Communication as a Crucial Lever in Change Management

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Abstract- Effective change management is essential to any organizations in this fast-changing era. The objective of change management is to maximize benefits, while minimizing the risk of failure during the change implementation. The purpose of present paper is to provide insight into change management and one of its crucial levers that is communication. The key to successful implementation of the change lies in effective communication. Effective communication has been seen as a two-way communication that serves several functions such as, information sharing, participation, compliance, and feedback.

Keywords: Change, Communication, Management, Resistance, and Effective.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the majority of organizations had been designed for stability rather than change. Moreover, they had been focused on creating a specific outcome, result or product. Whereas these days, organizations focus on improving the processes as well as they need a new way to handle their job and maximize benefits. Having competitive advantage and profit maximization are the primary objectives of any company. One of the ideal approaches to achieve these objectives through the rapid change in technology, communication, and information is managing change within the organization. Change the values that organizations live by, values like awareness, teamwork, tolerance, responsibility, and information are paramount – just as flexibility and change readiness [10]. It occurs by being knowledgeable about change management implementation and its procedures. Indeed, change management is a significant component of any organizations and one of the crucial components of change management is communication. Communication is regarded as a key issue in the successful implementation of change because it is used as a tool for announcing, explaining or preparing people for change [14].

To be honest, many organizations do not make real efforts to communicate during change process. They simply announce what the changes will be and expect everyone to comply. Barriers to change are created when there is a lack of effective communication during the implementation phase of the change. One of these barriers is resistance. People in an organization as a human is not good at changing, and see the change as a negative thing, therefore they initially resist change. Communication is an effective way to minimize this negative feeling and making the change process more efficient.

II. CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Modern companies are in a state of cultural change. Globalization, outsourcing, mergers, acquisitions, new technologies and new processes—these are all common issues that companies must face as they evolve. According to Gilgeous (1997) following factors result in the initiation of change within the organization:

- External factors: New technology, changes in the market place, change in customer expectations, competitor activities, quality and standards, government legislation, and prevailing political values and economy cycle.
- Internal factors: Management philosophy, organizational structure and culture, and system of internal power and control.

Therefore, for today’s leaders, the ability to manage change determines survival and success. Change management is the process of planning and coordinating the implementation of all changes through individuals, teams, and organizations. This process basically is defined as problem solving which is a shift from problem state to a desired future state [3]. It is the application of many different ideas from psychology and sociology fields, business administration, and system engineering [16]. Managing change is a process to make employee ready to accept change. In addition, it is a way to make them comfortable about change and to carry it out with enthusiasm and understand the role of their actions in the unfolding drama of the company’s fortunes, and believe that is worthwhile for them to play a part [1]. To assess the impact of change and to
monitor its implementation, it is essential to have a policy and procedure for Management of Change [11].

The process of change has four basic stages:

- **Diagnosis**: Analyzing the current situation and identifying both the desired goal and the problems faced in reaching it.
- **Unfreezing**: The creation of a difference realization between the status quo and ideal status of an organization that prepares people to change and decrease their resistance.
- **Effecting change**: Moving from existing situation to ideal state that refers to various processes such as training, education, and restructuring that lead to the development of new behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs [5].
- **Refreezing**: Reestablishing a new state within the organization by stabilizing the new patterns with a general support [5].

The primary purpose of change management is verifying changes in facilities, personnel, and operations, which are evaluated and managed to ensure that the environmental risks arising from these change are controlled [16]. Organizations that develop and promote strong change management obtain a significant return. A current research carried out by Khatrin Yates (2010) indicates that high-performance organizations perceived as highly effective in managing change are superior at responding to changes in the market, compared with high-performance organizations that are less effective change managers (65% to 41%).

A number of Objectives why organizations manage change are to:

- Minimize adverse impact of necessary change on system integrity, security, and the service level agreements [7].
- Maximize the opportunities presented by the proposed change.
- Take full advantage of employees’ productivity.
- Make employees ready to change, and make sure they are engaged with change process.
- Prepare and support employees to ensure effective change to achieve strategic goals and vision.
- Allow the coordination and planning of changes in order to provide a stable production environment [7].

As a result change management is a strategic activity aimed at effectively implement new methods and systems in an ongoing organization and obtaining the best outcomes from the change process [4].

**III. CHANGE AND RESISTANCE**

Organization’s members often resist change, for the reason that habits are a normal part of every person’s life. Humans are creatures of habit, are generally satisfied with the status quo, and will tend to initially resist change [8]. Initial resistance to change is caused by some reason. First, the uncertainty created by the announcement of impending change, it disrupts certainty and order of their work lives [3]. They feel a need to control their environment and resist anything that they perceive can threaten this control and it has an adverse impact on their job. Second reason is that employees require modify their existing individual and organizational identities. Implementing organizational change initiatives invariably involves people change themselves [8]. The change cannot occur until people decide to change. This Process based on William Bridge (2005) is expressed as transition. Transition is not the same as change. It is a psychological procedure while change is situational because of shift into the new state. Transition is an internal psychological re-orientation that people go through as they come to terms with a change [15]. The change will simply not work unless transition takes place. Workers’ anxiety is another factor, they worry cannot conform and succeed in the post-change work environment. They fear they cannot adjust their practices or adopt new ones in line with their existing mind-sets in order to reach a new bottom-line target [1].

The last but not the least reason is caused by the organization, many organizations do not thoroughly strive to manage change. They simply announce what the changes will be and expect everyone to comply [8]. When changes are imposed without consulting, employees will be confused about why organization makes change, what the objective is, and how their job will be impacted. This can also result in denial, resentment, conflict, organizational rumor, and even increasing sickness absence [5].

Due to these reasons, it is understandable why individuals initially resist change, and see change as a negative thing. Managers job is to recognize feelings and that lead to resistance and help employees to overcome these feelings through effective communication.

**IV. COMMUNICATION**

The fundamentals of communication: Communication is an action between at least two persons, where messages are delivered, received and reacted to among participants. It proves to be the most significant tools in social life and business management. Communication also plays a crucial role in organizations to generate and interpret messages between employees through both directional (one-way) and bidirectional (two-way) manner [2, 9].

It is noted that within much of the change management literature, communication is important to the success of change programs [15]. According to Lewis (2000) communication and organizational change are inextricably linked processes. In fact, communication is a crucial lever for change management. It is a key component to the developing change initiatives and implementing them. Communication is more than just telling someone something; it aims to answer employees’ questions and reduce their anxiety in order to
keep them motivated, gain support and achieve the desired outcomes.

In the opinion of Hardy (1997) managers or change agents who want to implement changes should ask themselves four key questions relating to communication:

- Who needs to be told? Everyone who will be affected by change implementation.
- What needs to be told? As much information as possible about change.
- When needs to be told? As soon as possible after decisions about implementation have been made.
- How should they be told? Through different media, formally or informally, and directional or bidirectional.

A number of recent researches indicate that many organizational change initiatives fail due to shortcoming in the internal communication [19]. Indeed, insufficient communication generates confusion, uncertainty, rumors, and lack of awareness. Communication is a tool to build and establish awareness of the need for change, to generate desire to participate in the change, and support it. Some companies still do not realize that without effective communication, change is impossible and it is going to fail. A good leader, manager, or change agent, takes steps to ensure that the communication process is being carried out effectively [20]. Managers must make serious attempts to communicate the nature and the impact of the proposed changes [14]. As stated by Duck (1993) “everything managers say-or-don’t say delivers a message. Many managers assume that communications is a staff function, something for human resources or public relations to take care of, whereas communications must be a priority for every manager at every level.”

One reason for a deficiency of more effective approaches to change management is that managers are unable to communicate effectively. They must perceive that communications before, during, and after change process is not a directive or one-way communication. In fact, it must be two-way, providing both information to the employees and opportunities for the employees to express their concerns and opinions about the change. Communication intends to move employees in a structured way to accept and engage in the change as a team. Successful change management depends on teamwork and communication with the employees involved in the change process and leadership with a vision that will enable the process rather than dictate the process [14].

Employees can only work effectively if they can participate in the organization and they can only participate if they are fully informed [21]. They need to know the purpose of the change; they need to feel safe about their main concern such as: job security, benefits, compensation, base pay, and job performance. Transformation is impossible unless all the people in organization are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices. Employees will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, the hearts and minds of the employees are never captured [22]. Therefore, effective communication is a perfect implement to prepare employees for change, help them to believe it, and feel safe about their future working life. On the other hand, effective communication helps management to make sure employees are capable execute the new way of working and use the new skills.

Communication can serve many functions during change initiatives:

- Information Sharing: If changes are expected to occur over a long period and are likely to involve high uncertainty at some points, then this should be clearly communicated in advance in order to avoid potential loss of momentum, disappointment, and cynicism in certain groups of employees [2]. Communication is used to announce organizational changes and to provide stakeholders with information about the nature, timing, and significance of the change [5]. It is critical to communicating information (e.g., mission statements and goal achievement status) during change. Failure to share information or to inform people adequately of why changes are necessary, viewed as having a highly negative impact [2].
- Participation: Participation is generally regarded as a key success factor during organizational change. Communication can break down when employees are not involved in the change process. Indeed, involving employees from start to finish in any program has always been considered as a good management practice. Change projects are no different. When change is necessary, the use of participation can be especially helpful because it often cultivates greater commitment on the part of the participants [20]. Change will be more effective when organizations bring employees into planning and organizing the process. Moreover, employees who have helped plan and implement the change will embrace it rather that resist it.
- Vision and Motivation: In change management it all starts from the vision and communication is the tool to make sure everyone involved with the change are aware of the vision and objectives related to it. If the target audience does not understand the reasons behind the change, it is very difficult to be implemented [2]. The employees’ understanding of the reasons for change is dependent on their relationship with the organization, the level of trust they have in management and the beliefs hold by their coworkers [14]. Communication can be utilized to convey the vision, set the goals, and high-light the important drivers for changing existing organizational attitudes, beliefs, and practices.
• Compliance: Change efforts can produce high-levels of anxiety, and communication is needed to determine employee responses to change, reduce potential fears, and encourage the establishment of social support systems among employees. Resistance to change can be reduced by discussing and negotiating the more sensitive aspects of change. Managers’ job is to recognize employees’ anxiety, fear, and stress and help them channel these negative feelings toward a positive end. Effective communication plays a key role in providing stability during these transitional periods [20].

• Feedback: Change efforts require the structuring of communication processes that provide employees feedback about their performance during change initiatives and provide feedback to management regarding strengths and weaknesses of the change initiative [5]. With detailed feedback that includes such factors as quality, quantity, and timeliness, people can become self-corrective and can more easily understand the big picture. With feedback they can also determine what help they need from others and who might be able to benefit from their assistance. Communication during feedback sessions should be both vertical (top to bottom) and horizontal. This allows for continuous improvement of the change process. Feedback should be as positive an experience as possible. By doing so, employees will be more open to suggestions for improvement [20].

According to Hirschfield (1999) “Communications should be forthright, easily understood, and not patronizing. Every manager should take extra steps to ensure that every communication piece has a clear purpose and a target audience.” This approach to communication helps set expectations, tells a coherent story, and fosters behavior and attitude changes. Considering this approach, there is a need for communication plan. Carefully planning and timing communication helps preventing conflicts and change resistance. The central purpose of the communication plan is to share the essential information for the target audience at the correct time [2].

Communication plan gathers communication related activities, goals, tools, audiences and timetables together in one place. It sets a framework for the communication tasks and gives a concrete conception otherwise of an abstract activity.

According to Robin Mayhall (2009) the four important activities related to creating and implementing a communication plan are as follow:

• Describe the predominant situation and the needs for communication, which is called the research phase.
• Analyze the targets and objectives for communication and determine the target audience.

• Implement communication plan, which is the phase of communicating.
• Evaluate the performance and determine the level of success based on the results.

Environment, goals, key messages, audience, and media are the main parts of which communication plan is compile of.

Environment: In the light of change management defining the environment, including the organizational culture is one of the main things to be aware of. When managers understand the environment that work in, will be able to alter the methods and communication to suit the situation. Particularly in cases where external consultants are used in order to help communication activities, it is important that central people inside the organization are tied to the work as well. Close operation with the staff is required so that the message outcomes are in the correct form for the organization in question [2].

Goals: The environment analysis is more or less the background work for the communication plan and the next parts are actual elements of communication plan. Creating the overall goal and vision toward which the change are targeted to is the first step. Vision should be clear, unambiguous, personally relevant, simple, and vivid. Next step is to identify goals for each message listed in communication plan [2].

Messages: Messages are the key element in communication plan. They need to be credible, clear, and motivational. Sources for the messages can be various, from project plan to project outcomes, or status reports. The messages should express what is going to change, the reason for the change to take place, why the chosen change is the best solution for the situation at hand, and why this is the time to take action in the form of change [2]. Keeping employees informed about the change process is critical. When disseminating information, it is important to use multiple methods for communicating the message as well as repeating the message consistently throughout the initiative [5].

Audiences: There is an adage in communications: start where your audience is. The advice is simple to follow, but only if know who the audience is [5]. Knowing audience is the basic rule when preparing a presentation and can be applied in communication planning as well. Audience is versatile, even if the message would be targeted just internally for the staff. It is recommended to segment audiences, after which it is easier to revise the message to suit the needs of the target audience – what do they find relevant and how would they wish to receive message [2]. There are two important things that must be noticed. First, true communication is a conversation. It is two-way and real discussion must result. Second, change leaders need to spend time conversing one-on-one or in small groups with target audiences who are expected to make the changes.
Media: A variety of media may be used in communication plan such as team meetings, email, newsletters, posters, public presentations, and Websites [5]. The important thing is to evaluate the suitable level of media for each key message and target audience. Moreover, consideration about how people would expect to receive such information is in place, since it may affect on the receiving react. For example, if the message in question deals a major change, which will have a large-scale impact on the target audience, it might be better to consider communicating it in person, instead of impersonal written message. The choice will show to the receiver how much the sender of a message cares to deliver the information and in what value he/she thinks the receiver of the message is [2].

Consequently, change process gets result when organizations create a change management communication plan, make a real effort to communicate effectively and encourage employees to believe change is a positive process.

V. DISCUSSION

In today’s fast moving market, change in organizations’ environment has become a way of progress, and it is an inherent characteristic of every businesses. Advancement in technology, increasing customers’ expectations, and the need to control costs and increasing efficiency mean that organizations need change to survive. Change has to happen in business and the customary reaction from people faced with changes is to resist. Resistance happens due to this fact that they’re human beings and habit is a part of them, they tend to like status quo and gets nervous when anyone starts messing around with what they’re used to. In such this situation change management and its key lever (communication) are necessary to overcome the resistance.

Effective communication is important to the success of change management. The correlation between change management and communication can help organizations and individuals to cope with change and its effects. In fact, communication plays a crucial role in developing and implementing change initiatives. Effective communication via multiple ways including speaking, writing, video, training and bulletin boards is a tool for informing, motivating, and coordinating as well as improving employees’ change skills, making them ready for change and making sure they’re engaged in change process.

The importance of communication during change is not only informing, motivating and coordinating but also managing employee expectations. Managers should notice that communication during change management is not one-way and directive. They should give employees enough time to ask questions, explain their concerns and opinions about change, and share their ideas. The change leaders or managers must clearly communicate the vision, the mission, and the objectives of the change. They also should help employees to understand how these changes will influence them personally in order to minimize their anxiety and stress.

One reason for a lack of more effective approaches to change management is an inability to communicate effectively. Coping with change mainly involves the understanding and use of communication and human relations skills. Therefore, a good leader, manager, or change agent, takes steps to ensure that the communication process is being carried out effectively in order to get the best result of change.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the change management approach should be fully integrated into organization's decision making, both informing and enabling strategic direction. It should be based on a realistic assessment of the organization's history, readiness, and capacity to change. Change management should minimize the adverse impact of necessary changes on system integrity, security and the service level agreements. Moreover, it is important to know that communication is truly fundamental to the change success. Because, reducing or eliminating negative feelings and behaviors during change process can be accomplished through effective communication about, and how, the change might affect employees.

Communication can serve several functions during change management process. Such as, share information with stakeholders about the nature, timing, and significance of the change or providing feedback to both managers and employees. Communication even can help to get employees involve in the change process and make them aware of the vision and objectives related to the change. These functions help organizations to convince employees that the status quo is no longer acceptable and motivates them to support the new condition.

Accordingly, in order to maximize the productivity of persons involved in change and implement effective change, organizations should consider communication as a key lever in change management process and use it properly.

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