies of individual and organizational behavior indicated that organizations and their members are resistant to change. This statement was confirmed by Kreitner (2007) who asserted that organisational change is consequentially challenged by both rational and/or irritational resistance from those who perceive that their jobs may either be directly or indirectly affected. Cole (1995) observed that even where organisational
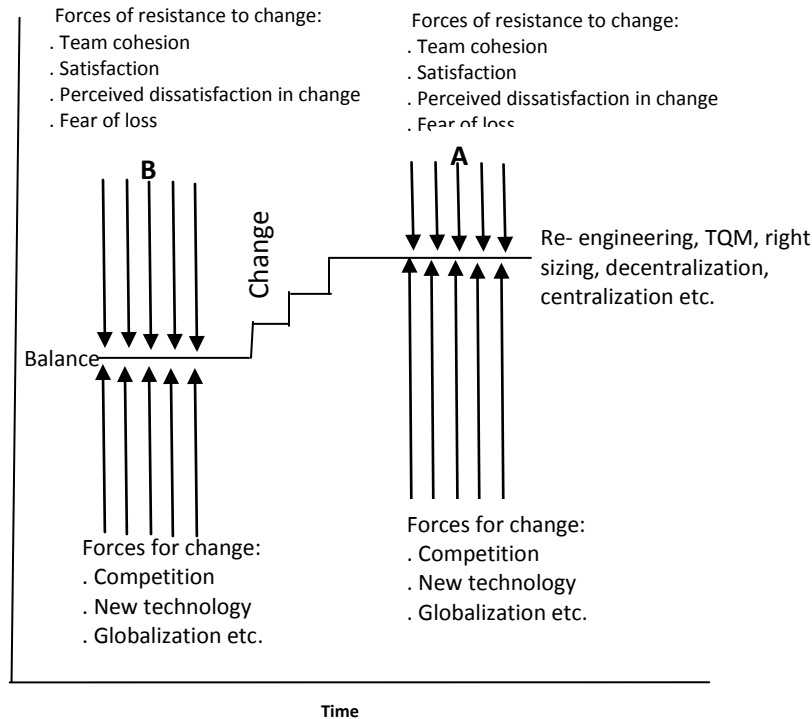
change has recorded a high level of acceptance, there have been pockets of resistance in certain areas and aspects of organisational activities. Scholars and researchers have adduced a number of reasons for employee and organisational resistance to change (Kirimi, 2011 cited in Wainaina, *et al.,* 2014; Kreitner, 2007; Robbins & Coulter, 2001; Weihrich *et al.*, 2008; Yilmaz & Kilicoglu, 2013). According to Robbins and Coulter (2001), three reasons are responsible for employee resistance to change: uncertainty, concern over personal loss and the belief that the change is not in the best interest of the organization. According to Kreitner (2007) and Kirimi (2011) cited in Wainaina *et al.* (2014) the reasons for employees resistance to change stem from the fear of being rendered redundant, misunderstanding, ignorance, lack of skills, emotional side effect, and competing commitments among others; and insecurity, which is a product of fear of the unknown (Weihrich *et al.*, 2008). Such resistance could manifest in the following employee behaviors namely foot-dragging, withdrawal, material sabotage, whistle blowing, work to rule and symbolic sabotage (Carr & Brower, 2000; Fleming and Spicer, 2003 cited in Pieterse, Caniels & Homan, 2012). For these reasons, Kurt Lewin has explained organisational change with regards to resistance to change in his force field theory (Cole, 1995).

Force field theory

Kurt Lewin's force field theory explained the nature of organisational resistance and how managers can overcome rivalry between the two sets of forces that are involved in organisational change (Cole, 1995; George & Jones, 1996). On the one hand, are the set of forces that compel the organization to change, while on the other hand are the set of forces that resist proposed organisational change (Cole, 1995). Lewin argued that if a state of balance is achieved between these two sets of competing forces, which is indicated by both set of forces having or exerting an equal amount of pressure on each other, a state of equilibrium occurs which is characterized by ineffectiveness in the organization (George & Jones, 1996). Therefore, to achieve organisational change, managers must increase the influence of the forces of change by weakening the forces

that promote resistance to the proposed organisational change (Cole, 1995; George & Jones, 1996).

Figure 4: Lewin's Force Filed Theory of Change

Forces of resistance to change:
. Team cohesion
. Satisfaction
. Perceived dissatisfaction in change
. Fear of loss

Forces of resistance to change:
. Team cohesion
. Satisfaction
. Perceived dissatisfaction in change
. Fear of loss

B

A

Change

Re- engineering, TQM, right sizing, decentralization, centralization etc.

Balance

Forces for change:
. Competition
. New technology
. Globalization etc.

Forces for change:
. Competition
. New technology
. Globalization etc.

Time

Adapted: George, J.M., & Jones, G.R. (1996). Understanding and managing organisational

behavior (1st ed.). USA: Addison-Wesley.

From figure 4 as depicted above, in diagram A, equilibrium exist in the organization due to equality of pressure between the forces for change and the forces that are resistant to change as such, the status quo in the organization is upheld. Whereas, in diagram B, there has been a shift from the status quo due to the fact that the forces pushing for change are of higher and more forceful intensity than the forces that are resistant to the proposed change. It follows that managers should develop and implement measures that are focused on promoting proposed organisational change such that agitation against such changes are minimized.

Commitment

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Commitment is paramount for the achievement of individual and organisational goals. According to Mehrabi, Jadidi, Haery and Alemzadeh (2013), organisational commitment is a concept that has elicited concern among members of the academic community. George and Jones (1996) defined organisational commitment as a positive feeling and belief by the employee about the employing organization. Organisational commitment is seen by Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) as a reflection of the degree to which organisational people are in affinity with, and are willing to exert their efforts to work with and stay employed in the organization. Myer and Allen (1997) cited in Mehrabi *et al.* (2013) have discovered that organisational commitment has three dimensions which includes emotional, normative, and continuous commitment. Emotional commitment is a reflection of how employees feel about their organization, continuous commitment implies the need for commitment to the organization stemming from cost implications. Normative commitment is the degree of employee belief in organisational commitment. Therefore, organisational commitment is an indication of how good employees feel about their organization and what it represents, with an intent to remain dedicated to the achievement of the organisations goals (George & Jones, 1996), and organisational managers are of the perception that employee commitment is key to achieving an enhanced performance (Mullins, 1985).

Commitment and change management

We have seen that it is important for organizations to adapt to the environmental realities by embarking on the needed organisational change as this will help the organization to survive, remain relevant and achieve continuous growth (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). Agreeably, organisational change is targeted at improving the organization (George & Jones, 1996). But organisational resistance may impede the implementation of the required change (Robbins & Judge, 2008). This resistance stems from the fact that individuals are attracted to work environment that can aid them in the achievement of their own personal expectation while contributing their own quota to the organization (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). But when organisational change is resisted due to perceived disadvantages on the part of the employee, commitment is compromised

and an equilibrium state between forces for change and resistance to change certainly will result into ineffectiveness thereby forcing the organization to suffer loss (George & Jones, 1996). Hence, for organisational change to be successful, the employees must necessarily remain committed to the organization (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004).

Conclusion

Evidently, it has been established that the concept of organisational change has been plagued with a continued vehement opposition from organization and its people (George & Jones, 1996; Robbins & Judge, 2008). We have equally seen a number of reasons which have been adduced by erudite scholars to be responsible for this situation (Kirimi, 2011 cited in Wainaina *et al.,* 2014; Kreitner, 2007). However, from this study it has been established that for the purpose of survival, relevance, continuity and growth, organisational change cannot be avoided, it remains a necessary evil which organisations must live with (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004; Sarayreh *et al.*, 2013). But could be planned and properly implemented by managers through change management (Song, 2009). Therefore we conclude that organisational change could be implemented successfully by making use of existing change management models such as Ulrich's seven step model, Kotter's eight step model and Lewin's three step model among others (Alhogail & Mirza, 2014; Cole, 1995; Gilley *et al.*, 2009; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004; Pryor *et al.*, 2008). From the ongoing, we have seen that for organisations to survive change, there is need for an effective change management process. Therefore, we recommended that in their quest to deliver value to all stakeholders, managers should adopt planned change as a proactive and practical measure to manage change by engaging their environment and motivating their organization and its people. We equally recommend the use of Lewin's three step change model as this model of planned change, will help to foster employee's commitment to the organization and what the organization stands for during the period of unavoidable change.

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