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Storm in My Comfort Zone!!

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Abstract:
The objective of this study was to analyse different situations about incidences where people found it difficult to change on different situations. Change has always been uncomfortable; it takes courage and time to accept it. Many models have been developed to assist in change management including Kurt Lewin's model of change. Other authors have also indicated the importance of embracing change when it is appropriate. This paper sheds light on real life events and situations where change is due and employees in institutions are uncomfortable with it. The paper describes the different behaviours exhibited by different individuals in resisting change. Data was collected through recordings, interviews conducted with both the change agents, and in some instances with change champions. Ten respondents were interviewed and the author used a record to store the responses which later were used for analysis. The paper concludes by elaborating the importance of change and its successes. The incidences were collected from different institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Data was then coded analysed using Content analysis. Data was qualitatively presented through reporting and narration.

Keywords: Change management, academic, comfort zone

1. Introduction

Successful management of change is important in any organization for its survival and succees in the today's highly competitive business environment. In strategic and operational level, Change is an ever-present feature of organizational life-cycle (Todnem, 2014). Organizations should have no doubts regarding the importance of its ability to identify and how to manage the changes required to be where it needs to be. Burnes (2004) argues that the fact that change is mostly unpredictable, makes it reactive, discontinuous, ad hoc and mostly brought about by situation of organizational crisis.

Identifying an agreement regarding a framework of organizational change is an uphill task. However, experts agree on two important issues: first, that the pace of change has been at its peak in the current business environment. Second, change, brought about by internal and external factors, is spontaneous and affects all organizations. When characterised by how change comes about, there are several different approaches. This paper focuses on two among these: planned and emergent change.

The proponent of planned approach to change was Kurt Lewin (1946) who posited that before change and new behaviour can be fully adopted, the previous behaviour must be discarded. He proposed three steps of unfreezing, change introduction and refreezing the introduced change. This kind of change has been under criticism, including the fact that it may not be applicable to rapid and transformational change. It also ignores situations where more directive approaches are required. Some authors argue that fast changing environmental pace weakens this theory.

To respond to these criticisms of the planned change, emergent change has gained ground. Emergent approach considers change as driven from the bottom up instead of the traditional top bottom way. Emergent change assumes change to be so rapid that makes it impossible for senior managers fo effectively identify, plan, and carry out the necessary organisational strategies. Therefore, the responsibility of organizational change should be devolved. The emergent approach, assumes change is uncertain in external and internal environment. This approach is more concerned with readiness and facilitating for change.

The author compiled a list of narrations of real incidences from different respondents of different cadres and has been arranged based on the subsequent titles:

2. Research and Publication

Research and publications is one of the most critical roles that are played in any university. It is considered as one of the core mandates of a higher learning institution. In Kenyan universities, it goes further to determine whether one can be promoted or not especially for the academic members of staff. In a certain public university, PhD students are required to undergo a thorough exercise of defending their proposal for their thesis in several stages. One of the respondents confirmed that at stage one of defending his thesis proposal, one of the defense committee members sarcastically corrected his document by saying ' In the history of this university, no one has ever done a case study for their thesis, what makes you special'. At this point, there is need to mention that case studies have been done and accepted in institutions all over the world. It may not have been done in that particular institution, however, that is how change starts. It is worth

noting the PhD student, had been allocated three supervisors, two of which did not agree with the 'case study' approach that the student was taking. This was simply because it has not been the tradition in that institution and members are finding it difficult to get out of their shells.shells. This could have been taken as a first step to change.

Before conferment of the degree of doctor of philosophy, a certain university has a policy that the candidate must publish a minimum of two articles extracted from the thesis. One of my respondents, a former PhD candidate at this institution had done due diligence of publishing more than the required two articles. However, since only two articles were required, he picked two of his best among the ones that he had already published. To the candidates shock, he was informed that the graduate school could not accept the articles submitted, reason being that the articles were not up to standard. The candidate sought to find out why the articles were not up to standard and was informed that the title of one of his articles was not appropriate. The specific word that was deemed 'inappropriate academically' was 'kissing up to the boss'. The candidate explained that the word was not to be taken literally but no one could give him an ear on this one. Apparently the candidate was required to write in a certain way that the graduate school was used to. 'This kind of writing will not be entertained here', that was the response he got from one of the professors.

3. Teaching

In another institution of higher learning, the author was meant to understand that lecturers are paid according to the number of subjects one teaches. Lecturers have turned board meetings into market places where there is a give and take kind of concept. The more courses one teaches, the better the pay check at the end of the month or semester. In a particular board meeting where lecturers met to distribute courses for the next semester, noises could be heard from outside the boardroom of lecturers, exchanging words about this particular course belongs to a certain lecturer. 'I have been teaching this course for the last 5 years, why would anyone think of taking it away from me', one of the respondents explained.

One of the most amazing narratives the author got from one of the respondents was that of a case of a lecturer who had been teaching a certain course for quite a long time on a particular day was in one semester, was changed to a differentdifferent day. It was to be taught by the same lecturer though. This incident brought scuffles between the lecturer and the person in charge of the timetable and by the time of writing this paper the two could not see eye to eye. Efforts by the head of department to bring the two to talking terms had not yielded any fruits. Apparently, majority of the other lecturers seem to be supporting the idea of not changing the days simply because 'it will destabilize us', they complained.

The author interviewed some students respondents about some of the lecturers and the courses taught. They responded by complaints that lecturers would use same notes year in, year out. In some instances, students would borrow notes from other students that had already done the course and its word to word. The respondents complained of being given examples of incidents that were outdated. A lecturer would use the same notes, give same examples despite clear evidence of changing environment and situations.

4. Administrative Duties

Some of the academic respondents confirmed to the author that there was a new Head of Department(HoD). The previous one had just ended his over 5 years term and employees were used to his style of leadership. ''Give and take' kind of leadership is what majority of us are used to', narrated one of the respondents. Many of the defences would fail to take place because of lack of quorum mainly from the board of examiners who are lecturers of that department. The outgoing HoD would then assign them other duties to compensate their unattendance. This would therefore mean that some lecturers may not be involved in this exercise while others are overused. To curb this problem, the newly appointed HoD divided the members into groups. Each group consisted of four to five lecturers. This therefore would mean that whenever there is a defense then a particular group is required to avail themselves as a team. This change did not augur well with majority of the lecturers including the respondent. They lamented that the newly appointed HoD is just excited by the new position, 'he'll get used to it soon', said one of my respondents.

Another case explained to the authors by one of the respondents was that of a newly elected dean. The respondent explained that when a new dean comes into office he/she appoints members of staff who would help him in running the office. He appointed a new team of examination officers who would help him in processing the school's examination results and giving academic advise to undergraduate and graduate students. Examination officers are allocated offices for exam facilitation. The offices are uniquely designed with computers which have finger prints gadget for logging in to the system, a specific password for a specific computer among other office equipments. The occupant of this office could not vacate the office because 'it was his office', with his computer, his printer and his office phone. To him it was ridiculous for anyone to suggest that he vacates the office. Handing over had not taken place in the time of writing this paper, the newly appointed exam officer had no office to work from.

5. Cases Discussion

A study by Niessen (2010) on age and adaptation to work found out that age was not directly related to change adaptation, however, the relationship was mediated by job experience. The author explained further that job experience made it more difficult for employees – whether young or old – to adapt to workplace changes. This study clearly supports the views expressed in the first case where the professor, who had a lot of experience and was confident that change cannot be introduced therefore he was surprised to see a case study methodology proposed at a doctorate level. Case studies are a methodology just like any other methodology used in academic research. The thought that a student is introducing something not known to many in the institution brought discomfort and the professor in this case, is an example of comfort zone. Similar to the second case, where the professor at the graduate school is used to a certain style of

writing and could not think of change at that particular point. In both situations, the two professors were taking advantage of their job experience to resist change, a 'things are done this way here' kind of attitude.

Leawoo, (2010) noted that resistance to change is should be anticipated. He posited that resistance to change comes from fear, on one of three levels—what will happen to me in my world, how will my relations to my colleagues change, or how will our practice and be affected.

Change exist in the core of leadership. Bass (1994) describes leaders as agents of change, whose actions affect other people more than other people's actions affect them. Change that is executed by coercive power or for calculated gain in certain roles is not likely to be followed. They believe that individuals resist change is brought about as a result of the leader's failure to grasp what motivates followers to change their behavior. In the case of the newly appointed head of department, he had all the time to apply Lewin's (1946) model of change instead of rushing to change the members ways of operation before preparing them for it. The head of department should have given it time to unfreeze, introduce the change behavior then refreeze. However, this cannot be taken as an excuse for the members to demand the status quo. When a time for change comes, there is nothing that can stop it unless one wants to perish. The members therefore ought to have pushed themselves into this new system instead of whining about it.

Zafar and Naveed (2014) noted that Resistance occurs when an organization moved from the known to the unknown. Lack of information may lead to negative employees perception of change hence creating barriers in the implementation of change. Employees resist the change when they have insufficient knowledge or skills for the change implementation. In the case of the newly elected dean, the changes he made without giving sufficient information of whether the outgoing exam officer was to be reallocated to another office could have been the reason for the resistance. Since one of the reasons for the newly elected dean was inadequate resources it could have been preferable to maintain their status quo since change requires resources like capital and people having appropriate tools and equipments. Inadequate resources may lead to the abandonment of the desired changes (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2008). The rnewly elected dean is therefore at a risk of losing even the newly appointed examination officer.

The management emphasizing more on equity rather than efficiency has brought about the chaotic scenarios noted in the case of course distribution among lecturers. This has therefore led to the many students complains, yet there is very little the management could do since all the lecturers should have equal number of units for equal pay at the end of the semester. The lecturers are comfortable teaching what they have always been teaching than changing to other courses, which will bring about disturbance amongst them. The lecturers need to be educated more on the inevitability of change from time to time. This will enable them to accept change smoothly.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion therefore, many employees are uncomfortable with change whether planned or an emergent kind of change. How managers and change champions will introduce change in organization really matter. The change champions need to identify the naysayers and those who are supporting it. There will be lukewarm employees that must also be identified in the process.

The study recommends frequent and effective communication during the change process. In the absence of proper and timely communication, people will fill the vacuum with incorrect information and creating untrue assumptions. Managers and change champions should use every available opportunity to communicate the need and importance of change.

Leaders and managers should ensure that they create a teamwork culture among employees. This is because in times of uncertainty, the members will together encourage each other to go on despite unclear road ahead. Nurturing team culture should be an on-going process that is founded on a climate of trust and mutual respect among the employees. Managers and change champions should ensure positive reinforcement and providing feedback to the employees. As the process of change continues, employees would want to know how they are doing and if their efforts have yielded any fruits. Managers should document progress and reinforce new behavior towards the intended change.

Leaders and managers in institutions should take the lead in encouraging others and praising individuals who do well. Acknowledge people's efforts in the change process and thank individuals for their contributions to the success of the practice. Celebrate milestones and successes to foster team cohesion and sustain change efforts. Make every member of the team feel as if the success is his or her idea.

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