Lewin's Theory of Change: Applicability of its Principles in a Contemporary Organization

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Abstract

Change is one of the shared strand that is experienced in all organizations irrespective of organizational size, age or industry. The ecosphere is fast shifting leading to organizations quick adaption to this change. Those organizations that tend to navigate through change well succeed whereas those organizations that are not able, tend to struggle in their existence. How successfully change can be managed in organizations varies widely dependent on the type of the trade, the type of change, and the individuals who are involved in the change. Using any theory of change is useful since it will offer the leaders a roadmap to follow and the capability to ascertain the probable outcome (Michie & Johnston, 2012). Therefore, these theories are very helpful because change is difficult to implement especially if you are doing it blindly. Lewin's theory of change is one of the pillar theories that help individuals to better understand organizational change (Kritsonis, 2005). It was Kurt Lewin in 1951 who came up with this theory, but it still holds to date. This theory is commonly branded as the 'Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze' that speak of the three phase procedure of change that is described by Lewin (Lee, 2006). Lewin was a physicist in addition to being a social scientist which abled him to explain organizational change by the use of an ice block changing shape analogy.

Keywords: *Lewin's Theory of Change & Contemporary Organization.*

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Change is one of the shared strand that is experienced in all organizations irrespective of organizational size, age or industry. The ecosphere is fast shifting leading to organizations quick adaption to this change. Those organizations that tend to navigate through change well succeed whereas those organizations that are not able, tend to struggle in their existence (Kotter, 2012). It does not really matter whether the suggested change is in the section of overall operations of change in the specific sections of project development. By and large, it is very difficult to adapt to change both for an organization as well as its workforces (Kotter, 2012). How successfully change can be managed in organizations varies widely depending on the type of individuals involved, the kind of change being pursued and the kind of the trade run by the organization (Riches, Rankin-Wright, Swain & Kuppan, 2017).

Using a theory of change is of great help to the leaders due to its ability to offer guidelines that are very useful as the organization navigates through the uncertainties of change and further empowers the leaders with the capacity to because it offers leaders a guideline to follow along with the ability to ascertain the probable outcome of the change (Michie & Johnston, 2012). Therefore, these theories are very helpful because change is difficult to implement especially if you are doing it blindly. Lewin's theory of change is one of the pillar theories that help individuals to better understand organizational change (Kritsonis, 2005). It was Kurt Lewin in 1951 who came up with this theory, but it still holds to date. This theory is commonly branded as the 'Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze' that speak of the three phase procedure of change that is described by Lewin (Lee, 2006). Lewin was a physicist in addition to being a social scientist which abled him to explain organizational change by the use of an ice block changing shape analogy.

Understanding Lewin's Change Theory

According to Burnes (2004) if someone has got a big ice cube and then recognizes that they do not need the cube but an ice cone, the very first step of what to do is to liquidify the ice to make it responsive to any necessary change (unfreezing). Secondly, one needs to do is make this iced water to the desired shape (change). Lastly, one needs to coagulate this new different shape that has been made (refreezing). By viewing change as a progression having different phases, an individual is able to prepare him/herself for that which is coming and come up with tangible

strategies to handle transition. Looking beforehand then take a leap is the ideal way to go about change (Kotter, 2012).

Too often, many people set foot into change blindly which ends up instigating needless chaos, disorder, turmoil and confusion (Lee, 2006). To start off any fruitful change process, it is ideal to critically understanding the reason as to why that particular change has to be effected. Lewin postulates that "motivation for change must be generated before change can occur". An individual ought to be aided to reexamine the "many cherished assumptions about oneself and one's relations to others" (Burnes, 2004). This is where change begins.

Kurt Lewin presented a three-step change theory that understands conduct as a self-motivated stability of powers that are at work in contrasting ways. Driving powers enable transition since they tend to thrust workers into the anticipated course while restraining powers deter transition since they shove workers to the contrasting path (Sarayreh, Khudair & Barakat, 2013). Hence, these forces ought to be examined and the Lewin's three step theory should aid in shifting the equilibrium in the path of the deliberated transition.

Unfreezing

Unfreezing is the initial phase of the change progression. The situation in existence has to be unfrozen first before anything work of change is done. It is necessary for the organization to be prepared first to accept the anticipated change. This encompasses contravention of the current situation before building up a different operational way (Cummings, Bridgman & Brown, 2016). This can only be attained through following three approaches; foremost, enhance the driving powers which will shift individuals' conduct away from the status quo; secondly, reduce the restraining powers which destructively affect the movement from the current steadiness; and lastly, get amalgamation of these two approaches (Bridgman, 2016). The very vital component is coming up with a convincing communication as to why the current ways of operation cannot go on.

To get the organization ready effectively, one needs to start the whole process from the main point, by challenging the values, beliefs, conduct and attitudes that presently describe the organization. One ought to keenly scrutinize and be set to adjust the current fundamentals since they may not be of the required sustenance on extra levels (Sarayreh *et al.*, 2013). This can be achieved through motivating participants by preparing them for change, dynamically participating

in recognizing problems and suggesting solutions within the organization, and cultivating trust and recognition for the need to change (Cummings *et al*., 2016).

It is vital to note that the very initial portion of this process of change is typically the most stressful and most difficult. The moment an individual starts cutting down the common ways of operation, everything and everybody is put askew (Martin, 2017). This might induce very robust responses from individuals, that is what exactly is needed to be done. By compelling a company to re-look at its fundamentals, one efficiently controls disaster which in turn builds a very robust inspiration to pursue a different and new balance. Without this inspiration, one may not get the buy-in and the needed participation to implement any expressive transition (Wang, City & Ellinger).

Change

Subsequent to the ambiguity generated in the unfreezing phase, the transition (change) phase is introduce. This is where individuals start to resolve their ambiguity and start looking for different and better ways of operation (Wang et al.). It is in this phase that individuals will start believing and acting in a manner that supports this different and new path. Hence, it is essential to move the goal scheme to another level of balance by urging workers to accept that the old system is no longer helpful to them, further encouraging them to see the problem from a new viewpoint, work together in pursuit for new, pertinent information and finally, put forward the opinions of employees to well respected, powerful leaders who also back the change (Kritsonis, 2005).

According to (Hussain *et al*., 2016), the changeover from the unfreezing phase to change phase does not occur instantaneous. For an organization to accept the change and pursue it to make it a success, employees ought to fully understand how it will be of benefit them. Unfortunately, not everybody is going to just like it for the reason that it is essential and will eventually profit the organization. Further, some employees will be sincerely wounded by the change, especially those who profit from the current situation. Other people may take longer to understand the benefits the change being introduced will bring. There is need to foresee these likelihoods and manage the situations in good time to enable the change to be successful (Levasseur, 2001).

Time and communication happen to be the two core components that will drive change successfully. Employees require time to comprehend the changes, and equally feel greatly associated to the company all through the changeover period (Levasseur, 2001). When managing

change, one needs a great deal of effort and time. 'Hands-on management' is usually the finest method to use.

Refreezing

The third and last phase of Lewin's theory of change is refreezing. This phase usually takes place immediately after change has been executed to ensure that this new creation can be sustained (Kaminski, 2011). If this step is not correctly taken, there is a high likelihood that the change will be short-lived and workers will quickly go back to their long-standing balance. Shirey (2013) suggests that the external marks of readiness to refreeze include a steady organizational chart, reliable job descriptions and other signs such as these. This stage is the real incorporation of the new standards into the organizational beliefs and culture. The main determination of the refreezing phase is to steady the new equilibrium subsequent from the change by harmonizing both the driving and restraining powers (Burnes, 2004).

The best action to be used in implementing refreezing phase is by reinforcing new outlines and institutionalizing them through the official and casual devices which include processes and policies (Shirey, 2013). This means ensuring that the changes are used all the time and that they are incorporated into the day-to-day processes of the organization. With a new sagacity of constancy, personnel will feel comfortable and confident with the new ways of working. Even though in many organizations change is continuous, the refreezing phase is still of great importance (Levasseur, 2001) because without it, workers will be caught in a changeover snare where they will not be sure of how things should be done and so, nothing ever gets done to complete aptitude.

Further, Levasseur (2001) postulates that if there is a deficiency of the new frozen state, it will be very tough to handle the consequent change initiative successfully. As part of the refreezing process, celebrating the success of the change will benefit employees to find closure, appreciate their endurance in painful times and help them have faith that upcoming changes will also be successful.

The Hands-on Paces for using this Theory's Outline in East Kenya Union Conference

The East Kenya Union Conference is a tithe-based organization run by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the third level out of the four levels of their leadership. Recently, a need to digitalize the finance system right from the local church to this level was seen and a team was

tasked to come up with an E-system to take care of that. The team came up with the E-Finance system that customized for all the levels that will be using this system. The top leadership of the organization took an action to support this change and currently, the change agents and leaders are in the first phase of unfreezing but all the steps of the framework will be discussed.

Unfreeze – first and foremost; determine what needs to be changed. The organization must make a survey to thoroughly understand the current state before any step of change is taken. The leadership should work hard to ensure that every employee and stakeholders understand why this change has to take place (Shirey, 2013). Usually, there has to be strong support from the senior leadership for the unfreezing to successfully take place. Create compelling messages about why the change has to occur and prepare to manage and understand the concerns and doubts. Always, remain open to employees and users of the system and address them in terms of the need of change (Kaminski, 2011).

Change – keep sending messages more often on the process of change. This should be done all the way through the planning and implementation stages of the change. Define the profits of change and how exactly these changes are going to affect everybody as preparation of everyone for what is coming is done (Hussain *et al*., 2016). Dispel rumors by constantly responding to questions amenably and honestly, dealing with the emerging glitches instantaneously and linking the need for change back to operating requirements. It is vital to include employees in this process by making short-term successes to strengthen the change and negotiating with outside investors as it may deem essential (Wang et al.).

Refreeze – anchor the changes into the organizational culture by identifying what supports the change and the barriers to the change (Kaminski, 2011). Come up with ways to sustain the changes by ensuring that there is the top management backing, generate a reward system, establish feedback systems and adapt the organizational structure as deemed necessary. Continually, provide support and training by keeping everyone informed and supported, and always remember to celebrate the success (Kritsonis, 2005).

The Principles that will Support this Change

According to Levasseur (2001), many change management theories currently in use, are procedures that have stage by stage instructions. To be effective, one needs to modify and weigh the change management determinations based on the exceptional characteristics of the change and

the qualities of the company. The following principles will help in navigating through the change process.

Address the human side of change methodically: Somewhat important change will generate people issues. New and different leaders will be obligated to step up, jobs might be changed, new skills and abilities will be established and thus employees will be uncertain and resistant. To control this, there is need to have the official methodology of handling change starting with the leadership lineup and ought to be established early and adopted as often as change progresses. This requires real-time data collection and analysis, planning, and implementation discipline. The change management methodology should be totally assimilated into program design and decision-making which informs and enables strategic direction (Jimmieson, Peach & White, 2008).

Start at the top: Since change is integrally worrying for persons at all levels of an organization, when it is on the horizon, the eyes will turn to the top leadership for support, strength and direction. The leaders ought to first embrace the new approach to both challenge and motivate the rest of the organization. They ought to speak in one voice and model the desired behaviors. The leadership team that works well together are best placed for success. They are united and dedicated to the direction of change, they understand the culture and behaviors the change intends to introduce, and they can perfect those changes (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993).

Real change happens at the bottom: As change programs develop from the definition of strategy and the process of setting targets to design and implementation, they affect various levels of the organization. The change efforts administered need to have plans for identifying feasible leaders throughout the organization and drive accountability for design and implementation down the organizational levels to enable change to cascade down to the entire organization. At every level of the organization, the identified and trained leaders should be assigned to the organization's vision, equipped to execute their specific mission and motivate to cause change to happen (Piderit, 2000).

Challenge reality, prove faith and craft a vision: Persons are integrally rational and are likely to question to what extent change is needed, whether the organization is headed in the right direction and whether they desire to personally pledge to making the change happen. They will look up to the leadership for answers to their questions. Enunciating an official cause for change and developing a written vision statement are precious chances induced by the leadership team

alignment. For this to be successful, challenge reality and send a message to all the employees convincing them of the need for change, prove faith that the organization has got a feasible future and that the leadership is capable of getting them and providing a road map to guide conduct and decision making. These messages ought to be customized for diverse addressees, telling the incomplete change in terms of that which matters to the individual (Castonguay, Castonguay, & Beutler, 2006).

Create ownership, not just buy-in: Huge change plans need disseminated management and leadership that have comprehensive effect on decisions both invisible and visible to the high-ranking crew. The change agents and leaders ought to over-perform throughout the change and remain the fanatics who create a serious mass among the personnel in favor for change. This will need settlement that the course of change is satisfactory. This requires possession by the managers and leaders who are eager to take accountability for causing change to happen in all the zones they control and impact. Possession happens to be the best when people are involved in ascertaining glitches and coming up with the required solutions. It is strengthened by incentives and rewards which can be tangible or psychological (Piderit, 2000).

Explicitly address culture and attach the cultural center: Effective change programs tend to pick up quickly and gain momentum as they cascade down, making it critically important that leaders understand and interpret philosophy and conduct at each level of the organization. Detailed cultural diagnostics can help evaluate the organization's readiness for change, bring major problems to the open, recognize conflict, and identify at the same time influence sources of leadership and confrontation. These diagnostics recognize the essential standards, conduct, perceptions, and beliefs that ought to be taken into consideration for change to happen successfully. They function as the corporate starting point for designing vital transition fundamentals like the new vision, and coming up with programs and infrastructure required to drive change (Labov, 2011).

Prepare for the unanticipated: There is no transition program that goes wholly according to design. Employees react in unpredicted ways, parts of expected opposition vanish and the outside atmosphere shifts. To excellently manage change, one requires constant reconsideration of its effect and the organization's readiness and capability to adopt the next level of change. Having real-time data from the field supported by information and solid decision making processes,

change agents and leaders can then make the adjustment necessary to maintain momentum and drive results (Labov, 2011).

Conclusion

Change is one of the shared strand that is experienced in all organizations irrespective of organizational size, age or industry. The ecosphere is fast shifting leading to organizations quick adaption to this change. Those organizations that tend to navigate through change well succeed whereas those organizations that are not able, tend to struggle in their existence (Kotter, 2012). It does not really matter whether the suggested change is in the section of overall operations of change in the specific sections of project development. By and large, it is very difficult to adapt to change both for an organization as well as its workforces (Kotter, 2012). How successfully change can be managed in organizations varies widely depending on the type of individuals involved, the kind of change being pursued and the kind of the trade run by the organization (Riches *et al.*, 2017). Thus, using a theory of change will be of great help since it gives leaders a guide to follow as they implement change and the capability to regulate predictable outcomes (Michie & Johnston, 2012).

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